CHAPTER FOUR

RIOT: A NOVEL
India has always been a multi-racial, multi-caste and multi-lingual country. Massive and awful differences have been penetrated of the people under the appearance of caste and religion. The problem of socialism being partly religious, cultural and political has proved to be a great social hazard resulting in fire of regional tensions and hate campaigns. Analytically speaking, the problem of communalism is, in reality, an emotional problem. Indian English novels on a large scale, deal with our national problems. These problems have received an intricate treatment by Indian English writers. It is one of the dominant thematic and Indo-nostalgic concerns of Indian English fiction. Now, Indian English literature exists, a new genre called partition fiction, highlightening the communalism of the Hindus and the Muslims. In Indian novels, like Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, communal violence finds an agonising description. Basically, communalism is a reality which we are forced to face but which we wish to forget. It is a bi-cultural conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims resulting in a horrific contemporary history and culture. One of the grand functions of Indian English writers is to portray and reflect this social disease. In this accord, Jha Mohan (1981:117) comments:

...communalism is the very negation of the valued principles of tolerance, accommodation and cooperation; by its very nature it is a kind of political and religio-cultural reaction that weakens the existing social order and thought at times it may be looked upon as a movement, it is, in fact, neither revolution nor reconstruction.

If we try to discover the genesis of the novel, it is a major setback, which suffered India on 6th December 1992, when the Babri Masque was demolished by the Hindu fundamentalists. It was a black day in Indian history. The event threatened the integrity of the nation on the grounds of communalism between the Hindus and the Muslims. It violated the guiding principles of Indian constitution. A host of Hindu fundamentalists became dictators. The self-appointed custodians told Indians that the land of India, that is, Hindustan belonged to only Hindus; Muslims and Christians were considered to be non-Indians. They had no right in Hindustan. These activists converted India into Bharat and took the nation into the dark age of Indo-nostalgic communalism. The massacre and the genocide that
followed the sensitive event, is captured by Shashi Tharoor (Interview: 2001) in the light of Indo-nostalgia, in his novel *Riot: A Novel*.

...it is based in part on a real story, but not the stains murder. I had become increasingly concerned with the communal issues bedeviling our national politics and society in the 1990's... As a novelist, though; I sought an interesting way to explore the issue in fiction. Years ago, my old college friend Harsh Mander, an IAS officer sent me an account he had written of a riot he dealt with as a District Magistrate in Madya Pradesh. I was very moved by the piece and urged him to publish it... But his story also sparked me thinking of a riot as a vehicle for a novel about communal hatred since I have never managed a riot myself. I asked Harsh for permission to use the story of his riot in my narrative, a request to which he graciously consented at about the same time; I read a newspaper account of a young white American girl, Amy Behal, who had been killed by a black mob in violent disturbances in South Africa. The two images stayed and merged in my mind and *Riot* was borne.

Shashi Tharoor has proved his formidable intellectual expertise and creative insight in his third novel *Riot: A Novel*, to make a fictional operation of Indo-nostalgia. It is a story of ignited passions and communal violence between the Hindus and the Muslims, leading to the destruction of Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1992 on the allegedly sacred ground of Ramjanmabhoomi at Ayodhya in India. In this novel, Tharoor reinterprets and represents the heritage of history as a reference frame for the present. Being widely acknowledged as an experimental novelist, Tharoor experiments with the narrative form, chronicling the mystery of an American girl’s murder in India. Though the novel is about the ownership of history, it is emotionally charged and intellectually provocative. It is about love, hate, cultural collision, identity, ideology and the impossibility of knowing the truth in the madness of religious and cultural nostalgia. It is set against the religious background of tensions in India, when Hindus and Muslims clashed in bloody riots over Ram Shila Poojan, the object of controversy being a four hundred year old mosque.

The novel was published in 2001, when Indian writing in English was gaining numerous considerations and the pan-Indian concept of ‘Hindutva’ was struggling to repossess its identity. The struggle for reclaiming senseless identity inflamed communal riots all over the country and resulted into senseless killing.
Amidst this highly explosive and aggressive spectrum of the contemporary period, Tharoor ventured to publish a novel with a controversial issue. The novel was published with two different covers and editions, one published in America and the other in India. The Indian edition has a touching cover page with a picture of riot, representing the scene of ‘Riot’- with flames and smoke from an overturned cart (Tharoor, *The Hindu* 1) and the other one with the picture of Taj Mahal; the former was for India while the latter was for western countries, bearing the subtitles as *Riot: A Novel* and *Riot: A Love Story* respectively. Commenting on the title of the novel Tharoor (Interview: 2005) says:

> I use the word “Riot” for the novel because it’s stark, its one word, it’s clear and simple. The riots, tragically, have been a phenomenon of our independent history for some time, and communal riots, that is, “riots between two religiously defined communities” have been a particular political problem in contemporary India.

The background of the Taj evokes image of the Mughal empiric rule in India; while the cover page with an actual riot serves the readers to the negation of hatred. Moreover, the two different editions reflect the two faces of India- one defined by the harsh contempt and the other by gentle love. The stories representing the two different strands are drawn towards the final blaze, when the communal riot rocks Zalilgarh, in Uttar Pradesh coincides with the murder of the American girl who is the protagonist in the covert love story traced in the novel.

The historical consciousness of the partition of India on the basis of religion and the teleology of Hindu nationalism has framed the modern discourse of Hindu-Muslim communalism and violence in India. A few gifted writers of Indian English literature have handled the rise of Hindu militancy in their fiction but Shashi Tharoor in *Riot* situates the undoing of an innocent American in the present context of Hindutva politics. The novel is about the potential fragmentation of the secular Indian populace, making it a worth reading and nostalgic tragedy.

On his regular visits to India; his homeland, Tharoor confesses that the only thing that disturbs him mostly is the ‘Rising intolerance in India.’ (Interview: 2005) He wrote extensively about communal issues in the newspaper columns and his many books. As a novelist, he sought an exciting way to discover the issue in his fiction. He traces the genesis of the novel *Riot* to the Sikh riots followed by 1989
Hindu-Muslim riots. Many basic facts about the management of the riots are based on the actual account of the Khargone riot in central India. Elaborating on the backdrop of the novel, Tharoor (Interview: 2005) avers:

In the *Riot*, in my novel, the trouble starts when this agitation is beginning. There was no foreigner killed in the riot, and the American girl is entirely fictional as are all the relationships and characters in my novel. But the bare bones of the riot are based on the real fact.

The specific point in history that Shashi Tharoor has chosen for his Indo-nostalgic purpose is the riot that reverberated in Uttar Pradesh in 1989 in the context of the Babri Masjid / Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. His intension was to revive this largely forgotten year in Indian history. Thematically, the book calls up images of the past through Indo-nostalgic technique and informs how it is responsible for many of the communal flare-ups that define the contemporary Indian time-space. With this deft blending of fact and fiction, Tharoor sets up a montage work, to enable readers to get the entire scenario into perspective. He selects bits from history and present day communal consciousness and weaves them together with bits from his productive imagination to create a quilt that is, 'intellectually and emotionally charged' (*Book Jacket Review*) with Indo-nostalgia. However, *Riot* is a brilliant experiment in narrative form. Using the framework of investigating the mysterious death of Priscilla Hart, an American social worker, during the riots, Tharoor uses the matrix of his novel to enable multiple voices to interact and in the dialogic process that evolves and takes hold of the text, the readers themselves are drawn towards an understanding of the real issues at stake and the politics behind the communal violence and hatred in this land. Tharoor privileges many factions on the variegated communities to express their views and even the most fanatic ones are allowed a space to express their nostalgic grievances.

The novel begins with a series of newspaper reports in the *New York Journal*. The first one from Delhi dated Monday, October 2, 1989, reports the death of Priscilla Hart, an American volunteer, who is in Zalilgarh, a small district in Uttar Pradesh, working with the non-governmental association HELP-US. She is beaten and stabbed to death reporting an obscure cause for her death. The story is set in recent troubled times of communal tensions in India. The author adopts a
mixed narrative mode, to tell the story. Tharoor (*The Hindu, 2*) remarks about the plot of the novel:

The plot of the *Riot* unfolded through newspaper clippings, diary entries, interviews, transcripts, journals, scrapbooks, even poems written by characters—in other words using different voices, different stylistic forms for different fragments of the story.

At one level, *Riot* is about the explosion of communal violence between the Hindus and the Muslims, but at another level, the novel is about an Indo-American encounter. Priscilla Hart, the heroine of the novel, is an American. As far as the choice of American characters in his novel is concerned, Tharoor (*The Hindu, 2*) says:

My fiction sometimes appeals in different ways to Americans and to Indians, but the whole point about literature, surely, is that while it rests on specificities of time and place, it must appeal to readers beyond those specifics.

Priscilla has come to India as a doctorate fellow to investigate India and to create awareness among the people of the country about population control. She comes to India when the country is hypersensitive under the pan-national disease of communalism. Amidst these hypersensitive conditions, there develops a love story of Priscilla and Lakshman, the district collector of Zalilgarh. Their love story extends against the backdrop of the Ram Shila Poojan campaigning and ends with Priscilla’s unresolved murder mystery. The novel centers around the character revealing the various problems, India is confronting with. Every character in the novel stands as a dogma expressing its views to expose Indo-nostalgia.

India as a nation comes alive in the novel through Priscilla, Rudyard Hart Priscilla’s father, Randolph Diggs, the New York Journal reporter. The entire Americans have different intentions behind visiting India. Tharoor has taken a synoptic view of the social conditions in India through Priscilla Hart. The character of Rudyard Hart, the senior Marketing Executive with Coca-Cola, who has been in India in the late seventies, explores an industrial facet of India in those days while the character of Diggs investigates the religious and political side of India. The character of Ram Charan Gupta articulates Hindu ideology whereas Professor Mohammed Sarwar explores the Muslim ideology. The District Magistrate V. Lakshman and the superintendent of police, Gurinder Singh assert
bureaucratic limitations owing to the political interruption. Gurinder Singh reminds us of the organised orgy of slaughter, fire-raising and looting of the Sikh community after the death of Indira Gandhi. Tharoor (Behal, Interview: 2001) admits:

...in *Riot* what happens of course is the ultimate collision of violence. But violence which involves both people saying this is who we are and this we are not. This is what we hate about you and this is why were going to do this to you. And at the same time at a visceral level, people defining who they are and how they are not and also what they are prepared to live and die for. And it seemed to me that this series of collisions could best be presented through different perspectives and voices from as wider range of experiences as possible.

