Chapter V
Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), a postmodern/postcolonial novel, the focus of this chapter, is of a farcical, parodic mode. However, behind this layer other narrative methods and strategies are also employed. The novel captures the essence of Indian history’s major events, especially of the freedom struggle, Partition, Independence and the post-Independence period, incorporating consistently, though loosely, parallels to the great ancient epic, *The Mahabharata*. The work’s opening and ending are unique and uniquely balanced parodically, “reeking” of scathing condemnation of colonialism, postcolonialism and the overall general attitude it reflects and embodies. A case in point at the beginning are V.V’s (representative of the mythical Ved Vyas in a parallel sense, a subjective literary doppelganger) words to Ganapathi:

They tell me India is an underdeveloped country... I tell them that if they would only read the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, study the golden ages of the Mauryas and the Guptas and even of those Muslim chaps the Mughals, they would realize that India is not an underdeveloped country but a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay.¹

There is no doubt as to those indicted at this point: the colonials and their lackeys. The biting expression indeed draws blood very effectively. So, the reader’s attention becomes almost immediately riveted. The quote just examined is from the first chapter, Book I – ‘The Twice–Born Tale’.

The novel’s framework is adopted in accordance with the epic of *The Mahabharata*, but has been remoulded for purposes of adaptation as per modern
narrative requirements. An essential point of this marked influence is that the characters who play actively major roles in the freedom struggle and overall 20th century Indian history are named after parallel characters of *The Mahabharata*. As such, the novel is replete with literary but not literal doppelgangers—a character-portrayal technique of Tharoor used with deft expertise for purposes of farce and parody as very jagged implements for biting satire. He sinks his teeth into the ills represented by colonialism and postcolonialism. He thus brings hypocrisy to the fore, it dominating the foreground practically throughout.

The novel's allegorical form also examines burning historical issues—the causes of Partition, Independent India's political scenario and the betrayal by the brown sahibs. The allegorical mode employed is not just farcically humorous, but also symbolically, powerfully presented, each doppelganger-character suitting his role to the point of great literary exactitude, though of course literary crafting is taken great liberty with to fit and adapt the action to the modern and, of course, postmodern, nay, rather contemporary times. Technically, the period ranges from, spans and encompasses the freedom struggle, Partition and the post-Partition era.

With respect to the novel's inspirational grounding in *The Mahabharata*, this simply shows that the novelist is equally at ease with the great epic and relatively recent history—to the point of barbed expertise in farce, satire, sarcasm—couched effectively in *double entendre* puns in particular. Even the mere titles of the eighteen parts/books are amply illustrative of the fact that history and ancient epic are conjoined in this writer's literary craft to symbolically parallel and mirror prominent politico-historical personalities. The novel is narrated by
Ved Vyas (V.V.), he relating the mythical episodes – relating to and somewhat merging with the twentieth century contextually, re-acquainting the reader with Indian history in a new recast light, all in an allegorically inimitable, comical, satirical manner. This is substantiated by the following:

The title itself is a take off on the ancient Indian epic *The Mahabharata* (The Great Narrative of India). By a daring stroke of imagination, Tharoor finds uncanny correspondences between the chief characters and events in the three thousand year old epic and the leading political figures and developments in modern Indian history. These correspondences are not mechanically worked out, they are suitably modified, sometimes hinted at rather than fully spelt out; and on occasion they are given an ironic twist in a spirit of self mockery, which is so characteristic of postmodernism.

So, it should be understood right at the outset that no mythic method a la T.S. Eliot is at work involving sustained working out of parallelism, which underscores the correspondences and identities between the present and the different periods in the history and myth. The application of myth is thus in the postmodernist vein – suggestive and fragmentary. Before discussing the novel analytically in detail, a brief summary, Tharoor’s major characters and a list of literary characters analogues/doppelgangers/parallels with their corresponding historical and mythical counterparts would be in order. In addition, a list of Tharoor’s fictionalized places and events along with their historical and/or mythic parallels is also provided. This will serve to avoid jarring and unnecessary repetition, thereby preventing misconceptions and misinterpretations likely to arise. So, let us proceed onto the overview in thumbnail-sketch form of Shashi
Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* for proper grounding and perspective. It is vital to note here that the parallels with *The Mahabharata* are deftly remoulded as per the Indian political epoch of both pre-Independence and post-Independence, the prime focus being the freedom struggle politically and the postcolonial era as well.

Gripping continuity as well as reader’s interest is sustained and heightened by the use of puns, farce, satire, sarcasm — all literary devices used aptly for the purposes of the parodic mode. Another important point that cannot be overlooked is the use of character analogues or doppelgangers, if you will, of mostly actual major *Mahabharata* figures. However, the novel is not merely a superficial recasting but a hilarious yet frankly caustic sentencing “to death” of colonialism and postcolonialism and raises disturbing questions about the British as well as their postcolonial successors — through incisively farcical commentary on both — by spotlighting the miserable plight of the poverty-stricken Indian masses, especially in the context of brutal exploitation for vested, nefarious ends of a very barbarous nature. To avoid the perils and pitfalls of scanty unsubstantiated analysis at this juncture, it is essential that examination of these points come later. In any case the points briefly drawn attention to will be given critical expression in the exegesis after the summary, in analytical detail.

Now to proceed directly onto a brief summary. However, regrettably it may seem, if only taken at face value, it is necessary to qualify that the summary is not all that brief because of the novel’s unaverage length (rather long) and its correlation to *The Mahabharta*. The novel’s very nature is such that it is vital to never lose sight of the fact that the analogue/doppelganger character portrayals
are not literal to the point of childishness but rather somewhat metaphorical, although the intended similarities may seem clumsily contrived upon cursory reading. In addition, Tharoor’s analogues/doppelgangers and parallel events are, to reiterate, as this is significant, fictionalized, at times even departing from the great ancient epic and history as well.

Pertinently, the novel, though replete with and greatly steeped in action, is, side by side, also of an essayic mode – a sharp tool for incisively penetrating commentary. As such, the exegesis proper will follow within the contextual framework of the critical analysis-cum-details of character portrayals and incidents.

The novel has eighteen parts/books as does The Mahabharata, Book I, “The Twice-Born Tale”, begins with Ved Vyas’s parodic introductory words to Ganapathi (his amanuensis, who not so coincidentally physically resembles Lord Ganesha). He bluntly blames the political machinations of the ruling British, their selfish supporters – lackeys hunting politically power hungry powerful Indian natives – whether Hindu or Muslim. Ved Vyas (V.V.) then proceeds upon a detailed commentary on the Indian tradition of marriage with the related ramifications of peculiarly native samskara, whereby the Brahmins had a really special place of reverence as they could choose any woman for sexual gratification impregnating whoever they chose.

This is followed by a description of the illicit relationships between Shantanu and Satyavati, and Rishi Parashar and resulting in the respective births of Ved Vyasa (the omniscient narrator). Shantanu eventually desires to marry Satyavati, but she levies the condition that her son be heir to the kingdom –
effecting a moral dilemma for the king. But honourable son, Ganga Datta, relinquishes his right voluntarily right down to the bloodline, (a la mythical Bhishma), thus completely eliminating all obstacles to Satyavati’s desire. The successive births of Chitrangada and Vichitravirya in due course follow after their marriage.

When the sons come of age, Ganga Datta, by sheer force of hypnotic personality abducts Amba, Ambika and Ambalika as brides for them, the last two being Vichitravirya’s. But Chitrangda’s rejection of Amba – due to her affair with Salva of Sanbal – results in Ganga Datta’s compassionate release to rejoin her beloved. But Salva now views her as damaged goods, and she heartbrokenly returns, urging Ganga Datta to marry her which is impossible due to his terrible vow. Disillusioned, with the fancy of a woman scorned, she vows vengeance–declaring in advance the cause of Ganga Datta’s death.

The focus then shifts to 1857, concentrating on the British exploitation of the loopholes of Indian kingdoms’ own rules about lack of legal heir(s) to the throne being made a case for legal forfeiture and subsequent annexation of kingdoms by the British. Modern Hastinapur is thus a potential colonial target, being heirless upon Chitrangada and Vichitravirya’s death. So Ganga Dutta and Satyavati enlist Ved Vyas to secretly impregnate Ambika and Ambalika. Blind Dhritarashtra (Nehru) is thus born to Ambalika, she unable to bear the Yogi’s weird appearance (she shut her eyes during intercourse). Pandu (Subhash Chandra Bose) is born to Ambika – pale, weak and effeminate, because she lost pallor during the act. Ambika is then again coerced by Satyavati to have another sexual encounter with the yogi, but the lady sends her maidservant instead.
Vidur, absolutely normal, is thereby born—a brilliant child with the capacity of genius. Now Hastinapur is secure, Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidur having legal claim—all due to apparent legitimacy.

Book II, “The Duel with the Crown”, is a pun title adaptation of Paul Scott’s *The Jewel in the Crown*, exposing inhuman colonial dominance and repression. This is the novel’s pervasive theme which gives rise to a series of non-violent protests by Ganga Datta (Gandhiji). The movement of Swaraj (self rule) within the British Raj is discussed comprehensively and Dhritarashtra also makes an important entry, it being made evident that the scope and magnitude of his political role (under Gangaji’s tutelage) may become major. His wife Gandhari briefly occupies a place of importance, largely in the foreground, for a short instance in time initially. But, overall Gangaji (though secondary to narrator Ved Vyas), with his dedication to truth and non-violence soon supplants them—his vowed celibacy the source of his towering spiritual strength, the foundation of his altruistic, saintly greatness. The forced cultivation of Indigo (a cash-crop) bought by the British (Scottish) planters at a depressed price (unsustainable for survival to the Indian agricultural labourers) becomes Gangaji’s catapult for opposition, a protest, he, as the leader of the agricultural labourers and farmers, even legally after arrest, wins, greatly upsetting and thereby alarming the British.

Book–III “The Rains Came”, begins with the description that Gangaji in his maiden political nonviolent debut, begins to successfully and firmly unite Indians against the British. On the other side, Pandu (the “palefaced”) is medically diagnosed as having a fatal condition (attack) during the sexual act with
his wives – Kunti and Madri, whereupon he is advised to thus abstain from sex or face death. But his desperation for heirs to the throne leads to compelled secret cuckoldry for Kunti and later Madri. Kunti already has an illegitimate son (Karna, made explicit as to identity later) by an Englishman Hyperion Helios, the product of premarital sex – a confession she then makes to Pandu. Simultaneously, Gandhari, completely devoted to the point of blinding herself perpetually with a blindfold, is actually a very devoted wife; soon gives birth to Priya Duryodhani.

Book-IV, “A Raj Quartet”, spotlights the brutal, grisly, unprovoked Bibigarh (Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar) massacre of men, women, and children by Colonel Rudyard (General Dyer) in his “Civilizing mission”. This incident sparks off a strong anti-colonial protest by Gangaji and his followers. By the experience of satyagraha gained over time by Gangaji, he steps into the mentor’s shoes for the Kaurava Party members. Kunti and Madri give birth to Yudhishtir, Bhim, Arjun and the twins Nakul and Sahadev.

Book V, “The Powers of Silence” focuses on the Indian Zamindars, destitutes and their politico-socio-economic abuse by the British as looters. The Jute Mill Workers’ exploitation by Bengal Mill owners (actual parallel–Ahmedabad mill strike) leads to a lockout due to a promised fifty percent bonus, which is not honoured. Gangaji takes up the workers’ cause with Sarah behn’s (Mira behn), an English woman, constant, unswerving support. Failure to make effective headway leads Gangaji to go to white lady, however, found the workers dwindling on hunger strike to certain illness under the process of hunger and illness. Gangaji and possible death effecting results: a 27.5 percent wage hike.
This in turn span nascent an ascent of Indian nationalism, greatly upsetting the political applecart of the British policy of divide and rule – Ganga Datta’s second victory over the “unbreakable British”.

Book VI, “The Forbidden Fruit”, begins with an indictment of the Kaurava Party and its working committee, The Kaurava Party is one of, at least theoretically, Fabian principles but contradictorily emerges later as tainted in the nitty-gritty politics of Dhritarashtra. Gangaji warns the British against their exploitive autocratic policies in writing. Gangaji subsequently appoints Dhritarashtra as leader of the party, resulting in Pandu’s disappointment. Internal dissensions lead to a rickety political future, built as it is on a ramshackle foundation – Pandu proving a thorn in their political posteriors till his death. Dhritarashtra and Pandu agree only on “socialism”; Dhritarashtra is a diplomat throughout whereas Pandu becomes a revolutionary. Dhritarashtra is idealistic and politically ambitious, but lacks political vision. Gangaji unduly openly favours Dhritarashtra, the apple of his eye. Great Mango March (Gandhi’s Great Dandi March) protests the inhuman salt tax in the analogue incident where Gangaji plucks a mango from a tree to highlight socio-economic exploitation of legalized tree grabbing by colonial laws. The agitators respond with bloodshed at Chaurasta (Chauri Chaura) which results in the death of two policemen. Consequently Gangaji suspends the movement, to the extreme annoyance of Pandu, who opposed it at first but now opposes its withdrawal much more. Finally in this book, Tharoor narrates V.V’s dream of the holy cow as representative of Mother India to Ganapathi.
Book VII, “The Son Also Rises”, describes initially the diversity of Indian tribes, castes and beliefs, myths and religions, and mysterious unity underneath all this— but the differences are still a gulf enough for the British to “divide and rule”. The emergence of Muslim League on the national scene occurs. The British unilaterally decide on separate Hindu and Muslim electorates boosting Hindu-Muslim enmity.

As the action develops, London-returned Karna (Jinnnah), a promising attorney, of staunch presence and views, makes great impact on Kaurava Party members—an outcome of the infamous British “divide and rule” policy. Though proficient in rhetorical oration, he soon realizes that he is a misfit in the party— unable to accept and thus comply with Gangaji’s philosophy of peaceful resistance to dislodge the world’s most powerful empire. He thus suddenly summarily resigns, later to head Muslim League as a supreme authority, upon the offer of Gaga Shah (Aga Khan). (Much time has elapsed at this point). Kaurava propounds, propagates and declares that Muslims will fight separately for freedom— “Independence without Hindu domination”.

Book VIII, “Midnight’s Parents”, begins with a description of Yudhishtir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev and Priya Duryodhani. Cunning to the point of ruthless extremity, as a mere girl, on a picnic with her cousins, she laces Bhim’s share secretly with poison and throws him into the river. But he miraculously survives. Duryodhani’s ploy still goes undetected.

Book-IX, “Him – or, The Far Power-Villain” begins when the Kaurava Party Presidency elections are declared Pandu announces his candidature (much to Dhritarashtra’s chagrin) and manages to gather enough votes to assume the
Pandu’s tenure proves ephemeral due to overt political machination and maneuvers – his revolutionary zest being the cause of frustration and subsequent resignation.

He thus establishes the Onward Organisation (Forward Block) and makes haste for Germany to meet the Fahrer. However, this only leads to ineffective radio broadcasts by him. He later seeks Japanese aid. Both attempts prove fruitless in the real sense.

He seeks solace in Madri’s presence whom he has managed to smuggle there. Despite the curse of death upon sexual engagement, his overpowering desire gets the better of him and he succumbs to her voluptuousness and dies. She dies with him as their plane (the place of the encounter) is shot down. Kunti becomes a sati and is given a white cloth as its symbol.

In Book X, “Darkness at Dawn”, Tharoor comments acerbically on the negative brainwashing effects of British-imposed segregated education and its Anglicism too. World War II breaks out and the colonial authorities unilaterally decide to engage Indian soldiers in the British war effort effecting mass protests and en masse resignations of duly elected Kaurava Party members of nominal government – much to Vidur the administrator’s utter dismay and consternation.

