CHAPTER IV
MYTH AS AN ALLEGORY IN
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THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor an Indian politician, an acclaimed diplomat also served as a minister of state in the government of India for external affairs and Human Resource Development. He is also former United Nations official. Another identity of Shashi Tharoor is that of an eminent writer. He belongs to the Post-Modernism. He got recognition both as a writer and as a diplomat. He was born in London on 9 March, 1956 to a Malgudi family of Lily and Chandran Tharoor, originally belonging to Palakkad region of Kerala. His father worked in London, Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta. Therefore, Tharoor subsequently moved to these places and got education at Montfort school, Yercaud in 1962 then at Campion school, Mumbai from 1963-68. He completed his high school from St. Xavier’s college in Calcutta from 1969-71. He graduated in history from St. Stephen’s college, Delhi. In 1975 he moved to the United States to study Law and Diplomacy. He completed his Ph.D at the age of twenty two. He has authored fifteen works of fiction and non-fiction since 1981. He wrote his first novel The Great Indian Novel in 1989. This is considered to be his masterpiece work. His other novels are Show Business (1992), and Riots (2001). He has written a short story entitled as The Five Dollar Smile and Other Stories (1990). There are some non-fiction works- Reason of State (1982), Indian: From Midnight to the Millennium

*The Great Indian Novel* is a fusion of the greatest Indian epic *Mahabharata* and the history of India. It is Tharoor’s most ambitious classical novel. Tharoor has rewritten the Indian history from the freedom movement to the regime of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He intermingle a two-thousand year-old myth with the fictional events of Indian politics and history. The work is laden with satire and irony. It gained wide acclaim internationally as it presents an effective use of parody while depicting the mythical Hindu epic and uses the instrument of parody for mocking and satirizing the historic events. It is for this effort that Shashi Tharoor won *The Hindustan Times Literary Award* for the best book of the year in 1990 and *Commonwealth Prize* in 1991. Website ‘Goodreads’ quotes the review of a Japanese reader:

This story is based on the *Mahabharata*, a classic epic of Indian mythology and is quite a journey: Intense, heartbreaking, hilarious. Just like India herself. It encompasses the entire history of modern India, since the struggle for independence. This book is listed as one of 1001 books to read before you die, and I attest that it deserves its place there. (Web)

Shashi Tharoor uses the postmodern technique in his novels. His writings are predominant in the effective use of satire.
‘Satire’ is defined as a literary genre, in which the follies, vices, abuse or weaknesses of human beings or individuals are depicted through the means of ridicule, burlesque, caricature, irony, lampoon, allegory or through other methods. It is not only used to present humor but it also provides a means to the author to show his disagreement regarding something. Satire is a popular literary mode used in the literary works as a means of criticism. It was prevalent in the works of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope etc.

The Mahabharata which is considered as a sacred text of Hinduism also inculcates the teachings of Bhagvat Gita within it. In The Great Indian Novel Shashi Tharoor successfully accomplishes the retelling of the sacred text of the Mahabharata. He has interwine this epic with the legendary tale of the Indian independence beginning with the arrival of Britishers up to the regime of Indira Gandhi. All the prominent leaders of freedom struggle have been recast in the characters of the Mahabharata. Krishna, Ganesh and other Hindu Gods are also recast by Tharoor. The novelist has put into consideration the sacred association of these mythological figures and their role in the Mahabharata.

In The Great Indian Novel Tharoor uses parody to bind the ancient epic in the political history since the freedom struggle. His work is not just an imitation instead he exposes the follies, strength and weaknesses through this satirical parody. The
novelist has embodied both verse and prose forms in this novel. This form of satire is known as Menippean satire, which is a prose narrative that usually contains some verse. Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* starts with a verse:

What follows is the tale of Vyasa,
great Vyasa, deserver of respect;
a tale told and retold,
that people will never cease telling;
a source of wisdom
in the sky, the earth, and the lower world;
a tale the twice-born know;
a tale for the learned,
skilful in style, varied in metres,
devoted to dialogue human and divine.

P. Lal

The Mahabharata of Vyasa (TGIN. 13).

Rajgopalachari, a freedom fighter who played a major role in the struggle for independence was also an important figure in the Gandhian campaign is recast in the character of Ved Vyasa in Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*. The portrayal of Vyasa in the novel is ironical. Vyasa calls himself a bastard for the story of his life is full of irrelevancies and is capable of becoming the Great Indian Novel. “I suppose I must begin with myself. I was born with the century, a bastard, but a bastard in a fine tradition, the offspring of a fisherwoman seduced by a travelling sage”
Parody lies in the narrative of Ved Vyasa. Here Tharoor inadvertently ridicules the customs of the Vedic culture and therefore mocks at the contemporary society while depicting the story of Satyavati, the mother of Ved Vyasa, popularly known as V.V.V in the novel. He mocks at the tradition where the Brahmins and sages were often attracted towards a village girl, who readily agrees to fulfill his wishes, as “no maiden wished to invite a saintly curse upon her head” (TGIN. 19). The same happened with Satyavati. According to the Mahabharata sage Parashar was transfixed by the beauty of Satyavati belonging to a fisher folk and requests her father to let her accompany him for pursuing higher learning. Tharoor ridicules this custom as it gives rise to numerous unmarried mothers and illegitimate children as Ved Vyasa. In the words of V.V, “India is littered with the progeny of these twice-born travelling salesman of salvation, and I am proud to be one of them” (TGIN. 19).

In The Great Indian Novel Mahatma Gandhi is portrayed as Ganga Datta- Bhisma. He is thin as a papaya tree, bald, wearing round-rimmed glasses. He is in charge of Hastinapur. His character portrayal is quite different from that of his contribution in the freedom of India. In the novel Ganga Datta is the son of Shantanu and his first wife, Ganga. She leaves him before giving birth to their son. Later on Shantanu marries Satyavati. Before their marriage Shantanu requires to fulfill a condition put up by Satyavati’s father that none other than her
son will be his heir-apparent. To this Ganga Datta promised the fisherman, Satyavati’s father that he should let his father marry his daughter and he will renounce his ownership to the throne. He replied:

But I have made a vow, and I’ll ensure it’s fulfilled. I’ve just renounced my claim to the throne. Now in front of all these nobles of the realm, I swear never to have children. I shall not marry, I shall desist from women, so your daughter’s offspring had never fear a challenge from mine (TGIN. 23).