Tharoor’s characters are Indo-nostalgic caricatures which stand for particular points of view. The radical Hindu, the fundamentalist Muslim, the American and the secular administrators, all these characters explore the past of India to put forth its consequences during the contemporary period. It is through these characters, Tharoor makes every aspect of India alive through Indo-nostalgic rendering. However, Tharoor has used major non-Indian characters, which are bound to influence the way the book is recognised both in U. S. and India. Tharoor (Interview: 2001) explores his genuine intention behind creating non-Indian characters in the fiction:

...because very often we define ourselves in relation to others.

India was witnessing the growing communalism in politics and also its consequences when the novel was published. Moreover, the novel is deeply concerned about the increasing split between the Hindus and the Muslims. Tharoor cuts out a pitiable figure of the motherland with his master device of Indo-nostalgia, experiencing the struggle of reclaiming a national identity when the world was heading towards the globalisation. The sad plight of illiterate women in India is flashed across the mind through the eyes of Priscilla and her mother Katherine. The story of a white woman falling in love with India and an Indian is masterly handled to expose the old tradition from *Passage to India* to *Heat and Dust* and many master-pieces in Indian writing in English. When Tharoor was
asked about the pitfalls that, he avoided and the influences; which he used for his
depictions. Tharoor (tharoor.in) replied:

…I know this will strain credulity, but I actually did not think
much about it. Of course, I was aware that Priscilla Hart
might be seen as one more in the long line from Adela
Quested through Daphne Manners and on, but I was writing
about a different period, the colonial connection was absent
and there was no rape metaphor in my novel. I am on record
as asking, with reference to those earlier novels, why, if rape
had to be a literary metaphor for the colonial connection, a
British woman had to be the victim of it rather than an Indian.
My novel is not about a torrid East-West encounter in a
colonial setting; it’s about today’s people in our increasingly
globalizing world, where collision and confluence seamlessly
cross national and ethnic boundaries.

Shashi Tharoor has used two distinct voices to prove Indo-nostalgia and
how history can inflame communal passions and how it can also alleviate
communal hatred. An analysis of Ram Charan Gupta’s views as recorded in
Randy Digg’s notebook would reveal how hard-core, unscrupulous ideological
positions could harm Indian society by flaming up sectarian passion among the
unsuspecting believers of a creed. Since, he is a scheming man, with eyes on the
vote bank, has no doubt in presenting an imagined version of history that posits
Hindus of India as a wronged people. For him, September 15, 1989 was a unique
day - a day when the Hindutva forces launched the ‘Ram Shila Poojan
Programme’. On the sanctified day, bricks inscribed ‘Ram’ were consecrated at
the local shrine, to be transported to Ayodhya to rebuild the Ramjanmabhoomi
temple, which was allegedly destroyed by Babar to erect his own huge Mosque.
His inflammatory allegations provoking Indo-nostalgia are:

In Ayodhya there are many temples to Ram. But the most
famous temple is not really a temple any more...it is the
Ramjanmabhoomi, the birthplace of Ram...but if you go to
the Ayodhya, you will see no Ramjanmabhoomi temple there.
In olden days a great temple stood there. A magnificent
temple...but a Muslim king, the Mughal emperor, Babar, not
an Indian, a foreigner from Asia, he knocked it down. And in
its place, he built a big Mosque which was named the Babri
Masjid....naturally; our community was very much hurt by
this...for hundreds of years we suffered under Muslim yoke,
then the British came and things were no better. We thought
then that after independence, everything would change. Most
of the Muslims in Ayodhya left to go to Pakistan. The
Mosque was no longer much needed as a mosque. Then the
miracle occurred. Some devotees found that an idol of Ram
had emerged spontaneously in the courtyard of the mosque. It
was a clear sign from God. His temple has to be rebuilt on the
sacred spot. (pp. 52-53)

But Indian government dismissed all his statements as illogical and refused
to grant permission for the temple. The temple was locked so that neither the
Muslims nor the Hindus could worship there. Ram Charan Gupta and other Hindu
fundamentalists condemned the government’s stand and its injustice. Ram Charan
Gupta and his party leaders said against this stand of government:

We have had enough. It is the people’s wish that the
birthplace of Ram must be suitably honoured. We will rebuild
the temple. (p. 53)

In response to their commitment of rebuilding the temple, bricks from
every village were brought to be taken to Ayodhya. He also spoke of the
excitement of young men and women making flag, placards and posters, and
preparing ‘pennants in holy saffron’ on the eve of the great procession to
Ayodhya, he inter-mingled his narration with volley of abuses against the
Muslims. He tells Diggs:

You have to understand their mentality. They are more loyal
to a foreign religion Islam than to India. They are all converts
from the Hindu faith of their ancestors, but they refuse to
acknowledge this, pretending instead that they are all
descended from conquerors from Arabia and Persia or
Samarkand. Fine- if that is so, let them go back to those
places! Why do they stay here if they will not assimilate into
our country? They stay together, work together, pray together.
It is what you American, I know, call a ghetto mentality.
(pp. 54-55)

These testimonies made against the Muslims by Ram Charan Gupta are the
marks of intense communalism growing in the minds of the Hindus over the pan-
Indian concept of nationalism. Another injustice that he points out has been done
to Hindus is that, they divided India to create the ‘Accused Pakistan.’ He has a
deadly regret that some of the greatest sites of the Hindu civilisation – “the ancient
sites of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, the world’s oldest university of Takshashila,
even the river Indus from which India gets its name...are all now in a foreign
country.” (p.55) His words and its aftermath has incited Indo-nostalgia and kept communal passions aflame.

R. C. Gupta’s shower of cruelty does not spare even the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. He condemns Nehru as ‘a Muslim loving brown Englishman’ who allows them to follow their own personal laws which privileges a Muslim to have four wives at a time. Again a striking facility is granted that, Muslims are paid for by the government to visit Mecca. He wonders why the tax paid by Hindus should go to helping Muslims get closer to a foreign God. (p.55) Moreover, the worst is that, a Muslim with four wives each is “out-breeding Hindus.” He is angry about the decision taken by Indira Gandhi during emergency. “She drove young Hindu men for compulsory vasectomy, while Muslims resisted even family planning as it was against their religion.” (p.55) What is most threatening under these circumstances is that, Muslims would soon outnumber Hindus in India. So his party’s agenda is to defeat secularists who have insulted Hindus and he adds most raucously that until they raise ‘the forces of Hindutva to power’ they would never be able to teach these Muslims a lesson. (p.57) Besides, he makes Diggs to know about Sadhvi Rithambhara, another woman preacher of Hindutva foyer, making a trenchant Indo-nostalgic consolidation:

Muslims are like a lemon squirted into the cream of India. They turn it sour. We have to remove the lemon, cut it up into pieces, squeeze out the pips and throw them away. (p.57)

Hindu nationalism or Hindutva is an ideology that endeavours to create a distinct Hindu identity among all Hindu irrespective of their internal social, cultural and regional distinctions. Drawing inference from Savarkar’s vision of India in a civilisational form, the proponents of Hindutva mobilise Hindus by invoking the commonness of ethnicity, race, religion, territory, history and culture that overrides all other differences. The search for an integrated Hindu identity results in the assertion of cultural and spiritual superiority of Hinduism in a highly politicised context. Echoing the Hindutva ideology in an Indo-nostalgic sense, R. C. Gupta says:

The non Hindu people in Hindustan...must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation, claiming, deserving no privileges, much
less any preferential treatment - not even citizen’s rights. (pp. 123-124)

Tharoor’s second dominant voice to reveal Indo-nostalgia is Professor Mohammed Sarwar. He is a liberal historian. He is in Zalilgarh as a part of his research programme on the life of Syed Salar Mausd Ghasi popularly known as Ghazi Miyan, who was a highly revered Muslim warrior - a saint in Zalilgarh, loved and worshipped by both the communities. His conversation with Lakshman, the District Magistrate of Zalilgarh, instructs how history can be used to alleviate communal passions. He revives Muslims of the past, who served the Indian community selflessly. In his opinion, such historical researches could contribute greatly to easing off sectarian ideas among the Hindus. He reminds and revives Lakshman some notable Muslim figures worshipped even by the Hindus, such as Nizamuddin Auliya, Moinuddin Chisti, Shah Madar, Shaik Nasiruddin and Mohammed Iqbal who wrote the patriotic song ‘Sare jahan se acha Hindustan hamara-better than all the world is our India.’ (p.67) The Professor does not represent Muslim ideology but he believes that historians with a secular view have a duty to retrieve historical figures, especially Muslims from stupor to create Hindu-Muslim unity.

The greatest strength of *Riot* is that, it presents an authentic Indo-nostalgic picture of various forces that are scrambling for supremacy in India, the forces of secularism, tolerance and compassion on the one hand and the forces of communalism, fundamentalism and fanaticism on the other. The depiction of the Hindutva movement could not find a fairer and more accurate portrayal than in the voice of Ram Charan Gupta, the firebrand Hindu chauvinist who feels that the Taj Mahal, the mausoleum of the Mughal emperor and his wife, is a Hindu temple. In the novel, Professor Sarwar, modeled on the actual historian Shahid Amin of Delhi University, expresses views of secular Muslims in India. Denying any attempt to balance the Hindu-Muslim debate, Tharoor (Chowdhury: 2001) says:

Sarwar is a Muslim believer in India’s pluralism but he is by no means typical of, or meant to be, “representative” of, majority Muslim opinion. He’s an ex-communist, a historian and a newly rediscovered faith in his own religion. This mistake is in seeing him as a sort of mirror image of Gupta, who’s a straightforward Hindutva politician of whose personal life we hear little. Merely because one is Hindu and
the other is Muslim doesn’t mean we must juxtapose and compose them that way.