By this time Gangaji’s Quit India Movement has gathered momentum to the great consternation of the British. Major Indian leaders are arrested. Karna is now fully, expediently communal, demanding a separate Muslim nation – Karnistan. After World War II, the British Empire’s weakened state makes Independence inevitable.
Gangaji is perfunctorily sidelined and rendered helpless politically because he cannot thwart partition of the nation. His magic seems to have disappeared. Amba (Shikhandin), now eunuch due to a back street operation, prepares to assassinate Gangaji as revenge for ruining her life by abduction and subsequent rejection. Gandhari, wife of Dhritarashtra, dies with Priya Duryodhani present at her side.

Book XI, "Renunciation or the Bed of Arrows", sees the announcement of 15th August 1947, as Independence Day by Viscount Drewpad (Lord Mountbatten), the last Viceroy of India. He is present in India with his wife Georgina (Edwina Mountbatten).

As a last ditch resort to avoid partition, Gangaji suggests that Karna be made the Prime Minister, but Dhritarashtra outright but politely refuses. Due to the ongoing communal bloodbath, a broken Gangaji observes silence (Maumvrata) as a form of protest-cum-prayer, but his era is definitely over partition being a foregone conclusion. The gruesome outcome is carnage at the maelstrom level. Dhritarashtra and Georgina have a rollicking affair. Independence is finally achieved amidst celebrations and simultaneous widespread carnage. Amba (Shikhandin) assassinates Gangaji as per vow. But fatalistically speaking, Gangaji's wish has been fulfilled as he himself wished to die.

Book XII, “The Man who could not be King” (punningly reminding us of Kipling’s “The Man who would be King”), begins with a description of Jayaprakash Drona, who is at this point a minister in the newly formed Government. He extends benign help and cooperation to Heaslop, who ironically
had earlier arrogantly insulted (true to the colonial outlook) him. The thorny issue of Manimir’s (Kashmir’s) status within the Indian Union (by possible accession) comes to a head with the invasion of Karnistani Pathan irregulars for purpose of annexation. Astute Vidur uses behind-the-scenes stratagems to resolve the situation in India’s favour, Dhritarashtra’s vacillation over the crucially strategic territorial issue notwithstanding. He uses the office of Vyabhichar Singh (the Maharaj) to effect accession of both Manimir and Devpur, even prevailing upon the Sheikh in the former case that it is in his interest to become part of India. Vidur’s deft manoeuvring proves successful. However, there is narrative spotlighting that Manimir remains disputed till date. Georgina’s illicit affair with Dhritarashtra results in the birth of a girl, Draupadi Mokrasi (symbolic of Indian democracy in its hybrid form, the postcolonial component being predominant) on, ironically, 26th January 1950, India’s Republic Day. Almost simultaneously, the Indian Constitution comes into effect formally. Ganga Datta’s assassination has by now resulted in Shikhandin’s execution; Karnistan is really born. It is clear that India’s birth marks the death of the philosophy of Gangaji.

Book XIII, “Passage Through India”, deals with Kunti’s miserable plight due to her moral dilemma of joining her sons in travel. But she does finally take the morally right decision to accompany them. In addition, Kanika Menon’s (loosely Krishna Menon, though highly diverged as a character), sway over Dhritarashtra is shown. Jayaprakash Drona’s groundbreaking reform programmes incite Drona’s jealous streak, the Pandavas being the object. Directly connected is the Kanika Menon’s treatise on the qualities and essentials of a king, elucidated at great length, but too involved to mention here the summary in detail. The focus
then shifts to Dhritarashtra’s views on socialism and related reforms notionally. This is followed by the fact that Vidur is a well-wisher of the Pandavas – a strange paradox as all other major Kaurava Party members are inimical. The book ends with the death of Karna.

In Book XIV, “The Rigged Veda”, Priya Duryodhani commands Purochan Lal to house the Pandavas in a lakh house (a Lakshagraha) and burn them to death. However, this tragedy is averted by a coded telegram sent by Vidur, who learns of the plot just in the nick of time. Commentary on industrial progress, neglect of villages and the educated unemployed follows while the Pandavas travel through Bohari where they meet two haughty landlords Pinaka and Saranga.

Dhritarashtra’s non-alignment political philosophy is then focused on. The scene then shifts to Bhim’s marriage with the nameless sister of Hidimba and the subsequent birth of Ghatotkacha. After this there is made much ado about the “Hindi-Chakar – bhai bhai” slogan (Chakar representing the Chinese) but consequent disillusionment is the end result when the Chakras attack India, to the point of massive, ignominious defeat. Dhritarashtra is shocked and dies.

Book XV, “The Act of Free Choice”, Shishu Pal (Lal Bahadur Shastri) ascends the Prime Minister’s Chair. Arjun then wins Draupadi Mokrasi’s hand. When Kunti curiously learns from Nakul on telephone that good fortune has come the family’s way she tells the brothers to share the prize among themselves – the possible reason why Draupadi becomes the wife of all the five Pandavas. She proves a source of unity for the Pandavas. The first war between India and Karnistan erupts. A speedy triumph for India results. But immediately
afterwards, Shishu Pal’s fatal diplomatic blunder of bilaterally agreeing to both armies withdrawing to pre-war positions. He dies under mysterious circumstances and Priya Duryodhani is installed as Prime Minister.

Arjun accidentally enters the place where Yudhishtir and Draupadi are making love, and thus, as per pre decided agreement, he is banished for a year. His adventures alone follow, a period when he meets Krishna Parthasarthy (representative loosely of Lord Krishna) and kidnaps and marries Subhadra, the latter’s sister. This is done as per the directions of Krishna Parthasarthy himself.

In Book XVI, The Bungle Book or The Reign of Error”, Yudhishtir’s practice of drinking his own urine is comically drawn, a weapon in the battle of the Fourth General Election between Priya Duryodhani and Yudhishtir. Priya Duryodhani’s courage, determination and decisiveness make her further promote herself blatantly. Measures like Privy Purses abolition and general social reform, including nationalization of banks are the prime focus. Ekalavya’s (V.V. Giri) candidature for Presidency is mentioned, supported as it is by Priya Duryodhani’s shrewd postcolonial ploys as well as due to environmental influences Ekalavya wins. A split in the Kaurava Party results – R for Real and O for Original. The simmering situation causes Draupadi’s illness which is symbolically representative of Indian democracy’s pangs.

The Gelebi Desh (East Karnistan) civil war begins. It soon ends with this territory’s independence by secession from Karnistan due to Indian military intervention.

Book XVII, “The Drop of Honey – A Parable”, introduces Jayaparaksh Drona’s clash with Priya Duryodhani on the political stage. Priya
Duryodhani uses the politico-administrative machinery, which includes the services of Bengali lawyer Shakuni Shankar Dey, to strengthen her own position. Due to resultant widespread protests over her draconian style, she imposes a state of national Siege (Emergency). Narrative commentary on the ‘subjectless’ Fourth Estate, democracy versus colonialism, and the bureaucratic malaise, is then brought clearly and periodically into the clear light of day. In a dream of V.V., to win the power play, Priya Duryodhani and Shakuni challenge Yudhishtir to a game of dice, which the latter accepts, losing all, including Draupadi. Duhshasan attempts to disrobe Draupadi but Krishna Parthasarthy intervenes, thus saving Indian democracy. It is essential to add here that Arjun, in V.V’s dream, regains the kingdom in another game of dice.

In Book XVIII, “The Path to Salvation”, Priya Duryodhani suspends the Siege, the previously arbitrarily jailed opposition leaders being therefore released, and calls for free general election. The Dharma-Adharma conflict is etched somewhat in the vein, comparatively, against the backdrop – parallel of ancient Kurukshetra, i.e., with respect to democracy.

Arjun experiences a spiritual crisis over whether he should contest the election as politics is mire but Krishna Parthasarthy persuades him to see things clearly and do so. The volatile atmosphere results in Duhshasan’s flogging and thereby vengeful humiliation at the hands of Bhima, no complaint being lodged despite Priya Duryodhani’s yelling murder, politically speaking. Soon, All India Radio announces Priya Duryodhani’s and the Kaurava Party’s defeat, a factor questioning the very essence of politics and leadership pointedly.
Yudhishtir becomes Prime Minister. This is followed by an eye-opening commentary-cum-analysis on the truth behind the Taj as a monument to love ostensibly, the narrator instead emphasizing Mumtaz's tragic suffering due to excessive child-bearing, an illustrative reference to male chauvinism and autocracy of rulers in general—homegrown feudal, colonial or postcolonial, only in descendingly less virulent form with respect to their rapacious privileges.

As events take a turn, dissensions and rifts develop with the ruling cobbled patchwork of the Janata Morcha. To make matters worse, its spiritual guide, Jayaparaksh Drona dies on hearing Ashwathaman's death, (Ashwathaman here being a mere cockroach, so named by Yudhishtir deceptively before killing it to thwart the former's potential power, as Drona would have necessarily favored his own son). Yudhishtir's truth is thus strictly technical—a political expedient to ensure his own hopefully continued influence and power in the political arena, especially the center-stage, insofar as possible. Resultantly, the patchwork government falls and the election, which follows sees Priya Duryodhani once again as the Prime Minister. Draupadi collapses in horror and Krishna is injured by an arrow on the sole of his right foot and dies (mirroring the mythical Lord Krishna's death). Thus, once again, the good versus evil, or Dharma and Adharama are sharply brought into the spotlight. The novel ends with the same bitingly sarcastic commentary verbatim with which it began.

For the major part of the action, Gangaji, making his appearance early in the novel, is not a towering spiritual figure. Initially, he is more of an analogue/doppelganger or, to use a plain word, parallel of Bhishma. This is illustrated in the simultaneous kidnappings of Amba, Ambalika and Ambika as
brides for Chitrangda and Vichitravirya. The scene is rather highly parodic of the original epic as the abduction is far less violent, though the act is necessarily farced. Its comic nature spotlights the parody and farce with great comic intensity in all its ridiculousness and is thus worth extensively quoting here:

He looked from the Raja to throng through his thin-rimmed glasses, and the famous gaze that would one day disarm the British, disarmed them — literally, for the girls emerged from behind the lattice-work, screens, where they had been examining the contenders unseen, and trooped silently behind him, as if hypnotized....

[To] pass entirely smoothly. One man, the Raja Salva of Saubal, a Cambridge blue at fencing and among the more modern of this feudal aristocracy, somehow found the power to give chase. As Ganga’s stately Rolls receded into the distance, Salva charged out of the palace, bellowing for his car, and was soon at the wheel of an angrily revved up customized Hispano-Swiza.... (p.27)

This shows that Gangaji is not, at this point, averse to using physical force. It must be remembered that Gangaji is the Regent of Hastinapur, though not exercising power, especially political, directly — the terms of his self-decided celibacy. However, he does have great influence, tempered with shrewdness and, of course, sagacity. He retains these qualities even after his spiritual evolution begins — and carries on. Slowly but surely, he, like the real life Gandhi (the true parallel), begins to find, make and mark his spiritual path — as evidenced in the Motihari non-violent protest against the exploitative British planters in favour of the oppressed, exploited peasant labourers and farmers. Before finally deciding to spearhead the agitation, it takes a scene of inhuman suffering under the colonial yoke to inspire him to act. Its genesis is as follows:
There was starvation in Motihari not just because the land did not produce enough for its tillers to eat, but because it could not, under the colonialists’ laws, be entirely devoted to keeping them alive. Three tenths of every man’s land had to be consecrated to indigo, since the British needed cash-crops more than they needed wheat. This might not have been so bad had there been some profit to be had from it, but there was none. For the Indigo had to be sold to British planters at a fixed price — fixed, that is, by the buyer. (p.50)

As to an indictment of this rampant phenomenon, D. Maya, in a general sense, elucidates:

Most of the novels written in the post-Independence era reveal the pressure of history on the consciousness of the writer.... common to third world countries who suffer from the received notion of history as ... ‘the few privileged moments’ of achievements, which serves either to arrogate ‘history’ wholesale to the imperial center or erase it from the colonial archive and produce, especially a New World Cultures, a condition of ‘historylessness’ of no visible history.³

It is precisely this ‘historylessness’ which Tharoor complains about articulately at one instance, V.V. citing the fact that Indian children (in colonial times at least) are ignorant of their own historical personages’ importance and related relevance, they largely being ignorant of these to the point of a cultural vacuum. So we can see that the contrasting conditions of colonialism in all its selfish rapacity make a deep indelible impression on him, despite his apparently noble birth and actually noble upbringing.

The fictional narrator, Ved Vyas, traces the political machinations and manoeuvres on the political scene of the colonizers and their collaborators, overt
or covert, with pungent, biting satire. In addition, the period of Independence to post-Independent India – especially relevant in the general sense to the postcolonial operational machinery in its inherited and thus equally apathetic psyche in all its exploitation – is painted with broad strokes on a large canvas.

Gangaji’s role is the most dominant and influential one till Independence – the time of his assassination by Amba-Shikhandin (Nathu Ram Godse). Gangaji’s political as well as socio-economic philosophy of Truth and Non-Violence, bolstered by Silence, along with its potent moral weapon of hunger-strike, goes a long way in tormenting the British colonial government – a perpetual thorn in His Majesty’s flesh. These ideals and principles along with their resultant actions are all tailored to achieve just moral ends in the face of immoral suppressive, racist and resultant divide-and-rule laws. These rules stem from the colonial attitude of treating natives like chattel – in essence a rather fascist viewpoint – and its necessarily linked style of politico-administrative functioning – peculiarly and eternally true, right to the core, of colonial, and sadly, as still glaringly visible in most former colonies (of any nation) right till date, and postcolonial governments as well.

Yet, the relevant facts notwithstanding, the foundation and embodiment of Gangaji’s morally just passive resistance (to use a British phrase) is embedded intrinsically in an altruism of a lofty spiritual kind, exemplified by self-application and resultant inspiration of followers – the acid-test of Truth versus Untruth. For the most part, in his Satyagraha, Gangaji proves unwavering and unbending in his idealism and spirituality in the face of overwhelming odds and draconian colonial responses, no matter what the cost. The resultant cost of the successful Motihari
agitation, in which Gangaji had turned the tables even legally on the foreign administration with polite insolence, proves to be a major colonial irritant, quite like a harpoon, as it raises Sir Richard’s peculiarly true-to-form colonial ire:

The man challenges the very rules of the game [...] We carve up the state for our administrative convenience, these so-called nationalists yell and scream blue murder, and what do we do? We give in, and erase the lines we’ve drawn as if that were all there was to it. That could be fatal, Heaslop, fatal. Once you start taking orders back you stop being able to issue them. (pp. 60-61)

In these words lies the embodiment of the Raj’s philosophy of ‘governance’, illustrative of its brutal unacceptance of resistance of any kind. Sir Richard vows to “teach a lesson” (p.63) to Gangaji and his ilk. So vengeance of such nature is quickly decided and implemented.