In this way the young crown prince becomes the ex-crown one. The British Residents accepted the “shiny soup-and fish” (TGIN. 25) by putting away Ganga Datta from the imperial list.

Mahatama Gandhi who is recast as Ganga Datta is seen to be accomplished by an army of non-violent satyagrahis. And in the later course of his life is assassinated in the crowd. Here Mahatama Gandhi a great freedom fighter and a pioneer in the struggle for independence is reduced to the task of a matchmaker and a policy maker for the kingdom. This is the parody introduced by Tharoor. He immerses himself to the philosophical study of Vedas, laws of manu, religion. His rejection to get married and sexual forbearance still persists. The novelist sneers at such attitude. He introduces a brief ditty:

Old Gangaji too
is a good Hindu
for to violate a cow
would negate his vow (*TGIN*. 26)

Gangaji often becomes the subject of humour for the English-educated who disagrees with his thinking and his love for the conservation of traditions and heritage. After the death of Vichitravirya, brother to Ganga Datta, the pressure of getting married to his brother’s wives- Ambika and Ambalika is laid upon him. Either he should get married or they will lose their territory. Still without a heir that can be annexed in those days by the British. Ganga Datta refuses to do so out of his vow to celibacy.

In order to rescue the Raj which is still heirless Ved Vyasa here V.V. is evoked by mother Satyavati. He was given the task of dynastic succession through Ambika and Ambalika. V.V says as he leaves the place, “the secret of my visit locked in these wombs” (*TGIN*. 32). Tharoor mocks at this adulterous practice or rather a custom prevalent in the Vedic age where the Brahmins or another son of king is called to procreate with the widow of the dead king, for providing an heir-apparent. The novelist satirizes the situation and inculcates an element of mockery to this heroic epic by depicting the ambition of Satyavati to see her offspring’s on the throne. She calls Ved Vyasa to Hastinapur, when she fails to convince her son, Ganga to “take Ambika and Ambalika to bed” (*TGIN*. 30). Ved Vyasa who is a son of Satyavati through her pre-marital union with Parasar, is brought
to save the barran kingdom of Hastinapur. Ved Vyasa the narrator in the novel confesses the entire episode to Ganapathi, who is appointed to write down the narrator.

Jawaharlal Nehru is a caricature of Dhritarashtra. Through his manners he appears to be over-educated. He has a vision of its own for his kingdom, Hastinapur and his subjects. Tharoor observes: “I have often wondered what might have happened had he been able to see the world around him as the rest of us can. Might India’s history have been different today?” (TGIN. 41) He marries Gandhari who belongs to an illustrious family of Allahabad. Their daughter Priya Duryodhani becomes the focus of his life. His qualities of being a great democrat and an eminent Prime Minister have been given less attention. His personal life emerges as a parody in the narration.

Pandu is a caricature of Subash Chandra Bose who like Dhritarashtra got English education. He strikes at a teacher, an Englishman who called Indian’s ‘dogs’. Gangaji, the man in loin cloth proposes Kunti Yadav as a mother for Pandu while he will marry Madri, the second time. Gangaji gives the responsibility of the States Department of Hastinapur to Vidur. He wants to devote himself to seek higher pursuits. He wants to quest for truth and freedom. It is due to his efforts that untouchability is no longer legal in Hastinapur. Ved Vyasa narrates the lesson of non-violence the weapon of disobedience used by Gangaji against the Britishers. His principles and philosophies are praiseworthy but
hard to implement. The participation of Gangaji-Gandhi in the national movement doesn’t get much acclaim. Instead his modesty and ideals are mocked in various ways. Tharoor observes:

Gangaji was the kind of person it is more convenient to forget. The principles he stood for and the way in which he asserted them were always easier to admire than to follow. While he was alive, he was impossible to ignore, once he had gone, he was impossible to imitate (TGIN. 47).

The image of Gandhi, his movements during the freedom struggle, his ideals are tracked with satire. An expression of disgust is rightly expressed in the remarks of Krishna Mohan Pandey. He says: “The way the whole description is given does injustice to the father of the nation” (Singh. 248). Tharoor gives the reference of Mohammad Ali Karna who resisted following the belief of secularism which the Kaurava under Gangaji’s principles tries to pursue. Tharoor has shown the difference in perspectives which leads to the formation of a new group, a muslim group demanding freedom from British. Karna becomes the President for this party. He gave a slogan, “Independence without Hindu domination” (TGIN. 148)

Tharoor scoff at the principles and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, represented as Gangaji in the novel. The strange which Gangaji hears before his death says:
What a wreck you are, Bhishma! The voice went on. ‘What a life you’ve led. Spouting on and about our great traditions and basic values, but I don’t see the old wife you ought to be honoring in your dotage. Advising everyone about their sex life, marrying people off, letting them call you the Father of the nation, but where is the son you need to light your funeral pyre (TGIN. 232).

The death of the father of the nation was considered as a great loss to the country. The greatest martyr of the nation has been portrayed with utter humiliation in the novel.

V.V. memorises the glory of Hastinapur before the intrusion of the British resident. The birth of Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidur symbolizes a boon to Hastinapur which is known to be the golden bird for its immense prosperity. There was abundance of crops, monsoon came at appropriate time, no sign of natural calamities were witnessed, and people lead a protected and blessed life. These conditions never persist for a long period. The intruders acquire benefit out of our weaknesses.