Some striking pages from the transcript of Randy Diggs’s interview with Professor Mohammed Sarwar disclose that, Maulana Azad was also a secular Muslim who believed in an united India and opposed her division on communal grounds whereas Mohammed Ali Jinah was Oxbridge educated and who enjoyed Scotch and Pork and who barely spoke Urdu and married a non-Muslim girl, had solicited a separate nation for Muslims. He asserts that Maulana was a more authentic representative for Indian Islam than Jinah was. He dismisses talk of partition arguing that Muslims were entitled to the whole of India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, just as the Hindus were. If we analyse the two farthest poles of India we come to know that, ‘Kashmir’ is a Muslim name whereas ‘Kanyakumari’ is the Hindu name, both uniting the land of India, provoking Indo-nostalgia, with their same share of culture and ethnicity. Sarwar further adds that, Moulana Azad did not accept the Pakistani idea of “a narrower notion of Muslim nationhood that confined Indian Muslims to a truncated share of the heritage of their entire land.” (pp.108-109) Professor Sarwar emphasises that Muslims of India are as patriotic as their Hindu brothers:

You can understand why some Indian Muslims are more viscerally anti-Pakistan than many Hindus, especially North Indian Hindus with their romanticized nostalgia for the good old days before partition. (p.109)

Moreover, Professor Sarwar gives an example of Mohammed Currin Chagla, who was India’s foreign minister during the 1965 war with Pakistan, made a speech in the parliament during the Bangladesh war of 1971. His regretting Indo-nostalgic remark is:

Pakistan was conceived in sin and is dying in violence. (p.109)

Tharoor’s Professor Sarwar is an Indian Muslim with intense passion of Indian nationality. He loves India intensely and ready to sacrifice for her. Some words from the scrapbook of Randy Diggs, in an interview, show his intense Indo-nostalgic gratitude to his country:
...I love this country. I love it not just because I was born here, as my father and mother were, as their parents before them were, not just because their graves have mingled their bones into the soil of this land. I love it because I know it, I have studied its history, I have traveled its geography, I have breathed its polluted air, I have written words to its music. India shaped me, my mind, my tastes, my friendships, my passions. (p.112)

Further he adds suggesting his Indo-nostalgia:

I take my children to the latest Bollywood blockbuster and laugh as the Muslim hero chases the Hindu heroine around the tinsel tree. I avidly follow test cricket and cheer for my hero, perhaps the best batsman in the world, Mohammed Azharuddin and I cheer for him because he is on my team, the Indian team, and not because he is Muslim...I cannot tell you how much it meant to me when he scored a century for India against Pakistan, in Pakistan. One day he will captain India Mr. Diggs, and he will make every Indian proud because no one will notice, despite his name, that he is Muslim. (p.113)

After his principal Indo-nostalgic voices, the Hindu R. C. Gupta and the Muslim Professor Sarwar, Shashi Tharoor uses Lakshman's conversation with Priscilla Hart, to speak out his mind on communalism. Lakshman wonders why Hinduism, an essentially liberal faith should want to defile a Muslim shrine to authorise itself. He wonders why Muslims are being assaulted for something that happened over four hundred and fifty years ago. He rightly remarks:

Politicians of all faith across India seek to mobilize voters by appealing to narrow identities. By seeking votes in the name of religion, caste, and region, they have urged voters to define themselves on these lines. (p.145)

According to Tharoor, a hegemonic discourse of Hindu-Muslim communalism exists in India, which has corrupted not only history but also penetrated nostalgic memory, contributing to the production and perpetuation of communal violence in the country. In the course of struggle for power, during British rule, this intensified and culminated in the division of India in 1947 on the basis of religion. A discourse of Hindu-Muslim difference was created that has struck deep roots in both communities and acquired a partly self-sustaining momentum that at the same time continues to be fed by political competition. Lakshman, while explaining Priscilla, his nostalgic sensitivity for India, says:
Why should today’s Muslims have to pay a price for what Muslims may have done four hundred and fifty years ago? It’s just politics, Priscilla. The twentieth-century politics of deprivation has eroded the culture’s confidence. Hindu chauvinism has emerged from the competition for resources in a contentious democracy. (p.145)

Thus, the primary cause of communal riots in India is the pursuit of political advantage. Despite the contrary attempts of secular nationalist leaders and historians, a divisive history of India has acquired a hegemonic place in the school textbooks and in the national mythology, which defines the millennium-long arrival of both the religion of Islam and Muslim arms into the subcontinent as a foreign Muslim conquest. In this regard, Chatterjee (1993:74) comments:

...despite the fact that probably ninety-five per cent of the Muslim population of the subcontinent is indigenous and descendants of converts to Islam, Islam is considered in the history of the Indian nation as a foreign element.

Lakshman exposing Indo-nostalgia tells Priscilla that the Hindus could be right. There could have been a temple there at Ayodhya over which Babar built a mosque. But, it is rather uncivil for Hindus, of the present enlightened age to repeat what the Muslims of the sixteenth century did in a fit of ignorance and fanaticism. Such narrow mindedness could only provoke violence and tarnish the image of Hindus across the world. He feels that, Hindus need to uphold the dignity of their religion by validating what Swami Vivekananda proclaimed at the World Parliament of religions at Chicago, quoting an ancient Indo-nostalgic and Hindu hymn:

As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different oaths which men take...all lead to thee. (p.146)

In order to devise the need for open-mindedness and collective harmony, Shashi Tharoor introduces another voice that links readers to another facet of India’s troubled history. In one of the many interactions between Gurinder Singh, the superintendent of police and Randy Diggs, he narrates the story why he continued to be a cop. It is the story of another riot in India during Indira Gandhi’s emergency period. He remembers with unveiled poignancy the storming of golden temple, a place sacred to the Sikhs to flush out terrorist who were fighting for
Khalistan, a separate state for Sikhs. The ‘Operation Bluestar’ by the army, threw the temple into shambles and hurt the Sikh sentiments so deeply that even the anti-Khalistan fractions of the Sikh community rebounded in protest. Khushwant Singh reacted by returning the government his civilian honours. Instead of curbing Khalistan terrorism, the Golden temple massacre abetted it, which later climaxed in the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi by her Sikh security guard. The assassination led to a wave of violence. Angry mobs roamed the cities in search of ‘Sikh blood to spill.’ and shouted:

India is Indira and Indira is India...Khoon ka badla khoon...they chanted “Blood in revenge for blood.” (p.194)

Gurinder Singh remembers nostalgic sentiments, how his own nephew Navjyot and his father were tortured to death in a car by anti-Sikh mobs. He remembers with pain the anguished face of the little boy “starting in disbelief as the flames consumed him.” (p.195) Gurinder Singh was so angry at what happened, he wanted to resign and join the Khalistan army to avenge his nephew’s death and also the wrongs done to the other people of his Sikh community. Had it not been for his father’s deep sense of tolerance and commitment towards communal harmony, he would have left the police force. His father’s words ring in his ears and they guide him when he is out to manage riots. His father had pointed to the smiling photograph of Navjyot and remarked with nostalgia:

The boy will always live in my heart he said softly “but somewhere in India, there is another grandfather like me whose only hope for the safety of his grandson lies in the thrust that he places in you and the policemen under your command. Do not, Gurinder, do not even betray that thrust. (p.198)

Some of the chief concerns of Riot involve the questions of identity in a political or religious sense and the question of allegiance. Hinduism is a religion which has practised tolerance for over three thousand years. Every single faith known to humanity, with the possible exception of Shintoism, has been welcomed in India. The proponents of other religions, like Christianity, Judaism and Islam, suggest there is no way to salvation except through their lord and that everyone else is in error. In contrast to them, Tharoor (Cole: 2001), provoking Hinduism in an archetypal Indo-nostalgic way, says:
The key to Hindu vision is the unknowability of truth; Hinduism is the only religion that doesn’t claim to be the only true one.

In the novel, Lakshman says that, “Hindu fundamentalism” is a contradiction in terms “because Hinduism is a religion without fundamentals, no organised church, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, no single sacred book.” Shashi Tharoor feels that, it is a travesty of the Hindu faith to reduce the soaring philosophical quests of Vedanta to the petty bigotry of political identity. “It is a betrayal of Hinduism by those who claim to speak in its name.” (Eswar: 2005) Professor Sarwar, avers over the nationalism of Indo-nostalgia:

The national mind has been afflicted with the intellectual cancer of thinking of “us” and “them”. (p.114)

Thus, the novel is about collision, collision between issues, collision between individuals, collision between mobs and cultural collision in particular, in this case, the Hindu-Muslim collision.

However, the novel spins around a twenty-four year old, slim blond blue eyed, Indo-nostalgic an American volunteer, Priscilla Hart, with the non-governmental association HELP-US; whose initials stand for health, education, literacy, population and United States. She was a young lady with New York University for her doctoral degree and had come to India as a part of her research. She was closely involved in developing female population control. She not only fell in love with India abut also she was too much committed and engaged in the problems in India. She was intensely interested in the population control and in the rights of women. Her father’s posting brought her in India. Commenting upon her good character, her father Rudyard Hart embarks:

Priscilla was a gem, an angel, a person brought onto this earth to do good. (p.2)

When, Priscilla was killed, her mother, Katherine, fifty-two years old, a high school teacher of English, could not tolerate the loss of her only daughter. She was in an intense mourning. She expresses her agony on her sad demise. Expressing her passionate love and commitment towards India, she says:

Priscilla wanted to work everyone together; she was determined to make a difference in the lives of the women of India. (p.3)
Her sad demise is a shock for her organisation HELP-US. Her fellow associates remember her with a deep sense of fellow-felling. In a state of missing a hardworking and committed research fellow like Priscilla, Lyndon Galbraith, the president of the organisation HELP-US says:

She touched a lot of people here with her evident sincerity and compassion. She will be greatly missed. (p.3)

Priscilla came across a number of things about India. She not only saw Indians but also came across Indian bazaars, Indian movies, Indian temples and the lower class Indian people with their poverty. She actively worked for the social service league and helped blind children at the catholic orphanages and always cared for the ‘underside of the society.’ But during her stay, in India, an incident changed her life and her mind developed a strong current of hatred against her father, when she found her father in bed with his secretary Nandini. This led towards divorce between Katherine and Rudyard. Priscilla felt regretful and could not forgive her father:

…but I cannot forgive him. Not just for taken for granted. But also for being careless enough and thoughtless enough to do it there. In Mom’s and his bed, on that afternoon, and letting me find him. I hated him finding like that. (p.79)

After nine years, Priscilla came to India at Zalilgarh, a district town in Uttar Pradesh. She found nothing changed; except the increase in population. Zalilgarh occupied a special place of reference in the scrapbook of Priscilla. She was so enthralled by the place that she composed a poem on the town of Zalilgarh with all its mist of dust, cow-dung sidewalks, rusting roofs, walls with red betel stains and angry black slogans with dirty brown men in their dirty dhotis. Tharoor captures the essence of Indo-nostalgia about Indian locality, cuisine and culture at Zalilgarh in U. P. through the poem of Priscilla:

Mists of dust on crumbling roadsides
Cowdung sidewalks, rusting roofs
Bright painted signboards above dimly lit shops
The tinkle of bicycle bells, the loud cries...
...Roll out the chapattis for dinner,
Pour the children drinks of sewer water
Serve their men first, eat what’s left
If they’re lucky, and then submit unprotected
To the heaving thrusts of their protectors
Abusers, masters. One more baby comes
To wallow in misery with the rest. (p.15)