As Dhritarashtra and Pandu as well as Vidur have claim to the Hastinapur throne, the British have so far been unable to successfully make the kingdom part of their empire. However, after Motihari, a case where they were greatly humiliated and had to submit, Sir Richard is determined to extract his pound of flesh and draw the proverbial blood too (metaphorically speaking). A lengthy discussion thus ensues between Sir Richard and Heaslop. The former is sharpening his authoritarian knife throughout, merely using the latter as a sounding board. Confused, slow to catch on Heaslop points out that they cannot prosecute Gangaji for the Motihari agitation as he led it as a commoner, not a regent, the demand of his ouster thus being superfluous. But Sir Richard is determined still to have his “hide for a carpet” spiritedly, in the illuminating dialogue thus:
“I’m not foolish enough to ask for his dismissal from functions he no longer exercises, Heaslop. It’s not a symbolic victory I’m looking for. I want to teach Mr. Datta, and any others like him, a lesson they’ll never forget. “May I ask how, Sir?” Heaslop’s voice was faint. “You may indeed, Heaslop, and I will answer you in one word,’ Sir Richard replied, rubbing his hands in anticipatory satisfaction. ‘Annexation.’” (p.63)

To briefly digress somewhat, though relatedly for the purposes of literary analysis, such an authoritarian attitude towards the general populace has been seen to be handed down to the successive governments of nations, which have gained/won independence. But the postcolonial politico-administrative machinery continues, by and large, to function in the same apathetic, exploitative manner towards its subjects. So, postcolonialism is a protest movement in which the authors address native human concerns. However, there is not a black and white divide between the colonial and postcolonial rulers to the point of being absolute. In this light, with respect to postcolonialism D. Maya, commenting especially on the inherited grafted-on alien psyche makes the following political indictment of British rule’s brainwashing aspect:

A direct result of the British presence in India has been the impingement of English culture and values on every aspect of Indian life. English education became the medium for the initiation of Indians not only into western culture, literature, science and technology, but also into a new value system which had no relevance to the Indian situation.⁴

To return to the textual context and significance of Sir Richard’s “Annexation” in all its ravaging ramifications, the workings and cogitations of the colonial mindset and its related psyche are abundantly clear at the outset:
subjugation at any cost with any means. This is made violently clear in unequivocable terms by the swift British reaction to Gangaji’s planned address at the Bibigarh Gardens (paralleling Jallianwala Bagh of Amritsar) in official notoriety action, on the unjust, rushed-through blatant annexation of Hastinapur. Therefore, taking pre-emptive action, the army is deployed at the proposed site of Gangaji’s protest speech before the spiritual paragon has even reached there – under the command of Colonel Rudyard (General Dyer). The soldiers, following fateful orders, mercilessly and murderously fire indiscriminately on the innocent assembled crowd of men, women and children without even the semblance of a warning to disperse. The rampant colonial viciousness in all its mechanical apathy is described by Ved Vyas, the omniscient narrator-character thus:

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, no additional supplies sent for. Just 1600 bullets into the unarmed throng, and when they had finished, oh, perhaps ten minutes later 379 people lay dead, Ganapathi, and 1,137 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.’(p.81)

In the light of this incident, the question the modern historians may well ask, or at least should ask, is ‘Who were the real savages? Who were the real barbarians? The Indians or their British colonial masters?’

Gangaji, as already stated, though an individual of unassailable ideals, proves a rather shrewd chess player in his movement for Swaraj. However, he is not free from hamartia: he cannot see beyond blind Dhritrashtra initially as the
undisputed leader of the Kaurava Party while combating colonial domination. However, at one instance he does persuade Dhritarashtra not to oppose Pandu as Kaurava Party President. Gangaji’s advice in this vein is thus incisively sagacious and thereby enlightening, especially insofar as it shows his true grasp and comprehension of politics at the grassroots level. Anxiety-prone Dhritarashtra is peeved at the prospect of losing the Kaurava Party Presidency, much in the manner of a child being denied a sweet/toy. Gangaji’s measured response is simply to tell his followers that he had no intention of seeking reelection. The Mahaguru (Ganga Datta) is concerned at this point with the larger issue of not splitting the Party or spawning internal dissensions, something which blind Dhritarashtra is also aware of, yet unwilling to accept deep down calmly. Gangaji finally convinces him that the post itself at this stage is of no consequence. His final inspiring words, keeping in mind the much larger issue of who will lead the nation in terms of real power after Independence, ring true: “The British King, too, has such a title. But he is not the most powerful man in England” (p.167).

Once the threshold of Independence is clearly in sight, the fog having been lifted (metaphorically speaking) after World War II, in which the Empire loses most of its tentacle-grip, Gangaji practically foists the sightless Dhritarashtra upon the newly about to emerge nation-state. Gangaji’s political acumen is shown to be incisively penetrating when Vidur, a member of the I.C.S. impulsively resigns in protest against the barbarous Bibigarh massacre. Gangaji’s advice is a strange combination of Machiavellian statecraft and ascetic vision of an extremely pragmatic nature, yet workable in the mire of politics upon which he, for the most part, towers above like the legendary lotus. With the experience
of long practiced artful gamesmanship, he summarily orders Vidur to withdraw his resignation of which the authorities are unaware. Aghast, Vidur refuses. Dhritarashtra, quick on the uptake, echoes the Mahaguru (Gangaji). In fact, the command is pre-emptive as Vidur’s resignation is in the Under-Secretary’s in-tray, it being a weekend. Both Gangaji and Dhritarashtra do not want even a mere whisper of the resignation to reach the colonizers’ ears. The conversation among Vidur, Gangaji and Dhritarashtra throws ample light on the power and relevance of expediency and relatedly biding one’s time till the opportune moment, bringing to mind Milton’s immortal words, “They also serve who stand and wait”, though in a decidedly more worldly context. The crucially vital issue is painted thus:

‘But why?’ Vidur asked despairingly. ‘You can’t seriously want me to serve this alien government, a government that has done this to our people!’

‘Whether it is the government you will be serving or the people whom they have harmed is only a matter of opinion’, said Ganga sententiously. ‘Explain it to him Dhritarashtra.’ ‘Don’t you see, Vidur?’ asked Dhritarashtra, who, despite his blindness (or perhaps because of it), revelled in optical allusions. ‘We need you there. If we are going to fight the Raj effectively we shall need our own friends and allies within the structure. And if we win’, he added, his voice acquiring that dreamy quality that women in Bloomsbury had found irresistible during his student days, ‘we shall still need able and experienced Indians to run India for us’ (pp.84-85).

This particular incident is of supreme importance as Vidur learns a valuable lesson in both administration and politics. So he continues to serve the imperialists in letter and form at least, if not in spirit, as a trusted servant. But he keeps his sharpened eyes and ears open, serving larger national interests. Vidur
rapidly ascends the rungs of the ranks of the colonial bureaucracy while secretly the Kaurava Party’s most trusted mole. Later on Vidur is in a position to offer persuasive advice to Dhritarashtra and other important party members. The lesson he learnt that particular day is paid back in kind, benefited as it is by further honed administrative experience and the secret information he is thus always privy to. The incident is as follows: Sir Richard, the Viceroy at this point of time and his Principal Private Secretary discuss the politically thorny issue of engaging poor Indian soldiers in the European theatre of the Second World War. Sir Richard is on the horn of a queer dilemma with respect to the very nature and definition of colonial power in the changed times (1939), a time when there were elected Indian representatives who, of course, lacked real power in a substantive sense but still wielded influence. As such, they could put impediments in the machinery of inhuman colonialism, adversely affecting the cogs – to the great detriment of the rulers. Finally, the Principal Private Secretary convinces the Viceroy not to consult the Indian arm of government, as it would be kowtowing unnecessarily and insultingly to Sir Richard in particular and the Raj in general. His persuasive words, from an imperial point of view, are cogently stated:

Why should we give them [the Indian representatives of government] the additional satisfaction of being consulted, when it is our nation [Great Britain] that is under attack, our homes under threat, our armies and aircraft under fire? Personally, Sir, I’d think it humiliating to have to seek the consent of the loincloth brigade before we placed His Majesty’s subject here on a war-footing. In my view, it’s neither politically appropriate nor constitutionally necessary. (pp.203-04)
Many tomes can be written on the highly callous coinage of the pejorative, or, rather invective, ‘loincloth brigade’. It reminds the present researcher of the little-known fact of the Hindi word *babu* being derived from the English word ‘baboon’. The two words are related in similar yet different ways to the postcolonial mindset. The fact that *babu*, depending on usage, has attained a degree of respectability in certain circles, shows the still deep-rooted inheritance of the colonial psyche, along with its concomitant still existent postcolonial psyche. Though it must be conceded that the word also has pejorative connotations among a significant number of people, this still does not absolutely repudiate in totality the first example. In such vein, to refocus on the Principal Private Secretary’s coinage, it draws emotional - blood and ire as it is rooted in the complacency of remote authority with all its apathy towards the masses, a state of affairs, which, unfortunately still exists in the new millennium.

To make a long story short, the Viceroy, Sir Richard, unilaterally decides to engage and deploy Indian soldiers of the Raj in World War II, bypassing the Indian representatives. The reaction is swift. The Kaurava Party members, led by Dhritarashtra and endorsed by Gangaji, decide to resign en masse. Just before they do so, Vidur firmly advises all compatriots against precipitate action:

‘Make your point by all means, but for God’s sake don’t resign’, he pleaded with his sightless half brother. ‘You do not understand politics, Vidur’, Dhritarashtra told them. ‘Perhaps not, but I understand administration’, my youngest son responded. ‘And one of the first rules of administration is, do not give up your seat until you know how much standing-room there is’.

(p.204)
But when all is said and done, Gangaji and Dhritarashtra prove intractable, even in the face of Vidur’s experienced and measured advice – forgetting the very lesson they themselves taught him years ago at the instance of the Bibigarh massacre. Thus, Vidur’s sane voice is the lone one in the political wilderness Gangaji and his followers are soon to be subsequently condemned to.

Gangaji may be said to have another personality flaw besides his excessive belief in and promotion of Dhritarashtra as leader: the absolute nature, in its immutable spirit of Satyagraha – insofar as all its non-violent means to secure just ends is concerned. In this light, it would be pertinent and belatedly relevant to refer to the Great Mango March, a response to the summarily unjust taxation on Mango trees (analogous to the salt tax which affected all across the socio-economic spectrum). The Great Mango March captures the followers’ imagination and takes the nation by storm, quickly diverting British colonial might to jail more peaceful agitators than their jails can realistically hold. The British respond with all the force at their disposal. Prisons are filled to the brim and probably likely to be in danger of bursting at the seams. The Great Mango March or protest, if you will, proves a mammoth movement of unprecedented success. Viewed specifically in the light of the actual parallel historic context of the Dandi March to protest against the salt tax, it gave, according to T.N. Dhar, with its mass base, not only the poor but also the middle classes, “their place in the sun” and “the concept of nationalism acquired a new orientation, revealing Gandhi’s strength of character as a “master strategist”5. To return to the novel’s specific analogous context, never before have the rapacious colonizers been so besieged. Even Pandu, initially viewing the Great Mango March as an
ineffectual, impotent gesture, is forced to acknowledge its impact. But at Chaurasta some of the protesters respond violently to British suppression, a mob beating to death two policemen and setting the police station ablaze. Imprisoned Gangaji is confronted by the Deputy Governor of the prison with newspaper, who aggressively asks, “Is this the non-violent lesson you are trying to teach British, Mr. Datta?” (p.125). The photograph of Gangaji on the front page has a caption labeling him the *instigator* [my italics]. The Great Teacher is stunned and benumbed to the point of sorrow and responds, uncharacteristically, somewhat like a zombie, dully, ‘I shall suspend the mango agitation forthwith... If you will provide me with facilities to make a public announcement; I shall do so immediately’. He saw the [incredulous] expression of his jailor’s face and half-smiled. “My people....have not understood me. (p.126).

The actual parallel of this incident is the sudden withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement in like circumstances--some historians have pointed out emphatically the actual danger of mobilization of forces and their equally sudden demobilization over a minor incident. But this nowhere fits within the absolute moral parameters of Gangaji’s ethical and moral principles (as in the case of the real life Gandhi). The still raging point of contention raised and subsequently criticized in differing forms can, however, be neither refuted nor affirmed. Of course, the historical debate it generated and still does will carry on ad infinitum. Instead, it is more illustrative, to reiterate, of Gangaji’s unswerving belief in *ahimsa* in which even a single life is invaluable, echoing the very essence of Jewish religious scripture, that he who destroys one life, destroys the world entire and he who saves one life, saves the world entire. So, historical judgment apart,
the real-life Gandhi or even the analogue/doppelganger Gangaji, does not deserve, in this writer’s view, absolute condemnation.

This is borne out by Louis Fischer’s opinion as to the real life parallel (the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930). In fact, the power of Satyagraha’s strength draws itself from and sustains itself on never compromising and never deviating from peaceful means. As to its great overpowering effect about the real life Gandhi, Louis Fischer Writes:

Gandhi did two things in 1930, he made the British people aware that they were cruelly subjugating India and he gave Indians the conviction that they would, by lifting their heads and straightening their spines, lift the yoke from their shoulders. The British beat the Indians with batons and rifle butts. The Indians neither cringed nor complained nor reiterated. That made England powerless and India invincible.6

So, strictly in the sense of war, which satyagraha was and still, for the most part is being transplanted even in the occident with varying success – it may be conceded, with many a qualification by some, that there is always at least temporary danger in summarily aborting an agitation. So, the instance in question is a highly moot point.

After all is said and done, it is, once again, necessary to reiterate the reason for Gangaji’s suspension of the movement, so that satyagraha does not become a sham, a weapon without spiritual substance, a trivial means to self-seeking publicity – defeated by its own hypocrisy. To quote the text in more universal context, W.H. Auden in his poem “Shorts” counterbalances narrow human attitudes and larger serious humane concerns against the backdrop of contrarily opposed sates. Suffering and solace are emphasized as two sides of the
human coin in all its essential condition. He writes of the inherent parallels which confront the individual — whether he acts or not. He affirms action and the quality of serious seeking instead of just superfluous and superficial speaking. Time as something priceless is a valued motif of the poem which is highly ironic in its painting of contrary states — the negative and the positive. Needless to say Gangaji’s very personality is positive, though possibly not private in public to the point of hypocritical obscenity. In this light, the last part of “Shorts” is illustrative of decided to call of the agitation such: “Private faces in public places/Are wiser and nicer/Than public faces in private places”.

But more appropriate to the spirit of the great souls like Gangaji or so many others who have served humanity in the widest cause and largest sense, like even Mother Teresa, Auden’s words ring with great depth, urging elevation of the deserving while commenting on the general tendency to value those with a visible socially acceptable status and or stature as opposed to a stature of existential significance. To quote the poet himself: “Let us honor if we can/The vertical man/Though we value none/But the horizontal one.”

This does not lose any of its intrinsic truth as the mango, a native fruit, is used by the novelist as a powerful symbol of the ‘in-grasp fruit’ of India’s liberation. This is ironically brought to the fore during a pre-arranged meeting due with the Viceroy, but the official is not immediately present, he being “unavoidably detained” (the actual interaction between the Viceroy and Gangaji does not figure in the novel). It is directly connected to the sudden suspension of the mango agitation, the British releasing all agitators, including Gangaji of
course, in a “gesture interpreted variously as one of appreciation, of consolation and of contempt”, depending upon the identity or identities of varied analyzers.

To slightly digress to an earlier, though important, incident for proper perspective, it is relatedly necessary to point out that Gangaji is accompanied by an English woman “Sarah-behn”, his constant nurse (Mira behn, originally Margaret Slade, daughter of the British Navy Admiral) and spiritual companion since the jute mill protest wherein Gangaji first undertook hunger strike as a weapon when his supporters’ (the workers) morale began to sag, stating: “I am fasting to strengthen the workers’ resolve, to show them how firmly they must hold their beliefs if they expect them to triumph. My fast demonstrates my conviction, that is all” (p.102). When the agitation finally succeeds, the following ensues:

Ganga was thanked, prostrated to and garlanded profusely. His humble volunteers were feted with coconut milk and river fish. Somebody produced a special gift for Sarah-behn, a cream-coloured Shantipuri cotton sari with a narrow black border. She accepted it with tears flowing down her strong face. It meant that she was now one of us. She used it that very evening, and was never again seen in the skirts of her Caucasian past. (p.105)

Such precipitate action not only boosted flagging morale but finally succeeded in an average wage hike of 27.5 percent, and even humiliated the jute mill owners so much that they had to cave in under long-delayed but finally forthcoming governmental pressure, which, of course, was not made public.