The era of the annexation of India by the British government and the freedom struggle that begins as a result of it has been confined by the novelist in the mythical framework of the Mahabharat. The Jalliawala bagh massacre has been recast as the Hastinapur massacre where Colonel Rudyard then General Dyer ordered to fire on the innocent public of Hastinapur. Gangaji now enters politics along with his family- Dhritarashtra,
Pandu and Vidur. Gangaji’s intolerance of the foreign rule has driven him into the war of freedom. While it is Dhritarashtra’s discontent in fatherhood and ill health of Gandhari that he immerses himself into politics wholeheartedly. The party made Gangaji its politic and spiritual mentor.

After the annexation of Hastinapur Gangaji announce a mass rally at Bibigarh Gardens. He is going to address the residents of Hastinapur. One of the most terrible events in history, the Hastinapur massacre in which “only 84 bullets wasted” (TGIN. 81) while 379 were dead and 1137 injured. This event is considered to be the true madness and the worst face of colonialism by Gangaji. *Vinasha Kale, Viparita Buddhi* (TGIN. 81). Gangaji plans to win this battle too on the principles of non-violence and truth. These weapons worked at Motihari, so it will at Hastinapur. Mahatama Gandhi’s movements are presented as a matter of fun making.

Tharoor has also portrayed the discrimination done by Gandhiji between Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose on providing opportunities of leading the party. Gangaji-Gandhi presented Dhritrashtra- Jawaharlal Nehru as a guide to the public. After he is gone, Dhritrashtra will lead the residents of Hastinapur. Though “he is blind, but he sees far. He has the capacity to lead” (TGIN. 121). In the novel Pandu is different in ideals and political style than his elder brother, Dhritarashtra. Though believed in non-violence but he keeps himself prepared
for any attack too, for this he practices martial arts. The virtues of Pandu seem to be overpowered by the charisma of Dhritarashtra. Both of them participated equally in the independence movement. But the efforts of Dhritarashtra are highlighted. Priya Duryodhani always speaks about the immense sacrifices her father made for the country. Whereas “…poor, tough, sacred, calloused Pandu with the smell of sweat on his brow and the dust of India on his sandals” (TGIN. 112) is always forgotten. Such is the injustice of faith.

The rift between the brothers, Dhritarashtra and Pandu widened as the war between Hastinapur-India and British grew intense. Pandu’s bitterness during a meeting of the Working Committee reflects the paleness in relationships. “The Kaurava Trinity…the father, the son and the Holy Ghost” (TGIN. 113) exclaims Pandu. He realized that his leadership in the party has been undermined. After the declaration of Dhritarashtra-J.L.Nehru as heir to Mahaguru-Gangaji-Gandhi, the trust between the two Princes of Hastinapur-Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose dies. This provokes Pandu to resign from the party. Pandu’s story after his resignation and the discrimination he faced on the hands of Gangaji while appointing duties and positions in the party has been narrated in the form of verse by Tharoor. He writes:

The time has come, I say tonight
To cast aside our veil;
To stand like men, to arm, to fight
to think of blood, not bail

Tonight non-violent Pandu dies!
No more shall I be weak;
For now I toil and exercise
To be strong as Indian teak

‘Away with Tolstoy, Ruskin, Buddha:
Their ideas just make little men litter.
No more “truth-force”, only yuddha-
It’s time to learn from that chap Hitler’.

So saying, our angry hero
Became the country’s first Fascist;
Admiring Roma’s latest Nero
He practiced how to clench his fist (TGIN. 176).

The Dandi March initiated by Gandhiji on 12\textsuperscript{th} March, 1930 is considered to be a landmark in the history of freedom struggle. This historic march leads from Sabarmati to the Dandi coast. This Salt-Satyagarha took place to violate the salt laws and tax lay on salt. This movement had a tremendous influence on Indians especially on women. As a result the representation of women participants was remarkable. Tharoor recast this historic event of the Indian freedom struggle as the great Mango March in the novel.
The British government levied tax on mango fruit, considering it as a cash crop. After the unfavorable response of the British government the march takes place. Gangaji-Gandhi personally breaks the law of the mango Act and is arrested but he requests his followers not to practice violence and raise their hands in anger. The procession was headed by Gangaji-Gandhi, bald, thin, bonny legged pioneers other satyagrahi’s. The novelist calls the movement “a low-risk, strategy” (TGIN. 122) while the leader is not a saint but “a master tactician with his feet on the ground” (TGIN. 122).

Shashi Tharoor also satirizes the outmoded notion of salvation that can be achieved only to a person having a son to light his funeral pyre. In a discourse with Kunti, wife of Pandu he explains the categories of sons given in our ancient scriptures. He says:

I have learned to live without sex, as Gangaji has done for so much longer, but I cannot, like him, hope for salvation in the next life without a son, no ritual, no sacrifice, no offering, no vow will help me attain the moksha that denied the sonless man (TGIN. 70).

Furthermore, it is a subject of intense mockery that our tradition teaches to be liberal when the question of procreation arises. Pandu refers to their family tradition when he asks Kunti to give him a son his heir from some other man. “So you see? You’d just be following a family tradition. You’ve always done as I asked
you to- so go and find yourself a good Brahmin and give me a son” (TGIN. 71). The sanctity of marriage and relations has been ridiculed in these descriptions.