Her poem shades a significant light on the Indian people with their dresses and routine habits, in the bumpy and dusty landscape of that part of India. It also explains the pathetic predicament of women in India and the dominance of patriarchy over the social system. When Priscilla meets to change the women at Zalilgarh, she comes across plenty of difficulties. Nothing helps her to achieve her targets and complete her tasks. So, in the concluding lines of her poem, she prays the almighty to empower her to fight against such adverse conditions and requests to offer her ample time to make difference. Some pages from her personal scrapbook read:

...Give me strength, oh Lord to make things change. Give me the time to make a difference. (p.16)

The laziness in the office makes her more regretful. Her project director Shankar Das and her assistant Kadambari make her work more complicated. Shankar Das is more concerned with statistical figures rather than practical achievements. The centre for Priscilla became an ‘ineffective place’ whereas her filed work became ‘upsetting development’ particularly in the case of Fatima Bi who had aborted her eighth child. After knowing this, her husband, Ali charges down the centre angrily with eyes bloodshot and red screaming. ‘I will kill the foreign whore.’(p.233)In all the harsh circumstances, Priscilla’s hope rests on Lakshman, the only man with whom she could share everything. In her first visit with him, she feels herself captivated towards him with her heart, body and mind. She herself candidly confesses a distinct Indian personality of Lakshman:

...Lakshman has a rich, soft voice, not smooth like a radio announcer’s but slightly husky, like raw-edged velvet. There was something about his voice that reached out and drew me in, something that was both inviting and yet reassuring. It was a voice like a warm embrace, a voice that was seductive but not seducer’s. (p. 19)

Priscilla goes mad with her love for Lakshman knowing that he was a married and had a daughter. She finds in Lakshman someone caring and loving with whom she could talk and discuss anything. Kisses, love making and intellectual inputs reinforce their resolution to cling each other against the tougher social and personal front. It is as much as swimming against current. Their visits at
Kotli help to understand each other in every way. Her excitement and dedicated love towards Lakshman, she expresses unhesitatingly:

...until I met Lakshman, and talked and connected with his kindred spirit, and said goodnight and I found myself flooded with the sense that I was missing something so bad I could taste it. (p.21)

In their consistent visits, they used to share everything. Their talks range from culture, history, politics and the ritual of marriage in India. Their relationship develops to such a passionate extent that Lakshman at times thinks of deserting his wife Geetha for Priscilla with whom he plans to shift to America. But the age old tradition, desists him from doing so and he confesses it to Priscilla. Tharoor, through the confession of Lakshman, represents an indebted nostalgia of an Indian husband not only for his wife and daughter but also for his own country, his own motherland:

...forgive me, but I must end our relationship. I love you but I cannot leave my wife, my daughter, my job, my country, my whole life, for my love. (p.239)

Priscilla accepts it and plans to leave India after meeting Lakshman for the last time at Kotli. She believes that, their shared love would be strong enough to pull Lakshman out of his placid marriage; however, she fails to understand the sustenance that Lakshman derives from the arrangement of a traditional and stable Indian family. The last meeting with Lakshman proves fatal for her. The fatal error of falling in love with the exoticism; which partially embodies Lakshman, makes her remorseful. In a letter to her friend Cindy, Priscilla writes expressing her nostalgic feelings for Lakshman:

...loving Lakshman filled every pore of my being; it gave me a sense of attachment, not just to a man, but to this land. (p.242)

Tharoor presents the existing hypocrisy in the institution of marriage, in India, through a brief but heart-rending relationship of Lakshman and Priscilla. The relationship makes the readers to question and ponder themselves over the issue of marriage in India. However when Geetha, Lakshman’s wife finds out her husband’s affair with Priscilla, She visits the Shiv Mandir on every Saturday, where Swamiji resides. To get rid of the trouble, she speaks to Swamiji:
…what can I do Swamiji? I cannot talk to him about this it would kill me if I had to tell him what I knew! I can only turn to God, Swamiji, and to you. Please conduct a special puja for me to help me keep my husband. (p.227)

Tharoor opens up an Indo-nostalgic vista of the superstitious attitude of a traditional wife and her commitment towards her filial duties. An Indian woman is always ready to save and protect her family from defamation. She leaves every problem to God to resolve, keeping an intense faith and bhakti in him. At the same time, Tharoor, through the portrayal of Geetha, remarks another facet of Indo-nostalgia, i.e. an Indian strong faith of fatalism on which the people build the castles of their lives and achievements. Geetha is ready to pay any amount to relieve her husband from the amorous shackles of Priscilla:

…I don’t care about the expense; I don’t care how you do it. Use tantra, do the tandavaa, use anyone and anything you want, Swamiji, but please don’t let this foreign devil-woman with my husband. (p.227)

It sounds quite abnormal but it has been and still is a pertinent attitude of an Indian woman however she may be educated. Indian women are intensely nostalgic, tradition and family bound. On the other side, Priscilla is very eager to create her own world with Lakshman, with an insensible attitude about his married life. She convinces Lakshman boldly:

…I don’t care whether you lived in a thatched hut with no running water or grew up in a mansion. I don’t care if your parents drove a Mercedes or brushed their teeth with twigs. I love you. Not your family, not your village, not your caste, not your background, only I love you. And that’s all matters to me. (p.89)

Priscilla is aware of the high tides on the mental horizon of Lakshman, yet she keeps on providing him the ventilation, he so badly needs. She conveniently overlooks the vital distinction between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’. According to her mother, Priscilla has the tendency to see things in people, which they do not see in themselves. At another level, Priscilla is well aware of the destiny this relationship held for her. Priscilla herself admits the same, in her note to Lakshman:

You have not taken a risk in this relationship, at all. But I have. It was my risk to take, to fall in love with a married man, and I did, and I take full responsibility for it. I’m sorry about that ink splotch; I am crying as I write this. But I don’t
want you to feel sorry for me. I want your love, not your pity. (p.207)

It is the western image of Lakshman which attracts Priscilla who talks, writes, reads and thinks in the way, she desires. Their love develops against all adverse conditions. They create their world of caring each other through their regular and consistent visits. But their love, rather than providing them pleasure and peace of mind puts both of them in tremendous confusion and mental strain. Priscilla, in a state of dismay, conceals herself about her idea of true love and sensuality:

...through sex he found love and in love he found confusion, uncertainty, fear. Whereas I loved him from almost the first moment and felt nothing but certainty about him. The sex was just a means of expressing my love, a way of giving myself to the man I loved. (p.242)

Priscilla is baffled at the very notion of Indian marriage. She is against the idea of marrying someone whom you don’t know. In her opinion, to marry someone on the consent and selection of elders from the family cannot be the basis of lifetime commitment. So, she does not expect it from Lakshman, since he was an educated and western in outlook. She feels regretful when she finds that, the man whom she loves from the bottom of her heart had no room for her due to the pressures of Indian customs. She felt that he has failed to understand her love. She calls Lakshman as ‘Mr. Right in the wrong place at the wrong time.’ All this results into the parting of loved ones, she admits in a state of nostalgic repent and repress:

...I saw so much in Lucky – a good man in a bad marriage, someone capable of love who had no opportunity to love until I came along, a man who hadn’t seen his own unhappiness fully until he met me. With me I think he realized for the first time that he hadn’t truly known love in his life and that could find happiness loving and being loved. Happiness, of course, at a price. A price that in the end he was not prepared—with his upbringing, his sense of his responsibilities, his inability to escape from Indian society—to pay. (p.241)

Tharoor paints through his innovative skill, the love of a father for his daughter in a purely Indo-nostalgic cast. It is Rekha, the daughter of Lakshman, who holds her father from deserting his family during the course of his intense
love for Priscilla. Symbolically speaking, Tharoor has used the name ‘Rekha’ to suggest a line of control. Priscilla is aware of only one identity about Lakshman, that he is a passionate lover. Besides, he is a man of multiple identities, husband, father, District Magistrate, Hindu and a poet. Moreover, Lakshman plays a role of protagonist in the novel. However, he is so habitual with her that he can no longer imagine himself without her even for a week. Expressing his intense nostalgic feelings for Priscilla, he says that, for him, she is:

...a consolation, she is escape, but she is more than that; she is a fantasy come true, the possibility of an alternate life. (p.155)

He is so obsessed with her consolation that even at times, he thinks of quitting the job and family and moving to America for her. His nine loveless years with his wife Geetha, might be the cause of his attraction towards her. Sex plays a pivotal role in bringing them close. Geetha has a different feeling towards sex, she neither ignites nor welcomes, she is to endure rather than enjoy in a traditional way, an Indian woman does with her husband, ‘Husband as a God’. On the other hand, for Priscilla, it is a joy, a celebration, for which, she gives as much as she takes. Thus, pleasure of sex becomes a carnal discovery for him with an endless delight.

Despite of all these passionate matters developed with her, Lakshman determines to end the relationship. He is not ready to give up his house, his country, his job, his wife and his beloved daughter Rekha, for Priscilla. It is his intense love and affection for his daughter, which withdraws him back from doing these things. His love for Rekha, wins over the love for Priscilla. He realises his filial responsibility and nostalgia:

...I realized, then that I could not deny these to her and still feel myself a worthy human being. That having brought her into the world, I had a responsibility, an obligation, to see her through those difficult years of growing up, secure in the environment of a predictable two-parent family structure. And that if I failed to fulfill this obligation in pursuing my own happiness, I would in fact, find no happiness at all. (p.240)

Priscilla’s unnatural and sudden death comes as a blow to Lakshman, retching his soul, heart and mind. It is Gurinder, who helps Lakshman to hide her
identity by suppressing Priscilla’s scrapbook and her postmortem report. Besides, Gurinder, being a close friend of Lakshman conceals Priscilla’s pregnancy to prevent him from getting involved in a sex scandal; which could have cost him his job and defamation. Priscilla’s murder mystery is later resolved by pointing arrows of suspicion towards a number of characters. It could be Makhan Singh or it could be Ali, who swore to kill her or it could also be those responsible for the riot or even the Swami. But Lakshman blames it on ‘communal passion.’ Lakshman’s journal written under her intense nostalgia dated a month later reads:

Zalilgarh is burning, but she is oblivious of it, forgetting the world in her desire to see me. Her body is full of sentences waiting to be spoken, of moments yet unlived, soft and heavy as if awakening from a sleep of lingering dreams. She waits, as the darkness gathers around her like a noose...night falls on her like a knife...she would have fought furiously. She had one more reason to live...Gurinder had to suppress in the post mortem. She was carrying my child. (p. 265)

Thus, the ill-fated romance of Priscilla and Lakshman serves a much larger purpose in the novel to expose nostalgic feelings of love. It provides the limited and manageable context through which Tharoor poses questions about cultural identity and presents an impassioned plea for understanding and tolerance among cultures. On a large scale, Priscilla represents symbolically a western helping hand eager to improve the social conditions in India, being obsessed with the love for the land. At the same time, Tharoor’s mouthpiece Lakshman represents bureaucracy, which fails to form a cordial relationship with this western influence. Priscilla explores the rigid social conditions of India and questions the validity of the age-old traditions with utter superstitious blindness and ignorance. The institution of marriage is thread-barely condemned by Priscilla. Moreover, the social centers are considered for their inefficiency rather than work. In a symbolic way, this helping hand is killed with brutality in an age old ‘Kotli’. Kotli, in a sense, represents India, with glimpses of glorious past with a mirror ‘pitted back with age in places’, haunted, full of myths and legends. Tharoor (Interview: 2001) exposes and emphasises why he chose an American girl’s love for married Lakshman:
...because a foreigner comes with a certain level of both innocence and a lack of understanding that helps illuminate for those who are trying to read a story like this.