Anyway, just before the actual meeting with the Viceroy, Sir Richard in his capacity as Principal Private Secretary, attends to brown Gangaji, studiously ignoring white Sarah-behn, derisive inwardly of a Briton by the Mahaguru’s side.
Sir Richard feels extremely uncomfortable and so the conversation on his part is rather uncomfortable and markedly sliced. Gangaji’s long discourse on the defects of the English language, from the Indian point of view, plus his preference for goat milk, as he dreamt of an exploited “large, sad-eyed white cow, with a long down turned mouth” (p.129) a rather explicit symbol of India–wailing with immense suffering, being mercilessly milked (by the merciless colonial British), though the meaningful intent is lost on Sir Richard.

To refer back to the incident at hand in encapsulated form, Gangaji relates that he fell ill to the point of death after giving up cow’s milk, till Sarah-behn came to the rescue with goat milk, effecting the Mahaguru’s recovery. Not that he feared the spectre of death itself, but rather the spectre of death amidst the mountain of unfinished spiritual work.

Cornered, Sir Richard is finally forced to offer refreshment to Gangaji in words punctuated by void-like pauses, he never being subjected before to such a clever, and to him, incomprehensible, never-ending ‘harangue’. But Gangaji’s polite response proves a satyagraha slap-on-the-face in its sheer ironic novelty. To quote the text:

An impish smile slowly spread across Gangaji’s face. ‘Don’t worry about me, Sir Richard, he said. ‘I have brought my own food’. His hand disappeared into the voluminous folds swathing his torso and emerged holding a small golden yellow, perfectly ripe mango. ‘To remind us of a more famous Tea Party,’ he announced. ‘In – Boston, was it not?’ (p.130).

The reference to Boston underscores the mock irony – an astutely polite but pointed reference to the Boston Tea Party long before US Independence
when British subjects of the Thirteen Colonies in the New World dumped tea from a ship into the ocean to protest tax on tea. The fact that the meeting is an ostensible peace gesture is yet exposed by Gangaji’s ironic consumption of the juicy mango. The mango agitation has been suspended, but a juicy insult to the British representative is still made, as is Gangaji’s point – the fire of his moral ire burns brightly with great heat. It has not been extinguished but is simply ready for combat in an as yet unrevealed but certainly indicated new form.

The very consumption of the juicy mango as a juicy insult to oppressive colonialism, the suspension of the mango agitation notwithstanding, brings to mind the fiery exhortation of Swami Vivekananda on strength in general in all circumstances, illustrative of Gangaji’s spiritual fortitude:

Strength is the medicine for the world’s disease. Strength is the medicine which the poor must have when tyrannized over by the rich. Strength is the medicine which the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned. And it is the medicine that sinners must have when tyrannized over by other sinners.⁹

Here the poor can be viewed in the context of the colonized Indians and the rich as the colonizers, the British. So, the tactical advantage and mileage Gangaji gains by this figurative slap in the face, upon analysis, shows that Sir Richard, not Gangaji, loses face—even though just in private—a novel way to humiliate the British, the empire on which the sun is thus foreshadowed to finally set: a direct consequence of their self-centered egoistically colonial (highly embellished, objectively speaking) opinion of themselves, destined to be deflated by the civilization wheel, as are their superficial egos, both subject simultaneously to time the great leveler, not only with respect to the British Colonizers but having
universality. T.S. Eliot’s words may serve as an illustration of this: “Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind/That blows before and after time./Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs/Time before and time after.”

Gangaji knows the truth and essence of such philosophy to the very core of its meaning while the British only know it in a strictly distorted sense with respect to perpetuating their rule – a paradox proved by the cycle of establishment, ascent, descent and extinction of both civilizations and personalities, no matter how high their summit may be at certain points in time. After all, time spares no one. And if it is used inhumanely, backlash is inevitable; so the continuum is the final moral authority even though in itself it lacks morality and is to be filled in the spiritual sense with morally right and morally just action. So, the British still live in and by the dated, nay obsolete syndrome created and advanced by Lord Macaulay even though it holds no water in the changed circumstances of the torrential freedom movement of India led by Gangaji – its force emanating from just means to secure just ends.

As Gangaji’s spirituality emanates from the very core – pure white in its quintessence and every respect as well – he is indubitably a towering colossus of humanity, his very soul a boundless receptacle of extreme compassion. This is strikingly evident on innumerable occasions. So, his tragic flaw does not mitigate his greatness insofar as most of the action and remaining events of the novel are concerned. Since we have already drawn attention to his hamartia earlier, it would be unnecessary to dwell on it again, at least at this point of our analysis. However, the issue will be highlighted later in proper course where major events – Partition and Independence especially – need to be examined, particularly insofar
as the Mahaguru had a major impactful role (or, ‘possibly’, lack of it) to play. Suffice it to say, that due to his personality – he is a veritable striding character, a titan – some other major characters look moral pygmies when measured against him. At least his pristine spirituality, intrinsically enmeshed inextricably within the roots of his moral and ethical fibre, is beyond question. This does not mark him in any way negatively, his cunning political powerplay along with its satyagraha weapons notwithstanding. Thus does Gangaji subject the colonial collectivist ideals to a crucible, they envisaging falsely a static condition. In this light, in an Aurobindonian sense, they view (true to their colonial/postcolonial mindset, with horror “all attempts at serious change”

...as an offence of impatient individualism against the peace, just routine and security of the happily established [colonial and authoritarian] communal order. Always it is the individual who progresses and compels the rest to progress; the instinct of the collectivity is to stand still in its established order. Progress, growth realization of wider being, give the greatest sense of happiness to the individual; status, “and ultimately”, secure ease, to the collectivity.11

In such light and vein Gangaji’s individualism is paramount, especially in its altruistic commitment to his people in particular and humanity in general. History is replete with numerous instances of individuals in the form of seekers and questers being dubbed as heretics and even persecuted. Nevertheless this cannot repudiate nor refute the validity of positively benefiting and often enlightening humanity at large. Gangaji is such an individual and thus is a spiritually strong one at that. Therefore he is a veritable fountain of progress, almost in the sense of the divine, thereby benefiting the collective.
Now to focus on Dhritarashtra as he is directly linked to Gangaji – as his disciple, at least at the apparent level (apparent in the sense of the latter’s ideals and aspirations). More importantly, his connection to the Great Teacher is major, rather so, especially in the light of being his beneficiary politically:

Gangaji’s methods stoked the fires of true nationalism among those who had recoiled from violence and lawlessness. It was this warmth that welcomed Dhritarashtra when he began to preach to them. He found them, ripe for conversation, and the Hastinapur connection, bathed him in the light reflected from Gangaji’s halo. If Dhritarashtra’s socialist beliefs went beyond anything Gangaji himself had ever expressed, there was never any question of the Great Teacher’s endorsement of his subject protégé. The Kauravas were left in no doubt that Dhritarashtra was Gangaji’s man. (p.111).

Dhritarashtra benefits immensely from Gangaji’s sane, calm and usually fruitful advice. However, Dhritarashtra is not an absolutely true disciple in the sense of selflessness and the greater quality of altruism. But he does follow Gangaji’s shrewd counsel, of course, as it generally fructifies in his favour.

Dhritarashtra’s foreign education and consequently inescapable environmental conditioning naturally and, of course, unavoidably mark his personality. This is necessarily so in a very major way. Resultantly, he is of a postcolonial mould, making him rather unaware and often really ignorant of the political ground-reality, including its socio-economic aspect. As such, his thinking is divorced from that of the masses, the vast majority of whom support him, the reason being Gangaji’s soft corner for him. In a nutshell he is of an *ivory*
tower outlook, and that too, of a western style and design ivory tower, not even a native one.

It must be emphasised that Dhritarashtra’s alien point of view leads to numerous and major errors of political judgment. Gangaji’s departure from the scene after his assassination causes an unfillable void, though by this time, Dhritarashtra assumes the reins of power as the leader of newly born India. Dhritarashtra is born blind, perhaps possibly a fair reason for his over-reliance on Gangaji, his tutor and mentor in the political sphere at practically every stage of his career as a freedom fighter and politician. He benefits immensely from Gangaji’s worldly grassroots counsel and favouritism, but even this scarcely effects real and radical transformation in his alien consciousness. Till the very end, his thoughts, if not actions, remain of a Fabian bent and proclivity, alien transplanted Fabianism being rooted in both the very depths of his being and behaviour. Since Dhritarashtra is of a colonial proclivity and mindset, his postcolonial role as Prime Minister with alien ivory tower ideals based on armchair Fabian principles, his education and formative foreign environment bear directly on his personality. Divorced from the grassroots, because he steeped in his own and coterie-created propaganda, the effect is marked ignorance as to the actual state of political affairs. But as a politician, despite his vacillating, nature he is "obliged to have political opinions, because of some vague idea about the requirements of democracy." And he thus helps himself "with scurrilous ways of thinking and sometimes with forthright bluff..."stemming from his ignorance of the facts. This is typical behaviour on the part of the authoritarian personality
although he is such in a relatively mild form compared to the one destined to follow, Priya Duryodhani:

Gangaji, the party’s political and spiritual mentor, made no secret of his preference for the slim and confidant young man. Pandu, in circumstances, took it all rather well. He saw the world very differently from his blind half-brother. His recent brush with the angels of death and his subsequent immersion in scriptures had made him more of a traditionalist than the idealistic Dhritarashtra, and the solidity of his appearance testified to one whose feet were staunchly planted on terra firma. Not for Pandu the flights of fancy of his sightless sibling, nor, for that matter, the ideological flirtation, the passionate convictions, the grand sweeping gestures of principle that became the hallmarks of Dhritarashtra’s political style. (p.85)

The novelist’s foregoing description hits the nail on the head: Dhritarashtra had already acquired in England traces of the right accent along with streaks of wrong ideas. He had returned fired with Fabianism, which taught that equality and justice were everybody’s right, and which (with typical imprecision) omitted to exclude the heathen from the definition of ‘everybody’. The Fabians had drawn up an all-embracing philosophy in order basically to make the point that it was the state’s duty to provide gas and tap-water to the British working-man, and while the British working-men rapidly moved on to less elemental with respect to behaviour, its appearance is presumably not visible in public (the novelist does not show him making any public speech as such at any point), but can be amply seen in the directly narrated action of the work.

In all fairness it cannot be denied that despite his ivory tower outlook Dhritarashtra does have a certain measure of innate goodness, which however is
misdirected due to his colonial connection, fettered as it is by his Anglophilia. This is highly ironic, considering that he espouses and advocates the cause of the common people by and large—a strange state of affairs, especially since after Independence he is at the helm of the mother ship of Mother India, now without the benefit of Gangaji’s sagacious directional counsel. This has major cataclysmic results, a case in point being the disastrous and unnecessary referral of the first war between India and Karnistan over Manimir being placed before the UN. The circumstances briefly are such: Vidur successfully manages Vyabhichar Singh to finally agree to accede to India under highly incongruous circumstances (the ruler being reluctant to do so) in record time while it is under attack by Pathan irregulars from Karnistan, their purpose being conquest or, to put it tactfully, annexation. Sheikh Azharuddin, the Manimir National Congress leader, welcomes the Indian troops publicly after the Maharaja’s hasty flight with Vidur and his panicky female European companion of the night. The Sheikh hails the Maharaja’s removal from power and welcomes the prospect of democracy. Of course, he will directly benefit as the new democratic leader. So India does not have to be unduly worried and concerned about common Manimiris opposing them. The Indian Army repulses the invaders decisively almost completely out of Manimir, but 700 miles short their advance is halted “by an inopportune ceasefire cast over their heads like an ill-directed fishing net. My [V.V’s] blind and visionary son had decided to appeal to he U.N” (p.260). Notice the words ‘blind’ and ‘visionary’, a very obvious pun which directly illustrates contextually Dhritarashtra’s lack of sight as well as political vision, the fact being that since Manimir had acceded, no matter what the reasons, to India, referral to
the U.N. was a superfluous exercise—having no legal basis. This incident spotlights Dhritarashtra’s colonial cultural conditioning. His Eurocentricism/Anglophilic world-view thus proves a recipe for disaster, some believing his liaison with Georgina Drewpad (the former and last Vicereine) as responsible for compounding his error of judgment. To cut a long story short, Manimir is thus condemned as a “‘disputed territory’, part of it in Karnistani hands, the bulk in our hands” (p.260).

Dhritarashtra’s worldly blindness, opposed to physical, stems from his colonial socialist ideals, as well as the more native ideals he has inherited from Gangaji, a factor which gives him a conscience. With respect to the diplomatic Manimir debacle, it would be worthwhile to quote the text:

... Dhritarashtra had not, after all, been the Mahaguru’s handpicked heir for nothing. [It] would not allow him to let soldiers take and lose lives for land he was certain India would regain at the conference table, in an international court of law or in democratic referendum. Of course, he was wrong, but he was wrong, Ganapathi, for the right reasons. (p.260)

Nevertheless, particularly with respect to India, Dhritarashtra’s blindness is also figurative and metaphorical. The uncalled for decision to bring the U.N. into the picture is of strategically adverse consequences, with a cascading effect which continues till Shishu Pal’s time in like vein.

In addition, since he has surrounded himself with an elite coterie of similar postcolonial mould and moves in lofty social circles, the latter being practically almost as ignorant of the grassroots reality as he is, insulated and buffered from a major threatening, political fallout and resultant disaster. His coterie, sycophantic
as all coteries are — probably unaware and ignorant of or, rather, simply apathetic to the common man's socio-econo-political malaise — serves to further distance him from the reality on the ground, almost to the point of perpetuity.

With respect to his advisors (Vidur apart, very much of the nature of a genius who yet genuinely believes in and follows Dharma), he depends heavily on Kanika Menon (Krishna Menon). In fact, Kanika is overall a maser tactician and operates by the principles of he Arthashastra, the extremely instructive treatise on the art and science of statecraft. Kanika Menon makes his first strikingly impactful appearance as the ambassador to Great Britain. At this point in time Dhritarashtra is somewhat worried about Jayaprakash Drona and his protégés, the Pandavas, realizing at least dimly that at some future stage they can grow into a threat to his power. This being at the tip of his mind, he consults the master political tactician and strategist for counsel qualifying just beforehand explicitly that some of his party men feel that “Drona and his young followers are becoming too popular [due to their radical socio-economic rural reform program]. They feel I ought to be doing something to — make life a little difficult for them. Cut them down to size.” But even though Dhritarashtra has been frank about the matter he does agonizingly state that he cannot bring himself to act in such a manner. Menon responds forthrightly pointblank by quoting from the Arthashastra and the Shantiparvan, professing “it comes sanctified by the centuries” (p.270).

However, Dhritarashtra is in agony upon hearing these Machiavellian stanzas (which, possibly, would even have drawn Machianvelli'unabashed admiration) and states that he cannot pursue such machinations. But the importance of such callous counsel is fated to pass down to the bloodline in a
rather bloody manner as these apparently secret words are overheard by Priya Duryodhani, the duo unaware of the eavesdropper.

Despite his inherited mantle of Gangaism, Dhritarashtra throughout, his western socialist as well as grafted—on Swadeshi ideals notwithstanding, largely remains a coffeeshop socialist with ivory tower ideals—indeed of a fairy tale nature and form. Jung’s concept of shadow as a threatening force always hovers near, morally speaking. Such a limbo state is reflected in the leader’s failure to address issues decisively and in real terms due to his vacillating nature. This is a serious personality issue which he never addresses; nor does he acknowledge it at any point of time. It leads to his failure to comprehend the ground reality. Psychologically, this can be seen as emanating from the undealt—with shadow.