Tharoor brings up the irony explicit in the Kunti’s reply to her husband, “I don’t really know how to tell you this, but I already have a son” (TGIN. 71). This son of Kunti is Mohammad Ali Karna. He was brought up by a Muslim couple after kunti abandoned him. His foster father is a chauffeur to a rich man. He is a successful lawyer now, trained from London. After his return London, he has joined the Kaurava party- congress party. Desire for the male child seems to be prevalent from the ancient times. Here Tharoor gives reference to an instance, the news of the birth of our late leader, Priya Duryodhani was born, and caricature to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi wasn’t accepted with much delight as Dhritarashtra was anxious for the birth of a son. Besides this Gandhari think about the boon of Lord Shiva that she will be blessed with hundred sons. She feels guilty of not producing a son that her husband needed. V.V. tells Ganapati, that he tries to console Gandhari for her daughter would one day rule over India. Destiny had treasure a history behind her birth. V.V. says, your daughter “will be equal to a thousand sons. This I promise you” (TGIN. 74). Gandhari never gained appreciation by her husband throughout her life. She decides to sacrifice her life and cling to her blindfold bearing it as a marital symbol.
The _swayamvara_ of Draupadi Mokrasi- Democracy in which Arjun wins her hand and marries her also raises a question on the _dharma_. Nakul informs Kunti about a surprise they (Pandavas) are going to give her. And her response “Share whatever you have brought amongst the five of you-equally” (_TGIN_. 314). This statement of Kunti causes constration among Pandavas. Tharoor shifts the narrative to the dilemma into which the Pandavas has been plunged by their mother whether they should adopt polyandry or break the oath given to their mother, to obey her in every condition. To this Ved Vyasa replies that our _dharma_ incorporates severe action against violating the vow given to the parents than marrying several men. Draupadi’s invoking Lords has been put up in a manner as if she is a girl of modern generation and pleads for help. “I prayed to Shiva, Draupadi said, ‘to Jehovah, to the Virgin Mother of my adoptive parents, to the Allah of the Muslims and’…to the Archbishop of Canterbury” (_TGIN_. 316).

Meanwhile, the national movement for independence gathers momentum. The Kaurava party- congress under the leadership of Gangaji-Gandhi has raised a huge army against the British. While on the other hand a new figure, a young man from the muslim community entered into the scene. His face seems glowing like that of sun with the bright little half-moon on his forehead. He is known to be Mohammad Ali Karna, a growing lawyer in Bombay. His “poise and confidence were matched by
his forensic skill. Few dared debate with him and those who did emerged shorn and shredded by his razor-edged tongue” (TGIN. 137).

The Britishers designs to divide the country under their policy of divide and rule. Before the entry of the Britishers religion never interrupted with the national politics. It was their amoral strategy and immoral tactics that helps them to draw a line of partition between the Hindus and the Muslim candidates. Such used to be the administration of the British while they say:

In their own benighted Britain they would never have thought of making the Jews of Golders Green queue separately to put a kosher koilhai into the House of Commons—but such ideas were too good for the primitive, backward natives they were schooling in democracy (TGIN. 135).

The creation of separate electorates gains acclaim by few whereas some senior Muslim politicians, many Parsi and Christian notables joined the Kaurava party. Karna emerges and he too becomes a part of the Karauva political scene. Karna’s alliance with the party soon comes to an end. He would rather be a king or a minister in the great empire. His ego led to his resignation. Apart from this he finds Mahaguru, Gangaji to secular and therefore, too much of a Hindu, this makes him more consciously a Muslim. Once Gangaji declared his faith in all the religions and says: “I am a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, a Zoroastrian, and a Jew” (TGIN. 142) to this Mohammad Ali
Karna responds that only a Hindu can speak such words. This makes him mistrustful of the Gangaji Dutta. “It was not Islam that separated him from Gangaji, but Hinduism” (TGIN. 142).

The personality of Karna leaves a lasting impression upon the nation. V.V.ji “disdained the mullahs and disregarded their prohibitions…” (TGIN. 142) for him praying five times a day, he prided himself on his scientific and therefore agonistic, cast of mind. His outlook was that of an Englishman of his age and profession: “modern, formalist, rational, and secular. It was not Islam that separated him from Gangaji, but Hinduism” (TGIN. 142).

Tharoor shifts the narrative from the freedom movement to the young prince and princesses of Hsatinapur. They are reared to be future leaders who are going to create a history for the nation. Dhritarashtra’s only child, Priya Duryodhani- Indira, grows up in Hastinapur away from the Pandavas, the famous five. Blind Dhritarashtra’s daughter possesses the gems in the form of her striking pair of eyes. They provide her strength and dynamism to face the circumstances. On the contrary the Pandavas, showed various signs of excellence. Each of them acquires a talent unique from the other.

The eldest one Yudhishtir- Morarji excelled in studies, grows up to be a judicious young man. Bhim- Army in the novel developed into a well-built man. His stature and strong arms
makes him a protector of his brothers. Arjun—the press is a union of virtues and brain. While the twins Nakul and Sahadev, simple, decent and honest in attitude grows up to possess special merits and other than their countrymen. The twins are taken to be the External affairs in this novel.

In the course of events the Pandavas meets a sage cladded in saffron. He introduces himself as Jayaprakash Drona. Gangaji-Gandhi appoints him as their tutor. He accepts the task of training the Pandavas along with his son, Ashwathaman. Tharoor introduces a hilarious narration during a training session. Jayaprakash Drona tells them to imagine themselves as a revolutionary and their task is to target the picture of an English politician hanging there. He asks each of them—What do you see while looking at the target? Yudhishtir came first he replies, “I see an imperialist political figure…born thirtieth of November 1874…Home Secretary at thirty six…” (TGIN. 197). Next comes, Nakul, he replies to the same questions I can see, “An overweight, over the hill and overrated politician, a teller of bad after-dinner jokes, a gasbag…” (TGIN. 197). On Sahadev’s turn, he replies, “A representative of the worst of British colonialism, a die-hard enemy of our people, an oppressor…” (TGIN. 197). While Bhim says, I can see, “A fat man who seems to enjoy a good cigar. But I’ll kill him if you tell me to” (TGIN. 197). Ashwathaman replies the same. Arjun replies to the question, “I see my target…nothing else my mission is to hit this target. I see
nothing else. His background? His biography? His position? I need know none of that. I see my target. I see his head. Nothing else matter” (TGIN. 197).

Another stroke of satire is shown on the teacher taught relationship. This incident is given through the episode of Drona-Eklavya in the novel. Eklavya is portrayed as a twentieth century student who abstains from offering his thumb to his guru as Gurudakshina. He promises to give something else. He says: “…Oh please sir, not that! Ask me for anything else!” (TGIN. 198) Tharoor ridicules the formal relation between the student and teacher. Students are not devoted to their guru now-a-days.