Rudyard Hart revisits India after a span of twelve years with Katherine as a Marketing Director to revive the sale of Coca-Cola in 1977, when the country was still in a state of emergency proclaimed by the Prime Minister in mid 1975. Rudyard exposes the emergency and post emergency era. His parents were Indo-nostalgic missionaries, they loved India very much, especially *Taj Mahal* and *The Jungle book*, grown up with a long-lasting delusion of visiting India. He says:

My parents were so nostalgic for India that they were dreaming Bengal Lancer in the land of Pearl Buck. (p.30)

Coca-Cola offers him an opportunity to complete his dream and to increase the sale of it. He has a conservative estimate of a Coke for a week, per middle class Indian, which he thinks is not impossible. His colleague Kisan Mehata makes him aware of the law – FERA, which means Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, which is made for governing the activities of the companies involved in an international trade. According to Mehta, the foreign companies in India have been doing the business under the provision of that law. They both apply for it but as their case is pending, an anti-Coke wave emerges in the country. Coca-Cola became the symbol of American economic imperialism. It was accused of ‘looting the country’ and ‘destroying the health of Indians.’ The political controversy generates by the Coca-Cola affair evokes protest from the “hysterical left”. George Fernandes opposes it vehemently:

What kind of a country is India, where you can get Coke in the cities but not clean drinking water in the villages? (p. 31)

According to Tharoor, Coke receives terrible trouble from the government authorities and when Coke refuses their long pending application under the deadly 29th law of FERA is discarded and both the businessmen are asked to quit India. The political game astonishes Rudyard Hart that, in a country like India, there are plenty of unresolved problems but the members of the parliament are more concerned with the Coca-Cola. This is the third blow for Rudyard, deserting his long cherished desire of becoming minister for industry. It not only affects him but also drags his family down to fulfill his aspirations. It is a terrific struggle to
vindicate his nostalgic desire to be there in India. He tries a professional strategy to solve the deadlock, but all his efforts turn futile:

The professional challenge soon turned out to be a hopeless one...with shrewd advice from that old veteran Kisan Mehta, I came up with one clever scheme after another, but nothing worked. (p.33)

His professional dreams shatter. He is nowhere. It destroys his family. His discreet affair with his secretary Nandini deserts him from his family. India, for this western and ruined entrepreneur, proves to be a hopeless land, which gives him consecutive three blows and shatters all his creative strategies and dreams. In every sense, India is a disaster which makes him desolate. He returns with the hope of confronting the third blow, the country has given, the death of his only daughter. He sets himself on the path of salvation to get rid of his utter disappointment and destruction. He confesses his wife Katherine:

...Coming back to India has taught me a lot about my first time visit here. When I was here last, Kathy, I saw a market, not a people. At my work, I saw a target, not a need. With Nandini, I saw an opportunity, not a lover. I took what I could and left. And now India has taken from me the one human being who mattered most to me in the world. (p.263)

Through the novel, we come to know that Rudyard Hart slowly failing day-by-day and changing himself from a professional entrepreneur to a humanitarian. The country makes him to emerge as a human being shattering all his long cherished aspirations. He is accompanied by Randy Diggs, a South Asian correspondent of the New York Journal, form Delhi to Zalilgarh. Randy Diggs is another Indo-nostalgic mouthpiece of Tharoor next to Lakshman and Priscilla for he literally digs up every facet of Indian identity and leaves nothing unturned. He is a supreme example of onomastics. A factual western reporter, who is more attracted to Indians than Priscilla. He interviews everyone; Lakshman, Gurinder, Ram Charan Gupta, Professor Mohammed Sarwar, so and so forth. He exposes the bureaucratic attitude, the Hindu dogmas and the Muslim sentiments. The New York Journal picks up the serious issue of the death of Priscilla Hart and makes him to peep into the matter cautiously. When he visits Zalilgarh for his sentimental discovery, we come across his bitter kind of Indo-nostalgia, as he describes Zalilgarh, in his own western way:
God, what a dump. The heat. The dust. The flies. The shit. The crowds. You name it, Zalilgarh has it. Every horrific Western cliché about India turns out to be true here. (p.17)

Through Randy’s interviews with Rudyard, we come to know every detail about Priscilla and about her past. His interviews with Lakshman make us to know about Priscilla’s abrupt and blameless murder. He assumes that the communal riots might be responsible for her death. Through Lakshman, Professor Mohammed Sarwar and Rudyard hart, Tharoor captured an image of India with all its political, historical and social stuff. Moreover, Tharoor exposes the bureaucratic limitations of police force in handling these horrific riots. Professor Mohammed Sarwar, in his meeting with Lakshman, remarks realistically:

My uncle, Rauf–Bhai, is the Sardar of the community. He’s helped you to manage this riot, keep the peace. Even he was not spared Lakshman. His house was broken into and thrashed by the police search team. They took TV and radio, poked holes in the mattresses, smashed some furniture...what kind of country are we creating when the police response to a riot simply sows the seeds of the next one? (p.258)

Tharoor reveals how power is made abstract by means of the institution of bureaucracy. As he satirically remarks:

...the Indian government has apparently become rather good at managing these riots, and people like Lakshman are trained at riot control the way a student is trained to footnote a dissertation. (p.21)

Tharoor represents the mobilisation of the police force to subdue opposition within the event of the riot. In his opinion, the institution of bureaucracy follows the code of normalisation by persuading the power of consent and where power is made abstract and resistance from the ruled becomes possibility:

...I went on to the mobile wireless to instruct the police...on duty...at all sensitive point...to impose curfew...take whatever measure involving the use of force. (p.162)

However, power is universal and the power of bureaucracy is subverted by political interference where the power of the bureaucrat is confronted with the power of politicians. Nevertheless, the resistance from the bureaucrat who exercises his power is contained and regulated within the functioning of the governmental body. Satirising the Indian bureaucracy, Tharoor asserts:
Some of it is for petty favours - hire this person, authorize this action, expedite that approval – and he does it ... they make their displeasure clear. Even start threatening to transfer him. (p.94)

Tharoor does not fail to reveal that power is not identical with a utopian reality. “On the one hand, he says, he can do good, as District Magistrate he has real power here. On the other hand, he says he is frequently disillusioned with the cynicism he sees around him, in government, especially corruption.”(p.94)

Tharoor reveals how the system of Indian bureaucracy contains within itself the corruption:

India’s so full of rules and regulations that government officials can make a fortune from the way they exercise their power to permit the building of a factory here, the grant of a loan there. (p.94)

Lakshman considers the communal passion as an assault on the political value of secular India. He explores Randy Diggs the deception of the state government. Except West Bengal, all other states proclaim their secularism but do nothing to prohibit the march with annoying slogans. Lakshman is denied permission to prohibit the procession, ultimately leading to set a fire of bloody quarrel. He finds himself helpless as an administrator, in spite of his warnings to the Hindu activists the riot breaks out shouting and instigating slogans.

People pull out bombs or knives then melt away into the darkness. We are left with the bodies, the burned and destroyed homes, the legacy of hate and mistrust. And it goes on. (p.238)

We find in Lakshman, a bureaucrat, who does not accept his job only as a passport to power, privilege and life time security; but stands apart from other majority of self-centered IAS officers. He is intensely bothered and worried by the corruption, the political interference and the everlasting threat of transfer. This emblematic Indian bureaucrat is not like other IAS officers; who only make money but do not serve the country. He is strictly abided by his principles and convictions of rendering an ideal service. Satirising the political nostalgia, Tharoor renders an advice poetically, which gives the real glimpse of Indian politicians:

...Think of nothing
Do not think of words said and unsaid,
Of minor scandals and major investigations,
Of humiliations endured and insults suffered,
Or retorts that did not spring to mind,
In time.
...think of nothing
Then you will be able to sleep. (pp. 90-92)

Gurinder reminds us of the orgy of slaughter, looting and bloody reverence against the Sikh community in the capital after Indira Gandhi’s assassination and his cause of remaining in the service of nation. He opts for the job on the immense insistence of his parents and it also provides him a decent salary and social status with buggers saluting him left and right. But an incident changes his attitude towards the society and the country when his community is held responsible for the Prime Minister’s assassination. Describing a wave of anger and revenge against the community in a well organised riot, he says pathetically:

There was an orgy of slaughter, of arson, of looting. Sikh neighborhoods were destroyed, families butchered, homes torched...the bastards surrounded the car, howling and baying their hate for the assassins of the prime minister. “Khoon ka badla khoon.” They chanted “Blood in revenge for blood.” (p.194)

In the bloody murderous revenge, Gurinder loses his nephew. He along with his father is burned alive in their ambassador car by a mob. He wants to resign from his service for he cannot bear the system which takes three days to control the riots. He repents on the remark made in the speech of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the riot:

When a mighty tree falls, the earth shakes...that all my training, all my faith in the country and its bloody institutions, had been futile. (p.194)

His father forbids him from resigning the coveted post and the service; since no longer family shall endure what they experienced. He advises him to put out those violent flames of communalism engulfing the innocents. Gurinder, with a practical approach to life, sustains it with tolerance and considers his department as the ‘last bastion of civility and order in our racked and torn society,’ (p.198) and unconditionally accepts the corruption, reality and inefficiency overwhelming in the profession. Finding himself vulnerable, along with Lakshman, he cannot control the raging flood leaving behind corpses and ruins.
He narrates the post-riot scenario to the local MLA pressuring him to release the arrested members of his community. Even his own department helps to liberate the wrongs. Besides, he plays a role of conscience keeper with Lakshman, to protect his family and to relieve him from his discreet affair with Priscilla. He supports Lakshman in every chaotic period. He advises Geetha to adopt necessary steps to keep her family unbroken. He stops Lakshman from quitting his job for the sake of Priscilla’s sensual love. He humorously advises Lakshman not to confuse ‘bedding well’ with ‘wedding bell.’ Thus, Lakshman, a man of thoughts and Gurinder, a man of deeds, both find themselves feeble in a fury of riot, where everything (their thoughts and deeds) proves to be senseless and useless.