To quote Joseph Campbell:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.¹²

Relatedly, his failure to comprehend the ground reality can also be deduced and inferred by his sycophantic advisor’s compounding the problem, leading to dithering to the point of even further long drawn-out political vacillations instead of quick effective decisiveness. Note the tone of Dhritarashtra on the issue of Manimir:

‘Suppose we do, Dhritarashtra said mildly, ‘these things would still take time to, ah, become operational. We are speaking now about the immediate future. You were indicating, Vidur, that an
Azharuddin-led rebellion is a possibility, but not, right now, a probability. What if our intelligence fellows are wrong?’, Vidur raised an eyebrow as if the very thought was blasphemous. (p.248).

To refocus on Dhritarashtra’s blindness, he is blind to daughter Priya Duryodhani’s total lack of ethics and morality. With reference to Gandhhari, who willingly physically blinds herself for life with a blindfold after marriage, once their daughter is born and the doctor states that she is the first and last child, Dhritarashtra’s anguish is such that it manifests itself in the form of largely ignoring her from that moment—she being known from then on as “Gandhhari the Grim”.

To quote a few examples of Dhritarashtra’s blunders these are in chronological order as follows: the en masse resignation of elected Kaurava Party politicians during British rule to protest the colonial government’s unilateral decision to press Indian soldiers into the Second World War conflict - even in the face of Vidur’s advice not to take such thoughtless precipitate action; his neglect of the rural sector and its development, at the cost of funding heavy industry (thereby effectively bypassing the majority agricultural population); and the military liberation and annexation of Comea (Goa) on Kanika’s advice. The last is viewed in highly negative light by the Chakras and they decide that India cannot be allowed to flex its puny political and military muscles. So they invade India, greatly decimating the Indian forces and conquering a huge amount of Indian territory before a ceasefire – a great loss of face for Dhritarashtra from which he never recovers. He suffers from a fatal heart attack and thus exits in death amidst the ignominy of humiliation. Thus Dhritarashtra acts very uncharacteristically just before death, looking towards eastern values, described
with great pathos and poignancy, "... he sat down in the lotus position, his bare back to a tree, facing the east, where the dawn breaks for all of us but had never done for him." (p. 305)

Now to briefly bring Pandu's character under the analytical spotlight. Dhritarashtra and Pandu are, practically from the very beginning of their relationship at odds with one another, this factor being the direct outcome of Gangaji according greater political patronage and status to the blind politician. Equally important are their diametrically opposed views on effective methods to oust the British. Dhritarashtra prefers civilized negotiations with the colonial powers (due to his alien/colonial outlook) believing that they have a sense of honour and decency, whereas at the core Pandu does affirm and advocate violence. But his personality despite never having actual power, does show his authoritarian outlook and personality. The authoritarian personality, though it can be true to patriotic ideals, is generally of a right or left dimension in political terms. To quote:

The right-left dimension (reactionary-fascist, conservative, liberal, socialist-communist) is, of course, an extremely complex one. Crucial qualitative differences can be found not only among various ideological camps falling at approximately the same point on the right or left. Furthermore, there exists today a great deal of ideological heterodoxy, not to speak of simple confusion, so that a cutting across of formal political categories may be expected in many individuals.¹³

To re-emphasize Pandu and Dhritarashtra's rivalry both aspiring to lead the Kaurava Party as its president - mostly a privilege of Dhritarashtra due to
Gangaji's rigid, patronage and benediction—is embedded in the very roots of personal ambition.

The hostility between Pandu and Dhritarashtra as well as differences of character traits are of crucially vital importance to the narrative's plot and overall parodic expression—farceical, satirical, sarcastic and replete with puns of a highly barbed nature. As we have already dealt at length with Dhritarashtra, the following applies to Pandu:

Pandu never lacked in strength or courage ... what Pandu never had much of was judgement ... or, ... as some of his admirers prefer to see it, luck ... After insisting, with more pride than judgement, on pursuing his studies in India rather than in England, he was expelled from one of the country's best colleges for striking a teacher, an Englishman, who had called Indian 'dogs'. ... It was a pattern of conduct that was to last all his life. (pp. 41-42)

Though Pandu exits the novel much earlier than Dhritarashtra, his historico-literary importance cannot be overlooked. Pandu's utterances as a Kaurava Party member are in the nature of lip-service and, therefore, nominal Gangaist. For the major part of the action, he does not publicly challenge either Gangaji or Dhritarashtra outside the party but is still at least initially an articulate voice of protest as to how to best serve the subjugated country's best interests for the purposes of freedom from the oppressive colonial rule. He is far more in touch with the miserable plight of the common people unlike alien (read colonial) ivory tower Dhritarashtra.

With reference to Pandu's personal life, especially conjugal life with his two wives, Kunti and Madri, it becomes non-existent after intercourse on a single occasion due to a sudden debilitating seizure. The raucous details are as follows:
He was in bed one day with both his consorts, attempting something quite unspeakably imaginative, when an indescribable pain shot through his chest and upper arm and held his very being in its grip. He fell back, unable to mouth the words to convey his torture, and for a brief moment his companions thought their ministrations had brought him to a height of ecstasy they had never seen before. But a quick look lower down convinced them something quite different was the matter. They frantically screamed for help. (p.66)

So, his till then life of a sybarite in most of its epicurean dimensions, comes to an abrupt end – completely in its carnal aspect, with forced celibacy. Therefore, Tharoor, lightly jokes that the great son of Ved Vy as is thus forced to embrace, propagate, advocate and fight for the cause of the just instead. The other related direct fallout is forced celibacy. This may possibly be the reason that he, at least surficially, acts as a “true” Gangaite – psychological compensation being the catalyst, though clearly not at ease within his inner core.

Pandu’s sudden transformation is painted with imaginatively bold strokes on Tharoor’s literary canvas – with expert comic satire. He thus wears the new apparel of erudite discourse, speaking almost always in well-measured tone, often quoting the *shastras* in which, perhaps, he has taken sanctuary as an escape from the summons of libido. His going overboard in this sense–release of libido being redirected and rechanneled – is farcically ludicrous and of great hilarity. He is thus at this point in time, an impassioned disciple of Gangaji–a possibly pathological condition. The point of ridiculousness this embodies stands out in the fact that he even applies the most arcane ancient traditional concepts (of the *shastras*) out of the blue to the most mundane or routine circumstances, “In
debate he thought high and aimed low. He became adept at religion, generous in philanthropy and calm in continence” (p.69).

Steeped in the *shastras*, convinced of their absolute validity, he is, nevertheless troubled “but still self-compellingly unerect” in his physically antithetical yearning for a son, or rather many sons. Besides the fact that illegitimacy is in the bloodline (the big family secret) sanctified by the most esoteric ancient texts, it is also his heart’s desire to have heirs, irrespective of how they are obtained. So, quoting the *shastras* as this being the solution for his *moksha*, he bluntly practically orders Kunti to get herself pregnant—justifying such by the *shastras*. Sexually frustrated Kunti is still horrified and firmly refuses, but when Pandu reveals the big family secret, calling it a tradition, Kunti agrees. But the bombshell she drops that she already has a son from a pre-marital affair of whose whereabouts she knows absolutely nothing draws Pandu’s wrath. She pleads that they should look for him but Pandu answers that a son before marriage is unacceptable and she will have to get pregnant again – morality, or rather prudery, giving way to ancient *shastras* and family tradition in the land of the *Kamasutra*.

So Kunti’s condoned affairs lead to the births of Yudhishtir by the youngest Indian High Court Judge, Bhim by Major Vayu and Arjun by Devendra Yogi, after which Kunti now, quoting the *shastras* herself, puts an end to her affairs in the interest of Dharma as opposed to promiscuity. Thus is the way cleared for voluptuous Madri to seek her husband’s consent to have affairs. In spite of Kunti’s jealousy, the celibate father thus relents – allowing only one affair. Madri honours the letter of this agreement through an affair with two twin
brothers simultaneously, they always doing *everything* together. Ironically, the very act which led to Pandu’s premature exit from the sexual arena is blissfully enjoyed by Madri.

Pandu, politically, at the roots, is not of the colonial/postcolonial mould. Dhritarashtra’s ideals prove mere expedients when Independence has finally been won, at the cost of great communal carnage. This is clearly evident in Gangaji’s desire to make Karna the Prime Minister to avoid splitting the subcontinent being ignored and bypassed in the interests of unabashed, naked lust for political power. We may well surmise, considering Pandu’s true character, along with its much more *swadeshi* and thus anti-colonial views, that Pandu may have also sought the most powerful post had he been politically capable of securing it. Pandu too, like Dhritarashtra, is a creature of political ambition. However, since he does not share Dhritarashtra’s colonial outlook, especially of the ivory tower–alien kind, he is a true patriot, especially as to his nativity and thereby in-touch psyche with the miserable and horrendous socio-economic plight of the man on the street.

Pandu’s true character in its true essence emerges in quite a few instances – condemnation of the sudden mango agitation suspension; the fact of his being squared as the Kaurava party president when he does finally manage to ascend this lofty chair; subsequent disgust at being unable to achieve major objectives because of his resignation effected by the tumultuous waters, he tries to steer clearly through overt and covert opposition. He plays his last gambit thus, “In view of the variety of attacks on my position and principles within and outside the party of late... ‘I should like, as party President, to seek a vote of confidence from this committee”(p 174).
But this proves unfruitful and he loses this crucial hand. After this, Pandu finally shows his true colours, true patriotism, establishing the Onward Organisation (Subhash Chandra Bose’s Forward Bloc) – anticolonial in both roots and philosophy, advocating violence to achieve freedom. The violent means to achieve self-rule propagate and echo the philosophy of the *The Mahabharata* and thus have cultural as well as religious sanction. The fact that he seeks to forge alliances with the Nazis shows that he has no qualms, unlike Dhritarashtra and Gangaji to achieve Independence by whatever means. So he bluffs his way to The Third Reich Consulate to get a visa in record time, claiming to be Hitler’s best friend in India.

So saying, our angry hero
the country’s first Fascist;
Admiring Roma’s latest Nero
the practiced how to clinch his fist’ announcing,
“Onward, my friends! Our cause must march,
indiscipline we must never slacken.
Our military shorts we must always starch,
for Britain’s foes will need our backings” (p.177)

This incident illustrates his ability to think fast, engendered as it is by the need for desperate measures, in his view, and also born of firmly rooted in now outright and perceivedly upright life of quite desperation. He proves somewhat opportunistic – a trait he and Dhritarashtra share – proving that at the core he is Draconian politically.

However, Pandu is jailed preemptively before going to Germany but manages to convince the jailor to covertly release him using Patriotism as the
weapon. The quick-witted exchange, partly quoted, is illuminating, "It's time for you to serve the cause... You must help me get out, to fight our wars,... (p.178)

So Pandu, effects escape to Germany. When he finally manages to meet the Fuhrer the latter offers aid of a cosmetic nature and power in the form of radio broadcasts instead of tanks, declaring,

Radio broadcasts – that's what you can do;
said the Germans, when he asked for tanks
So instead of invading, our disappointed Pandu
Made speeches to other tanks;
Every Sunday and Thursday, on Deutsche Welle,
Chakravarti broadcast to the East;
But his stirring exhortations to march to Delhi
Came through like the yelps of beast. (p.181)

But this proves ineffectual. So opportunity presents itself once again when the Japanese, Hitler's allies in the Eastern sphere, join the war, impelled by force stronger than himself, he decides to rush off to Japan, exclaiming:

'Hooray! Said Chakravarti, 'Let's fight! Let's go!
Let's salute the rising sun!
With the help of Japan and the noble OO
Our battle will be won'. (p.182)

So, Pandu forges friendly relations with the Japanese, converting some Indian POWs to his cause in Burma. But this has far less than the desired effect as when the cat has to be belled finally, the POW troops (now armed by the Japanese and led by and under Pandu's war banner) simply cannot fire on their Indian Commander-in-arms of the British army. Therefore, the Japanese end the experiment, putting Pandu and Madri on a plane. But it is shot down just after
Pandu and Madri have made love – the expedient fascist, yet the true freedom fighter as well and his second in status wife dying, shortly after release, and she due to the bullets.

During The freedom struggle and shortly after independence when the sub-continent is divided into two, there is another potentially bright but highly westernized star on the subcontinental firmament – Karna. He is a Muslim in name only, not at all in religiosity in its fundamentalist core. He enters the political scene as a member of the Kaurava Party. His entry and emergence as a political luminary is rather flashy to the point of being glitzy. In the words of the omniscient character-narrator (V.V.):

He first came to national attention as a flourishing lawyer in Bombay, sharp, suave and self-assured, with a bungalow on Malabar Hill and an accent to match the cut of his Savile Row suits. Who he was, and what had made him, no one precisely knew. Mystery continued to swirl about him like mist at a Himalayan sunrise. (p.136)

He soon assumes the mantle of Hindu-Muslim unity. This makes him a rising star in the Kaurava Party internally in middle and potentially upper ranks as a person who cannot be taken lightly, or, certainly not sidelined. Of great importance are his origins—born of Englishman Hyperion Helios and Kunti, abandoned as the product of an illicit pre-marital affair.

At this point in time the British had not been able to effect an across-the-board irreconcilable divide between the two major Indian communities. So Karna’s entry is of great significance, it proving pivotal and major at a later crucial time. Karna in some ways shares similar westernized background with
Dhritarashtra. Both have a highly colonial outlook—but Karna's is much more pragmatic insofar as he is much better and more ruthless in the power game as well as general political gamesmanship and onemanship. Like Dhritarashtra, he too hankers for and later actively pursues power, much more blatantly than the physically blind politician. Neither are visionaries. But in actual terms Karna sees further with respect to how to manipulate the game of leadership. As already stated, both are colonial in their viewpoint, though Karna is much more Machiavellian in its pursuit—manipulating the British colonial masters for his own selfish ends. But both Dhritarashtra and Karna can be said to have pseudo-political philosophies—but differing. Karna is known as a master Machiavellian who knows the quintessence of the science of statecraft like Kanika Menon. More importantly, Karna has no qualms about using it, even to the point of unleashing initially colonially ingratiating forces and later violently divisive ones—all for vested gains wherein the ends justify the means.

With respect to the fact that both Dhritarashtra and Karna are politically cast in the colonial mould, the former an ivory tower idealist and the latter a westernized materialist, nevertheless an observation by S.D. Pillai is relevant in the post-modernist sense (inextricably linked to the postcolonial context) which is applicable to both Dhritarashtra and Karna:

... a good number of Post-Modern protagonists give a strong impression of being mere role players. They are more often than not formless performers and cardboard cut-outs with no Forsterian roundness about them. Each has patterned his or her self on this or that celluloid hero or comic book zombie or cowboy.
This observation in Dhritarashtra and Karna’s case is more applicable in the sense of deliberate caricature. However, it does not hold weight in a sweeping sense as the caricatures have been etched carefully to make a point—decidedly political in its scathing condemnation of the alien postcolonial outlook of those in the hallowed corridors of power. To elucidate the quote both characters are mere role players in the political chess game, Karna being much more shrewd and knowledgeable as to how to mould and twist the given circumstances. The characters’ cardboard cutout portrayal is not superficial but for the purpose of acidic commentary. The fact that their lives and destinies have almost automatically patterned themselves on alien entities and alien environment—especially western education—naturally is an inescapable influence. But to apply this to them as being a “celluloid hero or comic book zombie or cowboy” is applicable and relevant only in a highly superficial form, being relegated here to the public persona they maintain in the novel’s context. So, both characters have roundness though this roundness is of course etched for the purpose of political satire. S.D. Pillai’s observation in its post-modern and postcolonial context is much more applicable across the board to novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, e.g., in Untouchable.