After a long struggle the most awaited victorious moment appears. Dhritarashtra- Nehru becomes the first Prime Minister of independent Hastinapur- India. He announces the freedom in his emotional voice. He speaks with a sense of pride: “At the hour of darkness, as the world slumbers, India awakes to the dawn of freedom” (TGIN. 230). A new nation arises in the world map, Karnistan, which is named after its founder, Mohammad Ali Karna. The issues of the state Minimir arises and draws a line of enimity between Karnistan and Hastinapur. The new government engages its administration in the upbringing of the new nation. The saffron cladded sage- Jayaprakash Drona, becomes the Minister of State for Administrative Reform. His idiosyncracies and his style of being too personal at work make it difficult for him to live long in the government. Instead, he
decides to devote himself in the services of the society. His five students- the princes of Hastinapur offer to join him in his social work. Drona replies:

I’m not sure I want to inflict my plans on you, For Ashwathaman, of course, it’s a different matter-he’s my son. But the rest of you, princes of Hastinapur, wandering with me seeking social change in the villages-I don’t think it’s going to work. For one thing, you’ve never wandered around before. Ashwathaman and I have (TGIN. 264).

All the five of them- Yudhishtir- Morarji, Bhim-army, Arjun-press, Nakul and Sahadev- External affairs joined Drona and with Kunti’s permission leaves Hastinapur for the completion of their mission of bringing social work. Dhritarashtra’s friend and his companion in the struggle for freedom, V.Kanika Menon, Defence Minister who pioneered the Indian Home Rule League in London meet the newly appointed Prime Minister. He benefits his friend with a word of advice. Tharoor has presented this advice in the form of verse which follows as:

A King always make it clear
That in his realm he’s boss;
Nobody else, though near and dear,
May inflict on him a loss…

Any weakness must be concealed
As a tortoise hides his head;
A King must never be revealed
Quaking under his bed…

Keep your intentions to yourself-
Don’t reveal them on your face;
Purchase silence with your pelf
And pack a knife (in case)…

Dissimulate! when angry, smile,
Speak soft; then strike to kill;
Then weep- oh, never show your bile-
And mourn your victim still…

Regarding enemies, I only wish
you’d learn from the fisherman’s book;
He traps and slits and strips his fish,
And becomes what he doesn’t cook.

That’s the only way to treat all those
Who pose a threat to you;
They may genuflect, and touch your toes-
But don’t let them get to you.

Think of the future, it’s time to start
To anticipate the threat;
If you don’t grow callousness on your heart
You might just bleed to death (TGIN. 271).

The post-independence issues and political conflicts have been given due place in this amalgamation of myths and political history. The conflict between India-China has been Chakra-Hastinapur conflict. It arises when Chakra violated the Mac
Line-Mc Mohan line and marched into Tibet-Tibet which has an independent existence. Before the independent India came into existence the Britishers draw a border line between Tibet-Tibet and British India. Scottish resident Mac Donald draws this border so it was named after him. Dhritarashtra gives the slogan- “Hindi-Chakar bhai bhai” (TGIN. 300). Tharoor has changed this from the original being “Hindi-Chini bhai bhai”.

Tharoor shifts his narrative from the pre-independence era to the post-independence era and from the Prime Minister ship of Dhritarashtra to Priya Duryodhani’s assassination to the third Prime Minister of Hastinapur- India. The time is when the country reaches its fourth general elections. Though there is no opposition at the centre yet the Kaurava party loses majority in many states. Yudhishtir- Morarji reacted sharply to this calling it the result of weak leadership. This had not happened if Karna and his Muslim group had not left the country. Yudhishtir reminiscent of Gnagaji- Gandhi is a thin, bald figure. He feels Priya Duryodhani is not an appropriate face for the party and also for a Prime Minister. Whereas other leaders of the party believe her to be the appropriate representative of Prime Minister than Shishu Pal. Ved Vyasa remarks:

We want a Prime Minister with certain limitations, a Prime Minister who is no more than any minister, a Prime Minister who will decorate the office, rally the support of the people at large and let us run the country. None of us can play that role as well as
Priya Duryodhani can. She is easily recognizable she is known as her father’s daughter, and she will be more presentable to foreign dignitaries than poor little Shishu Pal ever was. And if we ever decide we have had enough of her-well she is only a woman (TGIN. 318).

V.V. believes a woman who is the mother and is also the procreator of this universe, is the driving force to our destiny. Such a lady can be a perfect leader. Apart from this Priya Duryodhani herself is a strong willed, determined, dramatic in style. These attributes are her greatest asset. She replied sternly to Yudhishtir when he questioned her leadership, “I think that if the elections have shown anything, it is that the people want a change…Priya Duryodhani said. I represent that change. The Kaurava party can’t do without me” (TGIN. 340).

Priya Duryodhani becomes assertive and arrogant after losing majority in the elections. Her insecurity converts her into an arrogant lady, who is against any sort of criticism. She saw her mother being hurt by her family and ignored at the hands of her father. From the experience of her mother she decides she will never let it happen to her. She never allows anyone to suppress her or influence over her. This is a lesson Priya as a young girl learnt from her mother’s life. The novelist has focused upon the stiffness of the Prime Minister, Priya Duryodhani while dealing with the Deputy Prime Minister, Yudhishtir- Morarji whose views always differs from hers. He objected when the
democracy is suspended and demands for a new party leader. He feels embarrassed when the Prime Minister ignores him and disdains his suggestions. He never gets an appointment to meet her when he needs. He complains to V.V. ji:

I’m Deputy Prime Minister but I know less about what’s going on than my own chaprassi. Hardly any files reach me, and my annotations on the ones that do are never acted upon (TGIN. 343).