With the help of these two massive Indo-nostalgic characters and their interaction with Randy Diggs, Tharoor exposes the typical Indian bureaucratic limitations, contradictions and helplessness prevailing in the government departments. Tharoor makes us acquainted with the steps adapted by the administration to handle the critical situations through the two characters. The steps undertaken by these government officials turn out to be fertile grounds for the new wave of social problem. In a nutshell, Tharoor exposes the failures of the Indian administrative system in tackling the problems for the past fifty years. The re-occurrence of communal riots shows the social disharmony and failure of Indian government. Growing through his protagonist, Tharoor lashes against the prevailing venality, political interference and the inefficiency of the Indian democratic system to provide satisfactory solutions. Diggs interviews with Ram Charan Gupta open up a panorama of the changing scenario in the existing communally harmonious secular India. These characters, being mouthpieces of Tharoor, articulate their suppressed feelings, in the light of their justifying ideologies. For the Hindus, it is an attempt to reclaim their identity engendered under the name of secularism. Muslims feel threatened under the partial ideology. In defiance, both the communities meet each other on a variety of circumstances resulting into eruptions of riots. The upheaval of communal riots in India is considered as a physical attack on the image of communally harmonious secular India. Literally, riot is a hostile outburst of crowd in which members of one group indiscriminately attack the person and property of the members of another group.
under the obsession of their religious and Indo-nostalgic frenzy. The aftershocks of the riots are clearly visible in the society affecting it to a hopeless extent. Riot, when deliberately inflicted on a particular community makes it more evident and discrete in a society. The occasional aftershocks mentioned in the novel, clearly indicate that something is going wrong somewhere in the society. In a true sense, Tharoor has succeeded in catching the snapshot of Indian society with his Indo-nostalgic thematic treatment.

The plot of *Riot* depicts not just the span of eight and half months (2nd February 1989 to 16th October 1989) but cites references to various historical events of the Hindu-Sikh riot of 1984, the Ayodhya incident of 1992. He includes in an afterword; which refers to the declaration made by affiliates of the Sangh Parivar of the construction of a temple in Ayodhya, in March, 2002. The span that Tharoor covers to trace starts with the pre-independence Hindu-Muslim unity and ends up with riots related to the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issues, widening the gap between these two communities. Despite, it was the unity of these two communities which played a crucial role in achieving freedom for India. It is through Professor Mohammed Sarwar, the author explores the views of Muslim community and their reverie image of secular India. Amidst the Sheela-poojan agitations, Mohammed Sarwar recites the speech of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, as the president of the Indian National Congress at Ramgarh in 1940. He considers the speech as the greatest testament of the faith of religious Muslim in united India. The speech voices the Indo-nostalgic sentiments of every Muslim and affirms India as his/her motherland, they crave for:

...I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of that indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice. Without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential, which has gone to built India. I can never surrender this claim. It was India's historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, and that many caravan should rest here...one of the last of these caravans was that of the followers of Islam. They came here and settled for good. (p.108)

The freedom struggle which affirms the sensation of Indianness, leads in terms of national entity without the imagination of Pakistan. But the freedom itself brings the urge for partition crushing the national entity. The entire Muslim
community is held responsible for the catastrophe. Professor Mohammed Sarwar, rather than considering his community guilty for partition, lays blame on those who engenders the two-nation partition theory:

If you mean I am a Muslim, I plead guilty to the charge of being Muslim. But to no other charge. Muslims didn’t partition the country—the British did, the Muslim League did, the congress party did. There are more Muslims in India today than in Pakistan. This is where I belong. (p.111)

The Muslims, who reclaim Islam on this soil and have been residing in India from the past eleven centuries and spreading the secular message of human equality and fraternity, are suffered discrimination after partition. Now, they are strangers, who owe loyalty to a different religion. Once, an inevitable part has become now a part people, who are extensively eager to dispense with. Its severe attitude of discrimination raises question mark, which halts the intellectual Muslim. He finds himself displaced:

Where do Indian Muslims like myself fit in? I’ve spent my life thinking of myself as part of ‘us’ now there are Indians, respectable Indians, and Indians winning votes who say that I’m really ‘them’. (p.114)

The only thing which hurts the Muslim protagonist is that he is forced to suffer, for which he is not responsible for. In a true sense, it is a revenge taken on him for what his ancestors had done in the past. He suffers the degradation of being thrown away from the mainstream, which generates insecure and horrible feelings in him. He visualises a change in the dominant philosophy of the country, in the attitudes, the ongoing agitations. Ramshilapoojan is, for him, an Indo-nostalgic presage, of history repeating itself, under morbid conditions of communalism:

…The Hindutva brigade is busy trying to invent a new past for the nation, fabricating historical wrongs they want to right, dredging up ‘evidence’ of Muslim malfeasance and misappropriations of national glory. They are making us into a large-scale Pakistan; they are vindicating the two-nation theory. They know not what damage they are doing to the fabric of our society. They want to ‘teach’ people like me ‘a lesson,’ though they have not learned many lessons themselves. (p.67)
The intensity of anxiety and terror increases when the Bhartiya Janata Party and its Hindutva associates raise the Mandir-Masjid concern. According to Sarwar, it is a communal movement motivated politically to take the benefits of Hindu vote-bank. Tharoor explores the communalism born out of politics and at the same time, paints a dirty picture of the consequences. The Hindus are inflamed by reminding them of the disgrace suffered in the past and also in the present under the mask of secularism. In a nutshell, the Shila Poojan takes up the whole country in disguise and ironically ends their lives in a bloody and senseless killings and meaningless destruction rather than creating a unique and secular national identity.

On the other hand, Ram Charan Gupta, with his Hindu ideology, makes us acquainted with the passionate ardor of Hindutva, in a specific Indo-nostalgic seam. In his passionate opinion, it is mandatory to awake Hindus to illuminate India. He constantly provokes Hindus by frequently providing the stories of invasions and reminding destructions made by Muslim rulers. The demolition of temples was an imperial strategy of Muslims to humiliate and demoralise Hindus. It has all done with a view to subjugate the Hindus. Moreover, he considers Muslims as the sole cause behind the partition of the country. Besides, what disturbs Gupta intensely is the pampering of Muslim community under the name of secularism. As a part of this pampering, he realises that, privileges are conferred by supporting financial assistance to visit Haj and the government subsidies the Muslim educational institutions. It troubles him immensely as he avers:

\[...\text{they have even managed special status for the only Muslim majority state we have, Kashmir. Do you know a Hindu from anywhere else in the country cannot buy a piece of land in Kashmir? (p.55)}\]

On the whole, the Shila Poojan agitation sets off the suppressed hatred against each other in both the communities. The opposition that Hindus face, both from the administration and the Muslim community challenge their acceptance. On the contrary, Muslims find themselves alien and consider it as an attempt to wipe off their existence from India. The slogan of ‘Unity in diversity’ is boasted, for every Indian is replaced by plenty of Indo-nostalgic communalist slogans. For Hindus, it comes as ‘\textit{Jis Hindu ka Khoon na Khaule/ Khoon nahi hai pani hai.’} It
challenges the life force: blood. It was an appeal to the Indo-nostalgic communal passions, emotions and feelings. Whereas, Muslims are taunted and forced by muddy aggravations as ‘Muslim ke do hi sthan/ Pakistan ya Kabrastan.’ This fatal aggravation set for Muslims two options, either live in India or leave India. With the same gust of air, another callous reply came from Muslim community ‘Has ke liya tha Pakistan / Ladke lenge Hindustan.’ For Hindus, constructing the Ram temple is an evidence of awakening ‘Lord Rama’, His enchanted birthplace, besides, it is like asserting their identity and it has become a matter of intense Indo-nostalgia with Hindu faith. On the contrary, the Babri Masjid constructed on the very site by destroying the temple is a matter of humiliation and demoralisation. For Hindus, the reconstruction of the temple is reclaiming their Hindutva identity and ‘Ramjanmastan’ the exact place of birth of Lord Rama. Despite of the legal action and Muslims’ opposition, the Hindus are intensely determined to demolish the old standing structure and reconstruct a new one with those Sheelas which means holy bricks. Professor Mohammed Sarwar, an intellectual Muslim, is more confused with the Indo-nostalgic Hindu blind faith. For him, it is ridiculous and a breach of trust for those Muslims resided in India.