As Karna and Gangaji are diametrically opposed with respect to both intrinsic nature and political philosophy—particularly as to the effective means to achieve freedom—conflagration and conflict is just a matter of time. Karna is highly cynical about Gangaism to the point of no return. Though initially prominent in the Kaurava Party as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, he soon gets disgusted over the slow progress. His differences with Gangaism
naturally impact on his differences with Dhritarashtra, Gangaji’s pre-maturely crowned monarch—directly antithetical to the consummate cynic’s interests. Karna publicly proclaims that peaceful resistance would by no means dislodge the world’s most powerful empire. He thus urges that power must be wrested from the British rulers under their own rules without breaking the law as that will hinder the future native government to make the law one day. He is firmly convinced that the “rabble” of—“the great unwashed” will not bring the British empire to its knees. He jibes bitingly: “I do not subscribe to the current fashion for the masses so opportunistically advanced by a family of disinherited princes” (p. 138). In elitist vein—typically colonial—he goes on:

In no country in the world do the ‘masses’ rule: every nation is run by its leaders, whose learning and intelligence are the best guarantee of its success. I say to my distinguished friends: leave the masses to themselves. (p. 138)

Having prefaced and amplified his views he hammers in the final point “Let us not abdicate our responsibility to the party and the cause by placing at our head those unfit to lead us.” (p. 138)

The last acerbic comment is directed at Dhritarashtra and indirectly at Gangaji. The divergence of viewpoints between Gangaji and Karna quickly comes to a head. This is because Karna views

…the Kauravas under Gangaji [as] insufficiently secular, and this made him, paradoxically, more consciously Muslim. Gangaji’s efforts to transcend his Hindu image by stressing the liberalism of his interpretation of it only made matters worse. When … Mahaguru … declared his faith in all religions with the words, ‘I
am a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, Zoroastrian, a Jew’, Karna responded darkly: ‘Only a Hindu could say that.’ (p.142)

However, Karna’s view is a misperception as Gangaji, like the real life Gandhi is of too great a humanist orientation and not an orthodox Hindu in its narrow fundamentalist mould. So, despite Karna’s perceived favouritism shown to the predominant community this charge does not hold real weight. But as a Kaurava Party member Karna, like the real life Jinnah, thus feels ignored. The personality clash presages dire and horrendous consequences. Karna soon comes to the realization that he is not the right person in right party and thus resigns, returning to London but it is only a matter of time before his return upon Gaga Shah’s invitation to join the Muslim League as a prominent face. However, he turns out to be a ruthless negotiator and extracts a heavy price: as actual president, in terms of real and largely unchallenged power, of the Muslim League for which he assumes a fully communal face. The encounter between Gaga Shah and Karna proves rather uncomfortable and even somewhat excruciating for the old style leader, Karna’s direct no-nonsense approach, unusual for him (Gaga Shah), he generally dealing with sycophantic and pliable members of his own community – easily swayed by the credentials of his title and public persona. So he cannot delicately break the ice and lead the conversation as per his own wishes. Karna cuts through the ice rather dramatically by abruptly leaving before the Gaga Shah restrains him, surprised and chuckling – the young man having already declared that he has, “no desire to offer advice … to an ineffective covey of irrelevant old man”(p.146). The Gaga Shah is impressed in spite of himself. Karna then states forthrightly that security under the British is reasonably fair but thought as to the
future is necessary, adding, “A future under Ganga Datta’s Kauravas does not bear thinking about. Neither you nor I would have any place in the kind of India they are likely to construct” (p.146). In the very next breath he declares that leadership is the need of the hour, which, “only I can provide” (p.147). Weighing the implications briefly, Gaga Shah finally asks him his terms which remain secret even at the time from the ubiquitous moles of Ved Vyas, written as they are on sheet of “speechless” paper. But they become evident soon enough with the indecent haste in and with which Karna is made the Muslim League’s unchallenged supremo as party President.

So Karna reincarnates himself as a Muslim leader to promote the party and mainly himself as an alternative, blatantly propagating initially a separate identity of an anti-secular nature in both form and politics. Even before the British have managed to sow completely divisive seeds, Karna and his group’s nationalism is divisible: Independence without Hindu domination …”, Karna’s new slogan – a marked departure from his previous Kaurava Party incarnation. He glibly states the necessity of minority rights protection within “a new form of federalism” (p.148). Dhritarashtra immediate interpretation is “the importance of Mohammed Ali Karna wielding power over at least one part of the country, unobstructed by anyone else’ … “He’s never believed in anything else (p.148).

Karna thus sends a signal to the colonial British rulers that he and his party are pliable—a factor which they do not fail to exploit to promote “minority interests” for their own nefarious ends to remain in power and exercise it immorally for their remaining reign. Therefore, it is quite evident that the seeds of Karnistan (Pakistan) are sown quite early on in the political game by Karna or the
real life Jinnah who as President in one instance declared: “The Congress is determined to crush all other communities and cultures in this country and establish Hindu Raj in this country”\textsuperscript{15}.

Karna as a master machinador proves mercilessly ruthless and unswervingly goal oriented with respect to personal and political ambition in many instances, the most pivotally important one being expectation of separate Muslim and Hindu electorates, thereby effectively collaborating with the British (illustrating the use of exchange of favours in the form of encashing political cheques). But the most horrendous and gruesome extraction is the terrible toll of human lives as a result of the Hindu-Muslim divide directly due to largely his own successful creation of Karnistan. Of course in his entire political career practically he thus uses his skill as a great orator – drenched as it is in sweepingly moving rhetoric – with great effect. As such, the nature of his autocracy is beyond question. Psychologically, it is truly of the style of the authoritarian personality.

So, Kunti’s son does rise and with him the sun also rises on Karnistan – a result of his twisted vision. Directly related to the last point is his previous use of political vacuum left by the Kaurava Party members upon en masse resignation in protest against the British Viceroy’s unilateral decision to engage Indian forces in the Second World War. The fact that the Kaurava Party leaders are pre-emptively jailed before the Quit India Movement has even gotten off the ground, solidifies his iron yet flexible hand – insofar as his extractive methods go, successfully remaining in the spotlight with his party, quite an easier task in the absence of the divergent Kaurava voice, especially as its spiritual mentor and leader (Gangaji)
has largely withdrawn from the political scene, receding instead into a more supernal background.

To slightly readjust the focus, with respect to Gangaji’s major impact as Tharoor’s literary analogue doppelganger of the real life Gandhi. T.N. Dhar in the historical vein contends (in a parallel historical sense) the following: “The Indian resistance against the British is seen mostly through the efforts of Gandhi. The narrative provides his compact and well rounded portrait, with the intention of reviving his memory among the public”.16 However true this may be, at least surficially, the fact that Tharoor’s literary analogue/doppelganger, though a towering spiritual colossus exuding great magnetic charisma, towards the end of his role largely takes on the character of a spiritual ascetic, evident in his overall withdrawal from active politics, even though his political career as a champion of the rights of the Indian masses in general and India as a culture and country in its own right – with its spiritually and morally divine light to freedom. Even towards the end of his then reclusive role, he still desires the utmost to avoid partition. The fact that he proposes Kama’s name as the Prime Minister of the as yet un-Partitioned nation is striking proof of this, especially as the political ideologies and agendas are completely at odds. So, when all is said and done it can be seen that he is a fading star – still bright in spirituality but only just above the lesser mortals of humanity like Dhritarashtra and Karna. When Dhritarashtra and the Kaurava Working Party brusquely brush aside his proposal of Kama as the Prime Minister – despite its being a cementing factor – one can see that he inhabits the political twilight, as evidenced in his vow of silence in which Sarah Behn becomes his mouthpiece and metaphoric walking stick.
Now to concentrate on how Gandhi exits the scene. It seems that even he cannot escape the nemesis engendered when he as the Regent of Hastinapur kidnapped Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, the first being denied the pleasures of marital life. Amidst the flaming background of simultaneously raging riots and Independence celebrations, Amba in the mutilated form of eunuch Shikhandin coolly walks into his chamber and confronts him with all the power of the vitriolic. Just before this he has been brooding, hearing “instead of the cheers of rejoining … the cries of the women ripped open in the internecine frenzy; instead of the slogans of triumph, he heard the shouts of crazed assaulters flailing their weapons at helpless victims” (p.231). For him, unlike for Dhritarashtra, the Dark Ages are hovering on the precipice amidst the starless sky of India. T.N. Dhar questions Gandhi’s judgment in “letting the question of partition be decided by his lieutenants hypothesizing that partition could have been averted by the method of hunger strike.” His further comments on Tharoor’s account of Gandhi’s assassination are important. The critic shows that the novelist “lets Gandhi’s [Gangaji’s] murderer Shikhandin berate him for his dereliction of duty and also for neglecting the issue of leadership of the party.”

However, hindsight analysis of a great leader’s actual views and related actions can be theoretically discussed till eternity. So it is highly questionable, though not to the point of absolute dismissal, how much weight Dhar’s opinion holds, particularly in the formalistic context of the text. This researcher suggests humbly that it be best left to the reader.

To return to the text proper Gangaji finds the darkness to be all enveloping. This claustrophobic feeling bursts to the fore with the entry of a dark
phantom from the dark past – another lifetime so many aeons ago. The living self-affected mutilated ghost of Amba in the haggard form of reincarnated Shikhandin addresses him, coughing blood in contortive pain stroked by “aeons” of the mission of revenge. Bhishma is benumbed with shock. The “man” refers to himself as “Shikhandin the Godless”, adding “Bhishma will understand”. Sarah Behn is petrified but Gangaji, after and upon final recall and recognition, views the unnatural apparition with ineffable peace. Shikhandin condemns his brahmcharya, mocking his title of the father of the nation, underscoring the absence of a son sprung from his own (Gangaji’s) loins to light his funeral pyre – calling the tragedy of the country his responsibility as seen in the flames ravaging the country: his own funeral pyre. What follows is worth quoting:

Three bullets spat out in quick succession. The screaming did not stop; it was joined by other screams, which dissolved into wails and sobs. For a second it seemed that occupants of the room were all frozen in shock, and that all that moved were waves of grief from the screaming women. Then everyone sprang into motion. Sarah Behn ran to Gangaji. Two or three of his male followers seized Shikhandin, who did not resist. The assassin leaned on his captors like bride reluctant to leave her father’s home, but there was defiance in his weakness, and his arms were pinioned behind his back. Shikhandin looked with bitter satisfaction at Mahaguru, lying crumpled on the floor, life oozing from his wounds (p.232)

So Gangaji dies with just a faint whisper, almost, antithesis of his political philosophy, gasping, “I...have...failed” (p.234). Much political hullabaloo, cynically speaking, follows along with genuine grief. This is all the more ironic as Viceroy Lord Drewpad had preponed Independence and related Partition to 15th August 1947 – in the form of a take it or leave it ultimatum. Its farcical form
was drawn by "cartographer" Nichols perfunctorily as largely arbitrary lines on a map with respect to respective religious community's geographical predominance areawise in a theoretical manner without an actual field survey. The date of Independence is ridiculous as Drewpad simply chose it because it coincides with his wedding anniversary – a highly political faux pas, without order, effecting chaos in its summary execution.

Now to focus on Shishu Pal (Lal Bahadur Shastri) as the succeeding Prime Minister when the Indo-Pakistan 1965 war breaks out, the view of people about the new Prime Minister as unequal to the task turn out false as follows:

But, like everyone else, the Kamistanis had underestimated Shishu Pal.... Our army... hit back so hard that our troops were just seven kilometers from Karnistan’s most populous city, Laslut, when another cease-fire intervened. (The story of the subcontinent’s recent wars, ... ‘Fire!’ and ‘Cease!’ at the wrong times) (p.317).

Shishu Pal then negotiates and gives back all gained as “Peace demands compromise”, (p.317). He suddenly dies soon afterwards.

The jackals bay betrayal but Shishu Pal believes in Dharma and preservation of life over revenge. Shishu Pal soon dies as this “was the only means, he had of showing the widows and cripples how intimately he suffered for their wasted sacrifice” (p.318)

After Shishu Pal, the Kaurava Working Committee members wonder as to how to fill the power vacuum – possibly, at least apparently, feeling the lack of a leader of acceptable stature. Initially an internal election to choose the future Prime Minister is suggested but consensus proves elusive, to which Ved Vyas responds, “There is only one possible solution to our dilemma, Priya
Duryodhani.”(p.318). The fact that she is a woman evokes concern and consternation. Ved Vyas’s answer is:

We want a Prime Minister with certain limitations,... who will decorate the office, rally the support of the people at large and let us run the country". She[Priya Duryodhani] is easily recognizable... as her father’s daughter, and ... presentable to foreign dignitaries than poor little Shishu Pal ever was and if we ever decide we have had enough of her- well, she is only a woman. (p.318)

So Priya Duryodhani is made the Prime Minister for the remaining interim period till the next elections. Since she has been apparently catapulted into this position because of her father and due to her own self-willed nature, she is often at loggerheads with the Kaurava Party old guard. The next fourth general elections see a greatly reduced Kaurava Party majority in Parliament for which some, like Yudhishtir, Jayaparakash Drona, blame her as the leader and the party's visible face but she denies this, which Ved Vyas confirms. He further urges Yudhishtir and party not to “jeopardize democracy” as a “political party is like a family, Yudhishtir. A family does not decide in the street who will cook its dinner tonight” (p.340). The pungent irony is that too much democracy is bad and therefore undemocratic, it being further pointed out and underscored that a public parade of internal dissensions would be detrimental and counterproductive.

By this time Priya Duryodhani has familiarized herself with the actual workings of her internal opponents in the real corridors of power with respect to building authority firsthand, now determined not to be subjected to even the mere hint of humiliation again, knowing fully well that even the Old Guard cannot afford to choose a different political face than her own as the party leader. After
the Kaurava Party wins the next general elections, though with a significantly reduced majority, she digs in her heels for the internal and overall national power play and statecraft. But Priya Duryodhani proves that she has a mind conjoined with a will of her own and is thus not pliable. Yudhishtir is made Deputy Prime Minister in this government but truly in Machiavellian style, he is largely ignored and sidelined to the point of emasculation – reminiscent of Kanika Menon’s long overheard advice to late Dhritarashtra. Priya Duryodhani has taken it to heart. As matters come to a head Priya Duryodhani and Yudhishtir’s differences widen, the former displaying the qualities needed for self-serving ends, cementing her own power.

The last straw on Yudhishtir’s upright back is the holding of a cabinet meeting without his awareness. He fails to discuss it with Priya Duryodhani, being ignored and resigns. This action makes V.V. say, “You’re a fool” (p.343) – echoing Vidur’s advice to Dhritarashtra, emphasising, “An empty seat never benefits the one who has vacated it” (p.343). But, Yudhishtir stodgy in honour, fails to realize he has played into Priya Duryodhani’s hands, she reportedly celebrating his self-removal with champagne. The phenomenon of barely culture based leader Jayaprakash Drona meanwhile is referred to the political background, he being a post-Independent Gangaite of a radical bent for effecting quick and effectively beneficial rural reforms for the populace at large.

Prominent differences emerge between Yudhishtir and Ashwathaman over the proposed abolition of privy purses. Yudhishtir argues that the privy purses are mere compensation for accession and monetarily less than the princes’ lost revenue. Ashwathaman responds, “Spoken like a true prince,
Yudhishtir"....drawing Yudhishtir's ire, he stressing that Hastinapur was annexed before Independence and his family is not a privy purse beneficiary. He instead views it as a solemn promise, not to be broken without dishonour, urging his adversary to read the Constitution – emphasising the mockery of his words. Ashwathaman instead quotes the Constitution’s directive principles of equality and social justice for all, stating that it is not a “moral exercise” but a means to improve the common man’s lot, “not strive for a collective place in Heaven” (p.345). Priya Duryodhani rapidly agrees, and action is soon taken accordingly – ostensibly paper action with a public pro-poor face. Another populist measure which follows almost immediately afterwards is the nationalization of banks.