V.V. ji wants Yudhishtir and Priya Duryodhani to compromise over the matter of change in the party leader. He wants that everyone in the party show loyalty to the Prime Minister. Yudhishtir agrees to the suggestion. Later on the attitude and ego of Priya Duryodhani compelled him to resign. A simple, straight forward, polite, truthful, honest person like Yudhishtir cannot bear the dishonor of his position. For him self-respect is more important than the position. He never thinks that, “An empty seat never benefits the one who has vacated it” (TGIN. 343).

In the meantime Draupadi Mokrashi-Democracy has been protected and sustained by the five brothers. Yudhishtir who believes in integrity and righteousness is impervious of corruption and injustice around him. He protects Draupadi Mokrashi. Bhim, a muscular man has joined the army. He is always present in the services of the motherland, whenever the country needs him in emergency and war. While Arjun,
represents the spirit of India, is the voice of common mass. His loud and vibrant voice gives expression to several people. He devotes himself to the services of the country and family as well. The twins, Nakul and Sahadev represent the twin pillars of India’s independence. They are India’s independent governance and administrative and diplomatic services provide safety to the Draupadi Mokrashi- Democracy. All these days Draupadi Mokrashi who is beautiful “began to appear plump, her instinctive smile creasing the flesh of her face in the slightest suggestion of a double chin…” (TGIN. 342).

Tharoor has recast Arjun, an immortal character of Mahabharata as press which played an important role during the emergency period. In the novel Arjun- the press exposes the evilness and hypocrisy prevailing in the society. He wanders throughout the country being the correspondent for his paper to see the immensity of the country. Tharoor’s imagination and amalgamation of the ancient myth of Mahabharata into the political history is commendable. His narrative technique and style of expression in the fusion of characters demands applaud. In the novel Arjun travels throughout the Hastinapur to find reveal the true face of the problems prevailing in the country. His role is similar to that of Indian press and media. Arjun’s journey to rural Bengal shows him the problems of Naxalites and Maoists. He witnessed the despair rising in the foothills of Himalayas, where he saw the poor village women struggling to
prevent the trees from cutting down; this is a reference to the Chipko movement. Moving towards the desert of Rajasthan, he finds the women and girls being disgraced in the district bazaars and were sold for little money. While he finds conflict rose due to linguistic issues in Madras, Bihar shows him the cruel face of draught. Being a journalist, Arjun is the voice of every common man. He wants to expose all the villainies hidden in the society.

The wheel of time moves and Priya Duryodhani who stands as the face of the party, a representative of the Kaurava party and Hastinapur too enforces the nationalization of bank and introduces legislation to discontinue the privy purses given to the ex-maharaja’s. Ashwathaman, JP Drona’s son who has now joined the Kaurava party and also the advisory of Priya Duryodhani gives this suggestion which is accepted readily and passed in the working committee. Once again Yudhishtir-Morarji faces humiliation that compelled him to resign from the working committee. The matter of nationalization affect the people specially bank employees as an earthquake. Similarly other political issues arise within the party, some of them related to the appointment of new President for the country. During these commotions in the party Duryodhani’s strategy, planning and plotting remains almost unfold and unpredictable. These conditions lead her to promulgate the situation of internal emergency in the country.
Moving to the narrative of the novel Tharoor has shown a
decline in the cohesion of the Kaurava party. This happens after
the Presidential elections in which Ekalavya- Fakruddin Ali
Ahmed in this novel becomes the President. The slogan
“Remove Duryodhani” (TGIN. 351) echoes everywhere. It is her
arrogance and attitude of dictatorship which results in a conflict
where she is left all alone. Tharoor observes:

At the end of it all, Priya Duryodhani stood alone amongst the
ruins of her old party, having smashed pieces all the pillars and
foundation that had supported her in the past. Alone, but
surrounded by the recumbent forms of newly elected supplicants
prostrating themselves amidst the rubble, the ciphers whose empty
heads collectively gave Duryodhani a bigger parliamentary
majority than even Dhritarashtra had ever enjoyed (TGIN. 351).

Jayaparakah Drona had disappeared from the political
prominence and lives in an ashram with few followers. “Drona
was a post-independence convert to the Mahaguru’s dogma of
non-violence” (TGIN. 344). JP Drona calls for a people’s
uprising against Priya Duryodhani. Yudhishtir- Morarji
accompanied him in his movement. The uprising and protest was
against the dishonesty of Priya Duryodhani’s government. They
raised the conscience of the public against corruption, police
brutality, raising prices, inefficiency of the bureaucrats, black
marketing, lack of goods, adulteration, caste distinction,
communal frenzy etc. All these issues raised a movement which
shakes up the government officials. Within few months several
followers joins Drona in this mass movement. JP Drona preaches students and government employees to join his new civil disobedience movement. He urges the youth to boycott the classes, clerks to withhold their taxes, union workers to raise strikes, government employees to disobey the orders. All this is planned to ignite people against the policies of the government and evils prevailing in the society. Slogan rises against Priya Duryodhani, demanding for her resignation. All over Hastinapur the roar demanded: “Down with Priya Duryodhani. Yudhishtir Zindabad! Long Live Opposition Unity! People’s Uprising Zindabad! (TGIN. 367)

V.V. ji believes that Drona’s step wasn’t appropriate. He tells Ganapati, “…the political chaos in the country, fuelled by Drona’s idealistic but confused uprising which a variety of political opportunists had joined and exploited could have led the country nowhere but to anarchy” (TGIN. 369).

Yudhishtir becomes a national hero as he undertook a fast until death. The tide this time seems to be anti-Kaurava and decisively away from the Prime Minister, Priya Duryodhani. Yudhishtir- Morarji provokes the mass rallies. In his earlier depiction of Yudhishtir had been shown as a meek fellow. He is made fun of by Tharoor while he seek JP Drona’s help to recover the ball from the well. Drona mocks at the Pandava brothers when they failed to take out their ball from the well. He says. “Is that all? You call yourself Kshatriyas, and you can’t even
recover a ball from a well? (*TGIN*. 156) This time it is the same Yudhishtra that ignites the mass movement with his guru Drona. The charisma of Priya Duryodhai becomes languid. The metaphors once used in her praise, “Ma Duryodhani” and “Duryodhani Amma” (*TGIN*. 355) no longer roars now. Once she represented the embodiment of women power having strength equivalent to the mother Goddess, Durga.