...your Hindutva types are presuming to know the exact place of birth of a man whose birth date is historically unverifiable...There is no evidence for the historicity of the Ram Janmabhoomi claims. (pp. 181-183)

In a true sense, it is a sightless nostalgic journey from waging words and waging words to weapons to increase the rift between the two communities. It is a fight between asserting superiority and defensive existence. It is a riot, an outburst of communal violence inflicting new scars before the wounds of partition get healed. R. C. Gupta reinvents the strategy to subjugate the Hindus and to create history by effacing the old and blind political error; whereas Professor Mohammed Sarwar articulates the emotions of Muslims from an aura of anxiety and duplicity. Digging up the graves of the history, it has been a political policy to provoke a particular community so as to pick the benefits of elections. In the opinion of Rudyard Hart, we find root cause of each and every problem in the history. He comments on this blind misuse of history:

...I will tell you what your problem is in India. You have too much history. Far more than you can use peacefully. So you
end up wielding history like a battleaxe, against each other.  
(p.205)

Against these struggles for imposing supremacy, Tharoor reminds us of a secular India, a country in which no one group of any community can claim monopoly. There stands the mouthpiece of Tharoor, Lakshman, as a secular person; who neither prone to Hindu nor Muslim. As a Hindu, he does not accept the ‘Hinduism’ preached and practised by Ram Charan Gupta. He prefers to build a temple of Ram in his mind rather than constructing it with stones and bricks. For him, the country ‘India’ stands as an extraordinary polyglot, polychrome, poly-confessional country with five major resources of division; language, region, caste, class and religion. The numerous languages, the hundreds of castes and sub-castes across the country with variety of classes and religions make it difficult for any dogmatic community to assert its supremacy over others. In the opinion of Lakshman, Hinduism is not a label of national identity but a set of Indo-nostalgic human beliefs, which does not claim to be the only religion to devise people. As a secular Hindu, he has subscribed to a creed which is free from the restraining dogmas of holy summons and which refuses to be shackled by the limitations and ideologies of a single holy book. He is wise enough to understand Hinduism as nothing but the filthy and communal politics to gather a Hindu vote bank. He utters:

…it is just politics, the twentieth century politics of deprivation has eroded the culture’s confidence. Hindu chauvinism emerged from the competition for resources in a contentious democracy. Politicians of all faiths across India seek to mobilize voters by appealing to narrow identities. By seeking votes in the name of religion, caste and region, they have urged voters to define themselves on these lines. Indians have been made more conscious from ever before of what divides us. (p.145)

Lakshman fails to understand what sort of religious pride they expect and bring to their communal minds by proclaiming ‘Garv se kaho hum Hindu hai.’ He feels proud to be a Hindu but his notion of Hindu is liberal and secular. He is not obsessed with the temples and bricks, Sheelas which make a Hindu on the arbitrary grounds of superstitious Indo-nostalgic ideologies. He deserves a mighty notion of a Hindu encompassing its diversity, openness and religious freedom. He
perceives with sympathy, the way in which Hindus are treated with standards of secularism but sticks to the conventional dogmas of openness showing him a 'true path of salvation and wisdom.'

Shashi Tharoor speaks on Indo-nostalgic elements like religion, secularism and Hinduism in the fiction. He has illuminated the political communalism with the help of his principal characters Ram Charan Gupta, Professor Mohammed Sarwar and Lakshman unflinchingly by tracing the upheavals in the Hindu-Muslim relationship. He is massively concerned about the dirty communal political stance that holds the country. The intense communal passion of Ram Charan Gupta under the umbrella of Hinduism questions, where the country will be leading. The aggressive defense of the Muslim community by Professor Mohammed Sarwar has raised dire problems to the existing situations. The Hindu dogmas that Lakshman expresses is what India needs now. His Hinduism advocating secularism would be useful for our democracy and for peaceful and prosperous India. Tharoor is serious about the odd that, when the world is moving towards globalisation, he finds his country struggling to resolve the identity crisis on the political and foul Indo-nostalgic grounds of communalism. The widening rift between the two communities is the principal cause of social instability and defective democracy. The conventional social vista in India is explored through the eyes of Priscilla, Randy Diggs and Shankar Das. Tharoor expresses not only the social exploitation of women but also the suppression of women’s rights in the conservative Indian society. Kadambari and Shankar Das have found voice to express, through the project HELP-US run by Priscilla Hart which is to emancipate the women and realise the true wisdom of ideal and safe living.

Kadambari takes Katherine Hart to the women’s ward in the hospital of Zalilgarh, a large sun down building with festers and rancid everywhere. It makes her horrible and pitiable for the awful predicament of an Indian poor woman and the rotten facilities of the Indian hospitals. She remarks it as “horror of the women’s ward.”(p.245) Making her way through bold stained ribs, baskets, narrow metal cots and women lying on the floor; she moves into the hospital filled with the musty mall of sweat, medicines and chemicals. She visits those women,
whom her daughter had helped in her lifetime. Hart expresses horrible and sensitive situation of an Indian women in the hospital as:

I was there because Mr. Das thought I would be interested to see some of the kinds of women Priscilla was trying to help: women who had difficult childbirths, women whose ill health did not permit them to bear or look after more children, women recovering from botched self-induced abortions, the whole female chamber of horrors in this overcrowded and desperately poor country. (p.246)

Katherine comes across Sundari, Kadambari’s sister who is less than nineteen years old, lying like a mummy and moaning; since she has burns over seventy-five per cent of her body. She narrates the pitiable story of her marriage and tortured marital life to Katherine in her feeble and tender voice. Her story starts with the dowry that her father draws a loan from the bank. The initial days of love fades up and she faces harsh and sardonic reality. With regular beating by her mother-in-law, she found herself alone and helpless since her husband had turned away from her. In addition to her trouble, she remains pregnant. When her medical test indicates a girl child, everything turns horrible. Tharoor uses an archetype for a typical Indian mother-in-law to expose familial nostalgia. Her mother-in-law remarks in a state of bitterness and anguish, as a common Indian mother-in-law does. She sarcastically comments:

What use of this woman who does no work around the house and cannot even produce a son? (p.248)

She was set on fire by splashing kerosene by her mother-in-law and cruel husband. The instance is rumoured as ‘a kitchen accident’ by both of them; but her neighbours saved her life. Tharoor narrates the evils of dowry system in the traditional Indian society and the trauma that a majority of Indian houses have gone through the same horrible conditions. It’s Kadambari, being learned and experienced, points towards a major problem, prevailing in India:

...this is the real issue for women in India. Not population control, but violence against women, in our own homes. (p.249)

With the horrible situations, Katherine experiences the sight of stark reality of the status of women in the typical and conventional Indian society. Her opinions express blind Indo-nostalgia of Indian people. In the opinion of
Katherine, nothing changed in Indian society from the myth of Rama to the contemporary examples of Sundari. She considers woman’s life in India as an ‘Agni Pariksha’, a public tribulation by fire. She confuses about Priscilla, who tried to perceive the life of women in India through the myth and even baffles at the life of Sita. She can’t understand what her fault is. Is loyalty expected only from her? With all these bewildering questions, India for Katherine stands as a country where:

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

The striking remarks and experiences of Katherine Hart and her daughter Priscilla Hart indicate a sordid picture of the status of women in India, which to a certain extent have remained the same in the contemporary time also. Though it gives the stark and bitter truth about our conventional life style, it projects in a candid manner ‘Western outlook’ towards India. Rather than the glorious and treasonous past and impressive culture, the western eye is more interested in exploring dark side of India to prove their (western) supremacy in terms of standards of living. Ram Charan Gupta, the Hindu ideologist criticises Randy Diggs for this, when he finds Digg’s immense interest to know and discover about the riot. He criticises the westerners, for their interest and their cruel and cunning vision of looking at India. He bitterly pokes at Diggs:

You foreign journalists and photographers who cover India are only interested in the kind of India you want to see. The horrible, dark India of killing and riots, like this riot that you are so interested in, of course: it is all of a piece with the stories of poverty and disease, of the widows of Benares, the caste system and the untouchables, poor people selling their blood or their kidneys, the slums of Calcutta or Bombay, brides being burned for not having brought enough dowry—how many such stories have you written for your American readers, Mr. Diggs? (p.228)

Thus, the western press is more concerned about an American lady Priscilla who is murdered. They attack minority especially Christian which matters to them above all. They are never concerned about India as a whole. According to Gupta,
they strike harshly on the biased projection. They forget that, our country has allowed the practice of all faiths without any hindrance to other religions by Hindu rulers. Whatever is projected about India through western eyes is only a part; it does not mean the whole of India. These are western stories entertaining western audiences, telling them about the dark image of India to prove their supremacy. The western press with all its biased stereotypes of partiality and presumptions: poverty, caste system, the untouchables, religious discords tell the world, how India is, and how they are superior to us. Ram Charan Gupta pleads Randy Diggs to cast off this brutal view and meet the people who belong to rural India. In the opinion of Nair Uma, (Asian Age: 2001) India resides:

... in an epoch of rapid and rabid change. Tharoor highlights economic asymmetries to produce stark cultural discontinuities. While there are social conflicts and political uncertainties there are also the inter-facing of a nagar and a nation.

Thus, history appears as an ensemble of Indo-nostalgic truth. The basic issue on which the plot of the novel is built is Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid conflict, to present the black and white stereotypes of Hindu fundamentalists and the secularist. Hindu and Muslims are used to make the mockery of the kernel issue of the novel. The other major issue, which the novel highlights, is the reproductive rights of women which Priscilla witnesses and experiences.

4.1 Endorsing stereotypes to bring out Indo-nostalgia:

The kernel point of the novel is to show how ungrateful and brutal India is and Indo-nostalgic communal Indians are to Priscilla. To this end, Riot would surpass colonialist texts and erect a binary opposition of the Indian ‘other’ to the economical, cultural and moral superiority of the western ‘self’. America, being the novel’s dominant point of view, situates itself as a virtuous self that scornfully evaluates the economic, cultural and moral decadence of the Indians. It is done through a discourse of stereotypes on the degeneracy of the place and persons that are presented as confronting to the Indian type. Commenting on the stereotypical production of Indian cultural structure in Riot, David Huggart (2006:37) asserts:

It fixes individuals or groups in one place denying their own sense of identity and presuming to understand them on the basis of prior knowledge that is at best defective.
In *Riot*, the tone for stereotyping of India to project Indo-nostalgia is set by the very choice of its representative setting, Zalilgarh, a fictional town in Utter Pradesh. Priscilla writes her friend Cindy Valeriani about it, depicting India, which is murderously adding to the deterioration of the environment:

August is murderous in Zalilgarh, but it is not as bad as Mayor June, before the monsoon, when you step into the street and think you have walked into an oven...as it gets colder you’ll have the pollution to cope with – the smoke from hundreds of charcoal braziers on the sidewalks, thousands of buses and cars and auto rickshaws, and God knows how many factories, all rising to be trapped under the winter mist rising from the river. (p.199)

In contrast to the human dignity, liberty and self determination of the American characters; the Indians in *Riot* present stereotypes marked with lack of self esteem, determination, moral dishonesty, cowardice, crookedness, ingratitude and total nostalgic surrender to social structures. These features are equally found amongst all characters to bring out the effect of Indo-nostalgia. The only character, who partially rises above these inferiorities, is the hero Lakshman, but that is consequent on his being rated by Priscilla as ‘Western.’ (p.153) He is a mimic of the west, with his elite education and love for Oscar Wilde; but also very much rooted in Indo-nostalgia which fixes him as Brahmin, an orthodox domestic with a frigid and conservative wife Geetha. She conforms to the Indo-nostalgic archetype of *pathivrata* (i.e. husband-devoted). Lakshman is the character in which the East and the West come into conflict. Being the District Magistrate, he is unable to win over the morally constructing forces of India. He sincerely regrets himself, being an Indian:

What benevolent God has brought her to me, in irredeemable Zalilgarh? I could not have invented Priscilla if she did not exist: her luminous beauty, her intelligence and sincerity of purpose, her complete openness to me... (p.155)

Through Lakshman, Indianness is denigrated by making him self-consciously exploited and Priscilla’s sexual openness for a cowardly escape from domestic sexual boredom. When, Priscilla pressurises him to leave his family to accompany her to America, with his suggested ‘Indian’ moral cowardice. To defend himself against her proposition, Lakshman says, emphasising typical Indian marital custom:
In my culture, no man with any self respect gives his mangalsutra, his ring, his name, to a woman who has been with other men before. (p.218)

Moreover, the stereotype of the corrupt and nepotic Indian bureaucracy comes before our eyes in the person of Gurinder Singh; who suppresses the postmortem report of Priscilla that, she was carrying his child. He also procures Lakshman for Priscilla’s scrapbook found at the place of her murder; the evidence which could have proved his relationship with her and thus implicated him in the case.