The election for the national President is in the offing, Priya Duryodhani’s astute and loyal doormat choice being Ekalavya and not the official Kaurava Party nominee. The seeds of imminent Kaurava Party split are thus sown, Ekalavya being expelled. Priya Duryodhani calls for a “conscience vote,” declaring the issues “far too serious to be brushed under the carpet of party discipline”. The Kaurava Party Working Committee asks Priya Duryodhani to show cause why she should not be expelled for breach of party discipline. The fact that the Communist and Socialist Party pledge to vote for Ekalavya, makes Priya Duryodhani coolly ignore the showcause notice for forty-eight hours and Ekalavya becomes “the youngest President in Independent India’s brief history and the first one not to have been the official nominee of the Kaurava Party” (p.350).

The tidal political waters finally deluge the shore of Indian politics – all due to the Prime Minister’s master Machiavellian machinations. The result is
inevitable – the Kaurava Party splits into two disparate groups: Real (R) and Original (O). Cynics dub R to mean Ruling or Rewarded by Priya Duryodhani. Tharoor states farcically that the O stands for Official or Old Guard or obsolete. The left support her which she capitalizes on in her rhetoric for the purpose of the next general election after which the leftists are predicted by the narrator to be discarded like Bakr-Id Goats, “no one to hear their bleats as they were led off to the electoral slaughterhouse” (p.351).

Thus does the narrator highlight the infinite lengths the postcolonial Priya Duryodhani is willing to go to in the form of biting satire to retain and propagate her own narrow minded but visionary ‘selfishness’ for her own ends.

In the next general elections with her ‘Remove Poverty’ slogan Priya Duryodhani is effectively the nation’s queen—exploiting the age old feudal tradition and mindset. Her rule is law. The irony is reflected in Draupadi Mokrasi’s illness, the symbol of hybrid Indian democracy. Tharoor’s intention is to show that democracy is thus under assault, under the boot of postcolonial autocracy.

The refugee problem from neighboring east Karnistan due to atrocities of the ruling regime in the west becomes a major problem for India. The result is another war between the two nations, East Karnistan being hacked off from West Karnistan – a decisive victory. East Karnistan is born as independent country of Gelebi Desh (Bangladesh). The triumph gives major stature to Priya Duryodhani, she being hailed by the common populace as “Maa Duryodhani” “Duryodhani Amma” (p.355).
Meanwhile, the ground reality for the poor starving common man remains unchanged, Tharoor suggesting implicitly that “remove poverty” means remove the poor. They weren’t “starving to death” as reported in the Western Press. To quote the text:

They didn’t starve to death, because they slaved and swept and sowed and stood and served and scratched in order to slake the hunger in their bellies, and found just enough to keep alive – underfed, undernourished, undergrown, underweight, underclad, undereducated, underactive, underemployed, undervalued and underfoot, but alive. Yet how sympathetically their underdevelopment was understood by Duryodhani’s underlings!" (p.357).

The satiric parody drawn-out by the word “alive” amidst the plethora of rampant suffering at the less than subsistence level, serves to highlight the political farce staged by Duryodhani with the aid of her coterie. She proclaims ironically “her democratic pedigree and socialist convictions from every lectern and platform” (p.357) – accumulating greater and greater power in the name of and with the support of the socio-economically disenfranchised. The further indirect attack on the fourth estate by limiting newsprint supply due to their being “‘out of touch’ with the messes” and shaking of the judiciary along with her authoritarian style of functioning does however begin to bear bitter fruit. The poor remain as poor as ever. Trade Unions and peasant unrest are ruthlessly suppressed. The following words, “prohibit, proscribe, profane, prolate, prosecute or prostitute” (p.357) show the freedom abrogated, though enshrined in the Constitution.
However, the draconian measures used to enforce authority lead to the rise in public perception of Jayaprakash Drona with his mass call against Priya Duryodhani. This has the fallout of once again giving Yudhishtir political prominence – in a much more genuine sense, his political voice reaching genuine followers.

Since Drona is a major character it is pertinent to briefly delineate him. To begin with by travelling back in time Drona’s dazzling winning over of the Pandavas making them his protégés – in accordance with Ved Vyas’s secret instructions – is of vitally crucial and pivotal importance. Equally important is his humiliation by Heaslop when he seeks work for the sake of his son Ashwathaman – the apple of his eye as well as his only weakness. Heaslop’s flinging of alms instead is the insult which propels him to ascend the material world – samsara. Drona’s mentoring of Pandavas as per each one’s best innate abilities go a long way in developing their respective character in an allround manner. Both Yudhishtir and Arjun are the most important cases in point, the latter so eagle-eyed that he only sees the designated target like his mythical analogue. Drona somewhat recasts him in the mould of Gangaism indirectly – by the time of Independence as the Minister of rehabilitation. Ample proof of this can be seen in his humane treatment of Heaslop when the other is at the receiving end. However, he soon finds himself faced with the inability to work in and cope with the postcolonial mindset of the government (Dhritarashtra’s first government). He thus surrenders voluntarily the reins of official power and retreats to the countryside – immersing himself in grassroots politics, which has
major consequences during Priya Duryodhani’s tenure. Drona blames her for the country’s general socio-economic malaise due to omission and commission.

So the fact that he manages to assume such sudden prominence on the political landscape and in the media shows that he is a firebrand activist for just and rapid socio-economic change – the undisputed and sole head of agrarian revolution, with an intrinsically genuine native outlook which is decidedly anti-postcolonial. Thus he is a true native grassroots leader, almost like Gangaji. But unlike Gangaji he can be said to be on the, “naxalite’ fringe”. This is evident in his condemnatory comparison-cum-indictment of heavy industries at the cost of traditional ones. So his slogan “Remove Priya Duryodhani” is an episodically ironical twist and answer to her “Remove Poverty”– immediately cascading throughout the land, gripping the popular imagination.

Therefore, Priya Duryodhani is under assault and losing her hold. To save and solidify her position, she consults the famed Machiavellian lawyer Shakuni Shankar Dey (Sidhartha Shankar Roy). In the spirit of Kanika Menon, he advises her to declare a siege for reasons of national security and general law and order and lock up all opposing individuals and groups. The Janata Morcha is formed. Siege is declared but it cannot quell the anarchy with the related chaos due to summary arrests and prosecution – the abuse of authority. But the draconian measures do instil fear among most, at least in the cities.

Tharoor then launches into an attack on the press and its limited subjects, they elevating politics to the level of a god with endless reports of “speeches, clashes, accusation and counter-accusation, resignations, defections, appointments, walkouts, rallies, padeyatras, satyagrahas, fasts, demonstrations,
attempts to court arrest, charges of breaking party discipline, show-cause notices, expulsions, party splits” (p. 370) and horse-trading and mass defections. The irony thus emphasized by Ved Vyas is that politics is covered by the Press in a highly superficial manner – ironically speaking – and given undue weightage in its overdone form and format (to the exclusion of other more genuinely important and relevant topics) biting literary sarcasm. So V.V indicts the modern Press’s veracity, thanking his stars for his own independent sources.

The opposing forces of Priya Duryodhani’s “democracy” in its postcolonial mould are then brought to the fore. They condemn the apathetic attitude of the postcolonial mindset of bureaucrats in their functioning—a colonial legacy with all its inherent, opportunistic hypocrisy. Priya Duryodhani’s political gambits against the forces of Drona, Pandavas and Ashwathaman gather steam soon enough, farcically portrayed, yet with the seriousness of real socio-economic-political issues. Allegory is then resorted to by the novelist in the several functional surreal descriptions of Shakuni and Yudhishtir’s game of dice for Draupadi (meaning Indian democracy in all its vibrancy) as the final prize, which Yudhishtir loses. As in The Mahabharata, this is followed by Duhshasan’s attempted disrobing of Draupadi—symbolically the rape of democracy, prevented by Krishna Parthasarthy to save and uphold Dharma. This is followed by another game in which Ajrun regains Draupadi and all else lost. This dream sequence of Ved Vyas has no narrative factuality, meant only to psychogologically illuminate Priya Duryodhani’s rapacious nature and her policy of ends justifying the means.
From the viewpoint of Aurobindonian philosophy-cum-psychology Priya Duryodhani is a creature of the lower vital, with its attendant disorders and problems. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

The difficulty in the lower vital being is that it is still wedded to its old self ... It defends, glosses over, paints in specious colours and tries to prolong indefinitely the past habitual ways of thinking, speaking and feeling and to eternize what is distorted and misformed in character [spiritually speaking].

Duryodhani’s character as to power retaining and enlarging mechanism is evident from the following quotation:

Duryodhani had made Parliament supreme because she could control it, and claimed that this was in the British Political tradition we had inherited. She did not realize that the concept of primacy of Parliament came from a very superficial reading of British constitutional history. 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. (p.384)

So she finally shows her true colours as a tyrant, her chameleon political hues being seen through in all their bloody redness.

The Siege comes to international attention in the American media drawing condemnation for its atrocities and illegality. However, they soon began to see its virtues: industrial discipline, U.S. business openings, population control and the relative speed of action as opposed to the pervasively slow progress of developing India. Their stand is further softened by the release of jailed opponents and thus they relapse into a stance which is not so critical. The last point is a pointer to the insidious forces of neo-colonialism – it being an extension of colonialism in a
more garbed yet vicious form – which favours, by and large, as proven in many former western colonies, rulers of the same inherited ilk.

Priya Duryodhani’s suspension of the Siege and call for fresh general elections – probably because she is sure of victory – is painted as it unrolls as combat between Dharma and Adharma. The mythical Arjun’s casting away of his weapon is recast by Tharoor in the form of the novel’s Arjun dithering over filing his electoral papers against Priya Duryodhani. But Krishna Parthasarthy (analogous to lord Krishna loosely) finally convinces him to fight for democracy.

All India Radio announces Priya Duryodhani’s defeat. Yudhishtir becomes the Prime Minister in the cobbled patchwork party of disparate groups and ideologies – a highly incongruous creation, though with a new brand of politics and leadership, known as the Janata Morcha or People’s Front.

The patchwork party begins to publicly squabble and major internal rifts develop. Yudhishtir’s supreme position being threatened, he rushes off to meet the ailing Drona – practically on the verge of death – to solidify his own position and connected power base before Ashwathaman receives the leader-cum-teacher’s (the last true Gangaite) blessings. He declares that Ashwathaman is dead – pre-emptive action, which speedily makes Drona die somewhat prematurely. The periodic reference to The Mahabharata is recast in the highly ridiculous form of the dead Ashwathaman being not the towering elephant but a mere cockroach whom Yudhishtir had so named to stick to the letter of the truth. This is a political expedient and the novelist’s description of the incident castigates politicians, political parties and the overall mechanism of politics across the whole power – corridor spectrum – irrespective of whether or not player A, B or C, etc., occupy
or are in proximity to the hallowed chair. Nevertheless, though Yudhishtir loses his never before compromised halo, his feet do now, in a much more genuine sense, touch real political ground, his princely origins notwithstanding.

With the death of Drona the Janata Morcha, unable to survive without the bright traditional Swadeshi star, falls apart and the government falls. Priya Duryodhani returns to power with a massive majority. Corruption, which had merely gone underground, resurfaces in its material, moral and plethora of other aspects. V.V. comments, “the real political issues of the day involve not principles but parochialism” (p.412)

Lady Drewpad, a stock example of playing the official, necessarily colonial, role (though naturally decorative but yet of import with respect to the public perception), is largely an epicurean, especially insofar as her sexual adventures are concerned – her secret liaison with Dhritarashtra being of significant importance. This, of course, largely impacts on hybridized Indian democracy as Draupadi Mokrasi (wife of the Pandavas later) is born of this union on 26th January 1950. Both her birth and its date form the major part of the political shape and trajectory the nation follows subsequently. Naturally, this is a potent symbol.

In a general sense but also of special significance to Lady Drewpad’s colonial outlook and overall conduct, is her impacting on events during her fleeting presence. Insofar as the English woman occupies a significant place in Indian English as a genre of postcolonialism (in the literary sense), she forms “one of the strongest pillars of the British Raj”19. Furthermore, she exemplifies ‘the mem sahib’ – a hybrid coinage current in British India among the Indians to
address the European lady with respect’. This is D. Maya’s view, which in the
case of the work under discussion assumes major importance as an illustration of
the school of postcolonialism and its inextricable link to postmodernism.
However, the English memsahib’s “functional role ... is of a limited and
representative quality and is clearly defined by the constricting framework of the
colonial set-up”. Lady Drewpad typifies and epitomizes the white woman who
had preserved her racial arrogance ... and “contained” the Indian in an
antagonistic “Value System”.20

Though Lady Drewpad is of course portrayed as a typical colonial, she is
not consciously arrogant--rather it is on her part a feeling born of her acceptance
of the British being the rulers as a given. So, it is part of her frivolity, and if
anyone does label her colonially cruel, it can only be justified on the basis of her
lack of awareness and general unthinking nature. But, to reiterate, it does have
major consequences since she is Drewpad, the Governor General’s wife.

Lord Drewpad is a study in epicureanism, reflected in his glorying in the
pomp and pageantry his status accords him. This can be seen even unofficially
when he relates his official role to his wife in the role assigned to him as the
Governor General of India. The conversation is illuminating as to both frivolity
and the deeper machinations underlying the colonial mind in its wily operations.
As a character Drewpad is frivolous yet at the same time determined with a set
jaw attitude to complete the job assigned, the British withdrawal from and
relinquishment of India. ‘I won’t be ruling it [India], dear, just giving it away.’
‘And, besides, I think they’ve chosen me because I’m young. We’re the glamour
brigades, you see, marching forth to the skirl of bagpipes [Lady Drewpad]’.

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'Why are we leaving India, then?' 'Because we haven’t the strength to carry on'.

This frivolous exchange shows the tone and overtones of colonialism (p.212).

Even the incident of how the cartographer Nichols initially arbitrarily draws his partitioned lines on a map without even a field survey is an instance of the hurried callousness of Partition before Independence. He is mocked by Basham for such a theoretical division:

‘Congratulations, Mr. Nichols! ... You have just succeeded in putting your international border through the middle of the market, giving the rice field to Karnistan and warehouses to India, the largest pig-farm in the Zillah to the Islamic state and the Madrasahs of the Holy Prophet to the country the Muslims are leaving. (pp.224-225)

Ved Vyas ironically and farcically illustrates the callousness of such an arbitrary division with, “in those days lines meant lives.” This shows that the British have largely washed their hands of the affair.

The lack of preparedness over suddenly preponed Independence and now unavoidable Partition dismays all. When Drewpad is asked about the reason of the date, he replies, “It’s my wedding anniversary” (p.222) - frivolity thoughtless callousness in the extreme. The only one to capitalize is Karna; Karnistan, at this point, becoming a certainty – irrespective of the bloodbath to follow. So, the Drewpad [Mountbatten] Independence plan and Partition is thus an attempt to save the British stiff upper lip honour apparently, but is actually just a facesaving device for which some modern historians have condemned the colonizers.
Now to briefly delineate Arjun’s character. Arjun’s chief significance is his successful wooing of Draupadi Mokrasi (the symbol of hybridized Indian democracy). Before this, his adeptness as a code-breaker is important, a point which has already been covered. However, Arjun’s year long adventures as a grassroots journalist are significant as it is during this period that his character is finally shaped. He is paradoxically portrayed as a highly libidinous womanizer, kidnapping and later marrying Subhadra as advised by her brother Krishna Parthasarthy.

Now to focus on Parthasarthy (analogous to Lord Krishna). He is content in his local political role as the Gokarna Party Secretary and local MLA of Gokarna and the Kaurava Party Secretary of the Taluk (district), with the legendary reputation of having dislodged the local Tammany Hall Boss, Kamsa. Yet he refuses further stature in the form of national office. He is located by Arjun while dancing in a mock classical style, parodying behavior to the point of farce – a jibe at the postcolonial psyche as well. He is not a distanced politician but a quintessential grassroots politician. His high degree of sociability and overall connected social commitment reflect this. His role is most crucial when he advises Arjun to contest the election instead of withdrawing from the political game on the basis of theoretical ethics instead of standing up for worldly ideals.