Priya Duryodhani herself is an embodiment of the *shakti* of a female. Her personality has different shades of black and white. Tharoor gives a precise depiction when he says:

The Prime Minister ruled like a goddess: black to liberal democrats, black to her political opponents (who were not all liberal democrats), while to adoring impoverished sansculottes at rural public meetings, white also to contented corpulent capitalists who shrugged off her strident socialist rhetoric and fuelled her party’s electoral machine with the profits they made through her less-than-socialist policies (*TGIN*. 368).

Priya Duryodhani’s political career confer a glimpse of her strong will, determination, power of decision making shrewdness and seeking benefit from everything. She once said that she had learned from the sacrifices of her mother which were obviously wasted on the services of her father. Hence she never sacrifices anything ahead of her self-interest. She never allows anyone from the Kaurava party or from her family to blindfold her eyes like her mother, Gandhari did. Therefore, her position in the
party remains dominating in spite of opposition. At the same
time when she ensnared with the complexities of politics and
charges of corrupt electoral practices against her during the last
election campaign. Priya Duryodhani in the midst of this political
crisis couldn’t have believed in the advice of anyone else than a
Bengali lawyer, Shakuni Shankar Dey also known as
“Duryodhani’s Kanika” (TGIN. 365). In the same manner as her
father Dhritarashtra has a confident, V.Kanika Menon. Tharoor
has recast this Bengali lawyer as Shakuni māma in the original
epic, Mahabharata, who is involved in every planning and
plotting against the pandavas and finally brings wreck to the
Kauravas.

Here, Tharoor narrates the political sequence where Priya
Duryodhani- Indira seeks Shakuni. S. Dey’s advice. His advices
of an internal siege- internal emergency originally that was laid
in 1975 by former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. This siege can
be defined to take place due to the threat observed to the security
of the nation from internal disruption. Shakuni added a clause to
his advice which makes Priya Duryodhani more firm to take the
decision. “No one has ever defined the permissible procedures
under an internal siege, which leaves it more or less up to us to
define them” (TGIN. 366).

Hereafter, Prime Minister, Priya Duryodhani takes a
historical decision which in a night changes the political history
of the country. At the midnight she promulgated the state of
siege-emergency. None from the Kaurava party or her cabinet knew this. But Ekalavya again has to pay for the favors earned by singing on the document. The circumstances worsen leading to the censorship of Arjuna-press, suspending fundamental rights, ceasing gathering at public places etc. V.V. remarks, “I was sensitive to the excessive formalism of some of the attacks on the siege the critics seemed to think that democracy had been overthrown” (TGIN. 369). Seige proves other name for tyranny at the hands of dictator Duryodhani. Her motive behind this seems to be arresting a number of opponents, imposing censorship on press. The worst still waits when she imposed a twenty point socio-economic program.

Under this the freedom of the Arjun-press is hampered along with a ban in strikes and political demonstrations, beautification programs, slum evacuation program, forced sterilization campaigns to control population etc. Media is restricted to express its grievances. It becomes silenced. Only the parliament remains unchanged. This is because Duryodhani could control it. But during the internal siege “a parliament placed above the people who elected it is no more democratic than an army that turns its guns upon the very citizens it is supposed to protect. That is why Priya Duryodhani’s parliamentary tyranny was better than the military dictatorship of neighbouring Karnistan” (TGIN. 384). The situation was turning drastic or dramatic nobody knows. It seems to be a blow on the
ideals of democracy propounded by Dhritrashtra- Nehru which has been violated by his daughter. Nayantara Sahgal observes about Nehru, “People could breathe free air, could move about freely. It is a very great thing to lose” (*A Voice of Freedom*. 112).

This is more than an authoritarian attitude of Priya Duryodhani. This is an irony in the entire episode. She should have allowed the press their opinion whether in favor of against. This would have proved or presents her decision of siege not an authoritarian or dictatorial. The disrobing of Draupadi was considered fatal for the Kaurava dynasty. This episode is a turning point in the *Mahabharata*. It has been criticized as a disgrace to humanity and a severe blow to the moral values. Shashi Tharoor has portrayed the disrobing of Draupadi Mokrashi- Democracy by Duhshasan on the directives of Priya Duryodhani. When all rights were ceased, freedom of expression and all sort of criticism are dismissed. In other words when democracy is vanquished the situation becomes the one that happens hundreds of years ago in the kingdom of Hastinapur where in the court of a king a lady, Draupadi is humiliated and dishonored. Here in the novel Shakuni Shankar Dey becomes the Shakuni *mama* of Kaurava’s and he plays the game of dice on the behalf of Kaurava’s. He wins the game and so Draupadi Mokrashi- Democracy is insulted. This is the insult of each and every individual who is a citizen of India and enjoys his/her fundamental rights. V.V. ji depicts the plight of Draupadi Mokrashi- Democracy to Ganapati. He says:
What can I tell you, Ganapati? Can I look into the hurt in her eyes and claim it didn’t matter? Can I acknowledge the little cuts and bruises and burns I had spotted on her arms and hands and face at each visit to her home and dismiss them, as Kunti did, as minor kitchen mishaps? Can I admit the terrible suspicion that her own husbands were ill-treating her, exploiting her, neglecting her, even ignoring her, and still excuse myself for having done nothing about it? Can I recall the sagging flesh that had begun to mask her inner beauty, the lines of pain that had begun to radiate from those crystal-clear eyes, the tiredness in the normally firm voice, and allow myself to pretend that I had noticed none of it, that none of these things, perhaps not even Draupadi herself, was real? (TGIN. 374)

The general elections that followed soon after Duryodhani suspended the state of internal seize remains decisive. Citizens of Hastinapur- India choose freely between democracy and dictatorship between *dharma* and *adharma*. Some called the elections not less than the great battle of the *Mahabharata*, ‘a contemporary Kurukshetra’ (TGIN. 391). Whether we talk about the battle as depicted in the ancient myth of *Mahabharata* or about the one we witnessed during the reign of Britishers than, which is not less than the battle of Kurekshetra. In this contemporary battle we fought for the restoration of our democracy. The fight was between the arrogant forms of the government monarchs and dictators on one side and democrats on the other side. We were the first in the world to vote for our
own subjugation. And this is what happens in the general elections - the defeat of Duryodhani or victory of a change.