In the characters of Priscilla and her mother Katherine, a liberated, dignified and self-determining womanhood is pitched against the Indian counterparts, like Geetha and Nandini, who are cast in Indo-nostalgic stereotypes representing the exact opposite of these stern qualities. The American / Indian binary in terms of feminity is expressively encoded in the binaries of Katherine / Geetha and Priscilla / Nandini. They represent pairs of maritally wronged wives and sexually exploited spinsters respectively. In a nutshell, all the Indian characters in Riot are portrayed to foreground a national degeneracy to America’s cultural superiority, taken for granted.

Shashi Tharoor earnestly wants us to believe that Riot has been written with the purpose of awakening the reader’s conscience to the horrors of communalism in India. America has done him only good, including the high profile UN job and the life, he secured. Having got pleasantly used to economic opulence, moral liberalism, individualism and also her first World Hygiene, it is quite natural to feel shameful disgust towards his home country which stumbles in Third World cream, poverty and ethical narrowness. This sense of shame makes him seek to form for the novel that would effectively distort the authorial voice but would still hit the target of India-busting and America-eulogising. In an ‘Afterword’ to the novel, he confesses his Indo-nostalgic concern as:

We live, the late Octavio Paz once wrote, between oblivion and memory. Memory and oblivion: how one leads to the other, and back again, has been the concern of much of my fiction. History, the old saying goes, is not a web woven with innocent hands. (p.269)
However, literature is a vehicle for the representation of the history and it contains nostalgic insights into the formation of historical moments. It reveals the processes and tensions by which historical changes come out. *Riot* is neither a love story nor an analysis of disaster; but it is an Indo-nostalgic polemic on contemporary Indian history, a refusal to let the past to be lost. The novel is about “the unknowability of history, the way in which identities are constructed through an imagining history; and finally, perhaps, the unknowability of the truth.” (Interview: 2005) But historical periods are not unified entities. Professor Mohammed Sarwar asks:

But who owns India’s history? Are there my history and his history about my history? This is in many ways, what this whole Ram Janambhoomi agitation is about - about the reclaiming of history by those who feel that they were, at one point, written out of the script. But can they write a new history without doing violence to the inheritors of the old? (p.110)

Thus, history is a monolith. There are discontinuous and contradictory histories. Historians can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached and objective. We cannot transcend our own historical situation. The past is not something that confronts from already written texts of all kinds. Explaining the relationship between literature and history John Brannigan (2005:170) says, we should see:

Literatures as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making and therefore rife with the creative forces, disruptions and contradictions, of history.

*Riot* not only opens the question of causality with reference to a particular and personal history, but also highlights the inadequacies of Indo-nostalgic historical paradigms. Perhaps, the most fundamental question explored in the novel is the question of what really constitutes history. During the last three decades the study of history has increasingly taken account of the discursive modes through which the past is constituted. In Linda Huncheon’s (2002:63) words:

The narrativization of past events is not hidden; the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed –
not found - order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure.

In *Riot*, Tharoor has managed to weave together a love story, through potent, social commentary and broad Indo-nostalgic historical analysis. The implied idea in the novel is that history, like literary text, is a fictional construct that is open to interpretation and that writing history inevitably involves the use of formal literary devices such as points-of-views, tropes and narrativisation. In the novel, Tharoor’s conflicting and colluding sub-texts suggest that Hindus and Muslims have generally co-existed peacefully in India and that history is manufactured in the service of ulterior motives. For Tharoor, understanding the past is the way to future. Rudyard Hart says:

...we at Coke...don’t worry too much about the past. It’s your future we want to be part of. (p.205)

Thus, the casual attitude of the Americans towards the ‘past’ is in stark contrast to that of the Indians; who are deeply immersed in re-imagining their history through their sweet nostalgic experiences.

Moreover, the question of representing India in literature through Indo-nostalgic fictional operation is central to the work of Shashi Tharoor. *Riot* holds up yet another mirror to India’s contemporary social and political history that continues to make the secular heart cry. The novel is an expression of the cultural, personal and spiritual diversity of the multicultural world of Indian society; where no single philosophy, belief, solution can play the extreme wealth of rich Indian cultural heritage. Speaking of much enamored India’s diversity, Tharoor (Interview: 2003) observes:

The reason India has survived all the stresses and strains that have beset it for fifty years and that led so many to predict its imminent disintegration, is that it maintained consensus on how to manage without consensus.

As we read the novel, we traverse through a wide range of events in India’s past. In the miniature set of Zalilgarh, we listen to distinct voices that enable us to reach into Indian history and the identity politics of its communal groups and see how it has shaped the politics of contemporary India. Tharoor suggests that, in India, Hindus and Muslims wield “history like a battleaxe against each other.” (p.205) However, Shashi Tharoor has attempted to contextualise India’s past to
interpret and understand it better so as to redeem her present that continues to churn in the fires of communal strife. Though religion lay at the root of the partition of India, the Indian constitution does not endorse that India is only for the Hindus and not for Muslims. India is a country for everybody and every faith has as much place in the Indian mosaic as the majority faith. In fact, what he emphasises in the novel is that ‘an Indian Muslim is as much an Indian as an Indian Hindu.’

Thus, Tharoor creates with his literary skill the postcolonial flavour. The reader is left with a neat drawing of a woman volunteer who loses her life for no rationale. What emerges finally in the book for readers is not a portrait of Priscilla and her murder but a snapshot of a contemporary India struggling with the forces of communalism, violence and the best intentions of men and women gone out of kilter. Thus, in a nutshell, Riot: the Novel expresses the anguish of isolation and the social mores of an Indian society through Indo-nostalgic standpoint. In this connection Shelley Walia (2001:35) avers:

Filled with subtlety, grace and beauty...Riot takes on a range of topics fusing life, art, history, class and culture into a vibrant novel about communalism in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition.

Tharoor performs the greater task of handling down the things and the memories of great epics in his own innovative Indo-nostalgic style. He uses myth and history with a typical literary purpose. With his experimental writing literature acquires simultaneity with the present. He chooses to combine myth and history in a bid to present the historical will in a novel way, which tends to split it from the age old irons of cultural hegemony. He seeks to re-motivate history with his experimental use of myth. He has deployed myth by humane terms. His literary move towards politics faithfully duplicates the bewildered postcolonial situation. His attitude of self-reflexiveness reflects on his position on the creation process and confirms their harmony with the grassroots. He describes the conditions that are revolutionary in the present day context. The artistic illusion in his fiction comes out of the tension between Indo-nostalgic instinct and consciousness, which drives on all the layers of society for future reality. He reflects an exact aesthetic understanding of social and historical reality and achieves historical insights
crucial to the comprehension of the forces shaping the present and the future, which will certainly help to comprehend the struggle between the forces of progress and reaction, life and decay in the postmodern life. Contrasting with the postmodern texts, Tharoor's novel moves back and forth in terms of time, space, and authenticity depending on the situation for which he uses myth for demarcation of Indo-nostalgic truth. He (tharoor.in) says:

...in the subsequent default of a particular phase of dominant culture, there is then a reaching back to those meanings and values which were created in actual societies and actual situations in the past, which still seem to have significance, because they represent areas of human experience and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses or even cannot recognize.

The multifarious nature of culture as represented in the social definitions of traditions, institutions, is related to forceful inter-relations, which stands historically varied and variable. The residual element, being the major area of the past, has been retained and incorporated by subtle interpretation, dilution and projections or by discriminating inclusion or exclusion. Tharoor makes serious and sincere efforts to redefine and reshape English prose with myths, humour or the themes as enormous as the subcontinent. His writing records seismograph of an Indo-nostalgic anxiety and shudder that our contemporary society is facing at the moment. From the intensive reading of the novel, it can be claimed that the novel does not provide an interpretation of reality in terms of myth; it only parodies in terms of contemporary facts – an Indo-nostalgic method felt to be forced, capricious, contrived and artificial with the result that the parallelism tends to be unconvincing and seems to collapse at crucial points. Tharoor consciously utilises the variety of myths and archetypes to give meaning to the social, political and cultural milieu of India. Both history and myth, lend a novel dimensions to the over determining of the literary text, in modernist and postmodernist trends. The novel shares a variety of literary devices such as irony, satire, force and parody to enrich its literariness and heighten the literary worth. In this connection Tharoor (tharoor.in) comments:

...the re-written text consists in allegorical operations. It is written in terms of some master code or ultimately determining instance', the particular master code exerted for
the purpose is its ‘transcendental signified’. The text has to blurt out its master code and thereby several its metaphysical moorings and ideological underpinnings. The text projects the various notions of unity and coherence of consciousness. It always presupposes a concept of unconscious. It affects this process through some mechanism of mystification, repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a more fundamental interpretive code. The act of demystification falls within texts the ambit of hermeneutics of negative kind.

He, thus, uncovers before the readers the venomous ideas and contemptuous of the outfits operating in the shifting domain of religion and politics. Besides, he affirms and enhances Indian cultural identity through his novel Riot by focusing on pluralism and openness in India’s kaleidoscopic culture by blending his modern and investigational technique through indo-nostalgic narration. He also aims to broaden the understanding of rich Indian culture and historical heritage. The single greatest contribution of India to world civilisation is to demonstrate that there is nothing antithetical between diversity and nationhood. As Shashi Tharoor (2000:46) mentions with pride:

I write of India with multiple truths and multiple realities, an idea that is greater than the sum of its parts.

In his opinion, the future of India depends on enlarged freedom for the multi-racial and the poly-cultural, in the world of shifting, decaying and emerging power centers.