Now to interpret and analyse the novel in both literary and historical senses (in the sense of parallels). The corresponding as well as divergent mythical equations will also be, hopefully, brought to the fore. The work shows innumerable farcical and bitingly satirical digs – in a starkly vivid manner and vein – as to the nature of the political landscape before and after Partition and
Independence till the time of Indira Gandhi (Priya Duryodhani). Tharoor shows himself to be an irreverent cynic who can make us smile, sometimes laugh, over the dismal events and general political circumstances, they also being entwined within the socio-economic spectrum. Tharoor’s simultaneous recasting-cum-remolding of both history and the epic is indeed skillfully rendered and accomplished, bringing to the fore the malaise of India that is Bharata. There are certain definite points of departure with respect to both myth and historicity. At the same time, pertinently, it is a rather obvious, thinly veiled account of both the people and events that formed India during the freedom struggle from British rule as well after –the writer’s parodic thrusts, being full of sarcasm.

To specifically concentrate on the writer’s remolding of characters, let us briefly focus on a few. His treatment, though stereotypical, yet manages to imaginatively animate history in the spirit of an artist and topical philosopher. In addition, his skilful fictional interweaving of mythology and history is highly unique and lighthearted – yet an incisive indictment of the colonial and postcolonial psyche, making it a valuable social-literary document. The manner in which traditional Eastern and Western literature has been merged is, of great standard. To briefly spotlight the portrayal of Nehru as a favourite of Gandhi, T.N. Dhar points out the following:

The narrative suggests that Nehru gained influence in the party hierarchy and succeeded in controlling the reins of power in post-independence India, because of the blessings of Gandhi. This is suggestively reinforced by Bhishma’s continuance in the court of Dhritarashtra, even after he knew of the falsity of the Kauravas.21
This interpretation also puts Gandhi somewhat in the dock, showing his lack of foresight – viewing Nehru as the apple of his eye. This comes up when Gangaji (Gandhi) states that only Dhritarashtra can lead the nation after British rule because “he is blind but he sees far” (p.121). It is a literary poke at the autocratic manner in which the first Prime Minister was decided, allowing Nehru to gain undue influence and subsequent control – the later negative fallout being the succession of autocrat Indira Gandhi. However, Dhar does laud the fact of Indian resistance being guided by Gandhi. So, it is inescapable that he implanted the seeds of genuine nationalism with the mass base providing the “concept of nationalism ... a new orientation” for which he employed “a great deal of drama and theatricality” to his campaigns, which has been used to great comic effect [by Tharoor], to give “the movement much publicity in and outside India”. (p.221) – a reference to the comic Mango March, paralleling the Dandi March of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The historical leader’s astuteness and foresight is, therefore, shown in the harnessing of the previously largely inaccessible fourth estate worldwide – till then the Indian freedom struggle being mostly ignored by it, especially the colonial and western press.

As a symbol of the hybridized nature of Indian democracy, Tharoor paints Draupadi effectively in changing health – rarely the best, often bad, directly affected by the tumultuous political events and personalities. Draupadi falls violently ill when Priya Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi) assumes unchallenged power – symbolising the nation’s ills. Democracy is under a state of continuous socio-economic rape and plunder. However, all politicians fail to realize – Dhritarashtra, Priya Duryodhani and Yudhishtir – that time is the great leveller of all, sparing
neither pawn nor king. Relevant to this is “Gerontion”: “History has many cunning passages, Contrived Corridors/ And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,/ Guides us by vanities.” This truth has universality and will continue to echo down the ages.

Indian democracy has historically been under assault due to the postcolonial outlook and general ingrained psyche – an inherited legacy. It began with the “foreign elite”, though racially brown, who continue to function like the colonials. The irony of such a situation is that the natives look up to them as demigods rather than the demagogues that they actually are. The wall of the farce of Indian democracy is at first cracked and later broken by Tharoor’s commentary fists – especially true in the postcolonial politician’s “concern” for the poor, rather naively soothed by empty socialist platitudes not genuine ideals as shown by Priya Duryodhani’s massive triumphant return to power after the Indo-Karnistani (Indo-Pak) war of 1971.

Draupadi is a typical chaste Indian wife but yet has five husbands. This can be seen, in two lights, the first being that of Western promiscuity and India as the birthplace of The Kamasutra and also that of the spirit of the true female Hindu character. But symbolically it is representative of India’s secular character – a moot point extensively debated at all levels of society. Though Tharoor does not extensively directly comment on India’s “secularity” – it is of tertiary importance with respect to historiography, secondary, in historicity and primary in the novel’s contextual framework.

Tharoor seemingly implies that Indian democracy is more than hybridized; it is in fact “bastardized” due to western influence. This is because its symbol, if
inference is to be drawn, comes about as the result of an affair between Dhritarashtra and Lady Drewpad. This speaks volumes of his conditioned colonial outlook and psyche. Therefore, as a character of the genre of postcolonialism in its portrayal of the brainwashing aspect, his foreign education is of special significance. Postcolonial writers thus view the alien model of education in a not too favourable light.

Education becomes a technology of colonialist subjectification in two other important and intrinsically interwoven ways. It establishes the locally English or British as normative through critical claims to 'universality' of the values embodied in English literary texts, and it represents the colonised to themselves as inherently inferior beings – 'wild' 'barbarous' 'uncivilized'.

This, of course, perpetuates the political power base of the powers that be.

Equally relevant is Ellek Boehmer:

The colonized made up the subordinate term in relation to which European individuality was defined. Always with reference to the superiority of an expanding Europe, colonized people were represented as less; less human, less civilized, as child or savage, wild man, animal, or headless mass.

With respect to the still in some circles immortalized Macaulay, his views on Indian education still echo and resound from the depths of the past till date – as reflected in the overall educational setup in general and the reverence given to and pride of place granted to ivy league alien model educational institutions – ring true insofar as the ground reality is concerned. They are as follows:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class

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of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.\textsuperscript{25}

This is a vivid example of colonialism's enslavement process, a process which still continues in more insidious form – though disguised and layered and papered over in the more recent political ideology and practice of neocolonialism with its operative mechanism – with an inbuilt twofold definition of “humanity” for serfdom, economic exploitation through spreading consumerism of Western and Western style goods and services. Contained within such exploitation is racial arrogance to the utmost degree, naturally favouring the haves. Linda Tuhiwai Smith accurately paints colonial racist influence:

The principle of ‘humanity’ was one way in which the implicit or hidden rules could be shaped. To consider indigenous peoples as not fully human, or not human at all, enabled distance to be maintained and justified various policies of either extermination or domestication. Some indigenous peoples (‘not human’), were hunted and killed vermin, others (‘partially human’), were rounded up… in reserves like creatures to be broken in, branded and put to work.\textsuperscript{26}

Such an attitude typifies and exemplifies colonialism and its legacy of postcolonialism wherein the ruler is a virtual czar and the ruled are actual serfs. So, such “humanity” is actually inhumanely brutal, barbarous and exploitative. The nefarious intent of such critical philosophy, highly callous and sterile, is epitomized by Charles Grant: “We are recalled to imitate the Roman Conqueror, who civilized and improved the nations whom they subdued … and of extending a superior light, further that the Roman eagle ever flew.”\textsuperscript{27}
The novel is a commentary on the prevalent state of fatalism of the masses for the most part at least in the sense of this being vestigial. In this light T.N. Dhar observes:

Tharoor makes us believe that the Indian people in general have perfected the art of the living with whatever they get, strengthening their vestiges of fatalism. He visualizes a bleak future for the country. This partially explains why people have become obsessive about their past. For some it is a source of power; for others, a comfortable retreat.28

The birth of Indian democracy is significant in Tharoor's allegorical design. Of course, the novelist does trivialize history and myth, deflating towering figures — at least as per popular perception but this is all done in a jocular vein for the purpose of parody. Tharoor’s historical-cum-mythic equations or correspondences are thus suggestive and implied, recast in the sweeping locale of both The Mahabharata and history, moulding thereby mythic historiography. At certain points Tharoor’s analysis seems regressive but this is deliberately done to emphasize the ironic parody of the political parade — deftly caricatured, wherein myth and history cohere in a mishmash mould with a distinctive impression. Tharoor does not take a faithful, civilizational view of history and myth — with reference to historicity — but departs quite freely from both to recast his own hilariously irreverent, heretical view, with sarcastic insight, commenting on diverse subjects ranging from prudery and promiscuity to political parties and rulers. Still, there is one major divergent difference of myth: Kunti’s ability to lecture on politics and the ancient treatises, unlike in The Mahabharata — a simultaneously superficial and substantive difference. Another important
point of divergence from history and myth is V.V.'s dream re-appearance of Karna after death: the real Jinnah never visited India. Another major departure is the attitude of Tharoor's Ekalavya, firmly refusing to give Guru Dakshina to Drona. This instance of refusal, unlike the epic, shows strikingly and interestingly that the Guru is no longer paramount – a sign of the changed era.

Insofar as Gandhi's towering stature, Tharoor's portrayal of him (Gangaji) echoes The Gita thus: "If a man raises himself by his own self, let him not debase himself. For he is himself his friend, he himself his foe." These words assume particular significance in the reverse Whitmanesque sense that he who degrades himself degrades another.

Now to focus on and briefly emphasize The Great Indian Novel's postmodernism and postcolonialism as a genre. It is both postmodernist and postcolonialist – the two inseparable. Considering that it was published in 1989, the novelist manages to effect a major break from the pre-Independence postmodern native writers and also the post-Independence native writers.

The novelist covers and analyses the various issues of colonial and postcolonial slavery, suppression, resistance, based on differences of race, ethnicity, and the overall postcolonial psyche of the rulers – a mere perpetuation of the colonials. He merges history and philosophy and myth in a highly parodic mode – full of satire, sarcasm and the frequent puns. The Great Indian Novel is a counternarrative in which the empire is besieged by the novelist's humorous acidic pen in its indictment of both the British and their "free" postcolonial successors. In the overall context M.K. Naik lauds Shashi Tharoor "for ...
creative use of myth," adding, the work is "easily one of the most outstanding novels of the period."\textsuperscript{30}

Tharoor rejects Western cultural imperialism. He repudiates thus the Eurocentric view of political and cultural imperialism. The counternarrative questions mockingly the very basis of Independence, considering its condition on the ground. It strikes back first at the empire and subsequently against its perpetuation by the inheritors of the colonial legacy.

Tharoor questions the fatalism of the Indian psyche, it showing signs of mass erosion when Priya Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi) is dislodged from power at the first instance. But fatalism in the context of the ground reality of Indian politics – with respect to the disempowered masses – again resurfaces when Priya Duryodhani recaptures power. In this light T.N. Dhar comments relevantly:

[The novel's] thrust is ... disillusionment with the country's declining political culture and... institutional structures, such as the press, bureaucracy, and party system [which] have not done much in promoting any meaningful change in the country. [He visualizes a bleak future for the country].\textsuperscript{31}

But Tharoor does not submit to the fatalistic state of affairs – due, possibly, to his being removed in time from Independence, enabling a wider panoramic vista – a regurgitation of disgust with the political stage and its inherently exploitative mechanisms. Besides, his firsthand journalism makes for cultural empowerment instead of cultural marginalisation – incomprehensible after discarding the foreign yoke for so long. He is thus a liberated novelist. In this light a comment of D. Maya is very apt: "A pronounced trend emerging in the liberated novelists is a tendency to strike back at the empire, refuting the ideology
of containment with an ideology of liberation". The empire indicted is also the post-Independence one – questioning the very basis of Indian democracy. Herein it would be relevant to quote the text:

An India where a Priya Duryodhani can be re-elected because seven hundred million people cannot produce anyone better, and where her immortality can be guaranteed by her greatest failure – 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. (p.412)

So, his cynicism at the end is more distanced and muted in the spirit of an objective journalist: Tharoor’s postcolonialism is rather mature in its creative experimentation of style and form. However, at times he seems rather too anti-Congress. But it must be conceded that he does not spare the Janata Party either.

Now to briefly highlight a few important points of the text – previously unmentioned - as their significance to the narrative and the narrative’s ending is crucial. This is in the re-rendering of The Mahabharata in dream form, the dreamer being Ved Vyasa in a highly somnolent state of consciousness – where myth, reality and fiction merge to the point of almost indecipherable indistinctness. During the surreal ascent to heaven – the abode of the righteous – Krishna collapses in agony, unable to go on. His imminent death is certain. Almost immediately afterwards Draupadi collapses. During the interim, V.V. hears a mountain-top voice-echo in a somnolent state, which blames Krishna for not choosing to enter the macro-political world, thereby allowing India’s ruin: "His brilliance burned itself out without illuminating the country. He cannot reach
the top" (p.414). The two incidents and characters are linked to the writer's
cynicism. They symbolise the final death of Indian democracy, shorn of its
protector. The finality reeks of the writer's existential angst. The second crucial
instance is when after the sole survivor of the Pandava's during the ascent passes
Dharma's test, as in the actual epic, to enter heaven by refusing to enter without
his loyal cur – who then manifests itself in refulgent glory as Dharma. But Priya
Duryodhani is seated on the royal throne – inducing shock, making him choose to
go to the imagined hell of his brothers and faithful wife. Their agony makes him
explode and he decides: “I shall stay with them and share their unmerited
suffering…”(p.417) upon which the atmosphere becomes heavenly. But, besides
his brothers and wife, the mass of Drewpad, Sir Richard, Shikhandin, the
Karnistanis and the Kauravas, and others of like ilk assail him. Dharma states that
these are all illusions. Yudhishtir wonders to what end. He repudiates Dharma’s
answer as Dharma’s eternal importance being meaningless if it makes no
difference to the sufferers. The conversation takes a marked departure with
Yudhishtir’s strident questions. Dharma vents controlled, unleashed rage, calling
Yudhishtir’s answer “sacrilege” (p.417) – “Upholding” Dharma. Yudhishtir
declares India eternal instead and Dharma, thus, mutable. He comments on his
ideals in life as irrelevant and further states that India lacks vital answers.
Dharma reanimates himself into the shape of the dog, thus being reduced
parodically to an ineffectual and powerless deity, Yudhishtir’s too-late discovered
empirical code of conduct as the only relevant basis of timing. He booms, “reject
equally the sterility of ideologies and the passionate prescription of those who
think themselves infallible”, (p.418) but yet urges that decency must be upheld,
and humanity worshipped, stressing multiplicity of “Truth” and “Right” – “Dharma” in its real mutable essence. Ved Vyasa’s dream ends to the echo of vain and frantic barking – in modern India with its “computers and corruption, of myths and politicians and box-wallahs with moulded plastic briefcases. To an India beset with uncertainties, muddling chaotically through to the twenty-first century” (p.418). But narrator Ved Vyasa tells dumb struck Ganapathi that the story still continues, the dismay on the secretary’s face notwithstanding re-begins the narrative with “They tell me India is an underdeveloped county…” (p.418). In this light Ved Vyasa’s earlier reference to life’s “banalities” in major and minor form – from chores to love – to child bearing and the other “mundanities” are always “sought to be concealed by the great lie, ‘they lived happily ever after’.” (p.163) So, he further underlines that the story continues even after finality of death – there being no final finality. As such at the end, already paraphrased and quoted, is the hint echoed that the story of India’s democracy will go on because “Today’s end is, after all, only tomorrow’s beginning.” (p.163).

So, we can see that Tharoor’s parodic sweep leaves the “newly-wrought epic” (The Great Indian Novel) open-ended – affirming hope, despite the dismal state of affairs, if the individual empowers himself, thereby empowering subgroups and groups and ultimately the nation. Dare we wonder?
References:


8. Ibid.


17. Ibid, p.222.


32. D. Maya, Narrating Colonialism Narrating Colonialism: Post-Colonial
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