In the closing chapter The Path to Salvation Tharoor concerns with the theme of dharma. He narrates Yudhishtir’s encounter with dharma in which he recollects all the fatal flaws of the Indians which lead her to collapse. Human beings are a collection of several attributes and flaws. We provide our services in our work place but we forget the greater part of our duty that is to conserve our values or dharma while pursuing our worldly duties. Those who are leading the nation, the political leaders are self-centered and arrogant. Their motive seems to prosper themselves rather than serving the country and countrymen. Talking about the eternal significance of the dharma Tharoor says:

If there is one great Indian principle that has been handed down through the ages, it is that of the paramount importance of practicing dharma at any price. Life itself is worthless without dharma. Only dharma is eternal (TGIN. 417).

In The Great Indian Novel Tharoor has depicted Mrs. Gandhi in the negative shade of her character- Priya Duryodhani. The role of Priya Durodhani is to jeopardize democracy. She is taken as an embodiment of the Kaurava and in a whole accumulates the evilness of the hundred Kaurava brothers. Her attempt to put democracy in danger was criticized all over. In the novel it is
shown through harming Bhima - which stands for defence. T.N. Dhar gives a portrayal of Mrs. Gandhi as depicted in *The Great Indian Novel*. He observes:

Events took on a dizzy town when, after the Allahabad High Court judgment, she declared a state of emergency in the country, which proved the most disastrous part of her tenure. It is interesting as well as significant that the emergency has been considered by the Indian English novelists as the most traumatic event of post-independence India. Sahgal devotes a whole novel to the emergency to dramatize its effects on the general ethos of the country. In Rushdie, it becomes the focal point of the degradation in the political and secular character of the country, which leads him to postulate two different kinds of India’s past. In Tharoor’s account it is a part of the deteriorating democratic culture of the country because of which the blame on Mrs. Gandhi is not as pronounced as in the other two. Tharoor understands the emergency in its very immediate context, when it was declared by Mrs. Gandhi (*Commonwealth Novels in English*, Vol.788, 1967-99: 142-143).

*The Great Indian Novel* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* have similar perspective. Both of these novels present an identical attitude towards the freedom struggle, the war for independence and partition. The declaration of Emergency which is one of the darkest phases in the post-independent history of India is also portrayed in a satirical way. The narrative techniques used in both the novels is different. Tharoor uses the narrative technique of mock-epic on the other hand. Salman
Rushdie uses the fantasy. There are some episodes that are identical in the narration of both the novels. The notions of nationalism, the principles and ideology of Gandhi had been mocked at. The depiction of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre is suggestive of an attempt of violence in the path of practicing non-violence during the freedom struggle. The depiction of the death of Mahatma Gandhi is based on the grounds of the post-modernist theory. Somewhere these novels negate the notion of nationalism and freedom struggle doesn’t gain much importance for them.

It is the genius of the novelist that perfectly blends the epical structure into the political history of India. Recasting of the epical characters into that of political leaders of the pre and post independence era is praise worthy. The selection of characters from the Mahabharata and harmonizing them into the political requires great deal of discretion. Tharoor’s imagination and artfulness makes it possible. It is due to his considerable brilliance that he matches the attributes of the epical characters with that of the Indian leaders. His innovative techniques, wit, wisdom and integrity in ideas are incorporated to accomplish this work. And the result is a masterpiece in the Indian English Fiction laden with humor, satire, irony infused in ancient myth and history.

The writers in Indian English Fiction have tried to use satire and irony in their works. R.K. Narayan’s comic vision is
occupied with satire and irony. His employs irony while depicting the social theme and also while dealing with the collision between the tradition and modernity. Other than Narayan, A.K. Ramanujan also employs satire in his poems. But Shashi Tharoor’s use of satire is quite unique than others. His adopting satire to narrate the political events of the twentieth century by recasting them in the epical structure of the eighteenth century literary piece is quite fascinating. The analysis of The Great Indian Novel has been done under the satirical mode. This literary mode has been used for a long time in past. The usage differs from one form to another. James Sultherland in his book English Satire observes:

Satire, then, is not an extinct dinosaur or pterodactyl, row of yellow bones in the literary Museum, but a living and lively form thus has still a vital part to play in twentieth century literature. If the satirist cannot save us he can at least encourage us not to give up without struggle; and he can, and does, let in a current of fresh air which fills our lungs and keeps our blood in circulation (22).

In a nutshell Shashi Tharoor’s socio-political views are discernable through this novel. His narrative techniques provides a constant shift sometimes from past to the present, from reality to imagination, from moral to immoral or vice-versa. These provide a vision to understand our ancient myths, significance of our traditions, culture, need to revitalize the lost value system. It is because of these reasons that the novelist chooses an ancient framework of Mahabharata for depicting the contemporary
situation. This is also a reflection of Indianness on the part of the novelist. He writes in the ‘Afterword’ of his novel: “Many of the characters, incidents and issues in this novel are based on people and events described in the great epic the Mahabharata, a work which remains a perennial source of delight and inspiration to millions in India”

Tharoor also admits for all the liberties he has taken in order to recast the events and characters of the novel in the epical framework. In his ‘Afterword’ of the novel he explains: “While some scenes in The Great Indian Novel are recasting of situations described in translations of the Mahabharata, I have taken far too many liberties with the epic to associate any of its translators with my sins.”
Works Cited


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