I. Introduction: The narrative of *The Great Indian Novel* is woven around the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and the modern history of Indian politics. It rather parodies both of them. The author has combined the stories and characters from the epic and history in a two-in-one method. On the one hand, the episodes of love, marriage and Kurukshetra battle of the *Mahabharata* are ridiculed and on the other hand, the role of India National Congress in the freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership, the regimes of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai in the free India of history are ridiculed. The author has tried to reveal the wickedness of politicians of both the colonial and free India through the parody of the *Mahabharata*.

II. Subversive Themes: There are two subversive themes in *The Great Indian Novel*. The first is the subversion of the ancient epic the *Mahabharata*. The second is the subversion of the modern history of India. Both the themes are woven into one another very intricately by the welding together episodes of the epic and the events in the mammoth history in one structure. With the result that the novel reads like the epic and history of modern India simultaneously. A study of the novel is undertaken to examine how the novel subverts the aforesaid themes in the following.

Though the *Mahabharata*, the greatest epic of India in Sanskrit ever written, is ascribed to Vyasa, whose real name is known as Krishna Dvaipayana, the exact time of the creation of the original *Mahabharata* of Vyasa remains a mystery, for there is no consensus among the scholars about the date of composition of the work. It is supposed to be more than two thousand years old. Until its evolution in the written form in the recent past, the tale of *Mahabharata* has been transferred from generation to generation through oral transmission. The first corpus of the epic is believed to have been recited by Ved Vyasa at the beginning of the Kali Yuga. This is known as *Jaya* consisting of 8800 stanzas. He seems to have taught this authentic version of the poem to his son Shuka and Vaishmpayana. Sage Vaishmpayana has revised this rendering and
compiled *Bharatasamhita* containing 24000 stanzas which, in turn, was recited to Janamejaya, the grandson of Arjuna, on the occasion of Sarpa Satra. After learning this revised version from his father, Lomaharshana, Ugrashrava Sauti has recited the poem with his revisions and this extant version with 1000,000 stanzas is called the Mahabharata. In the process of its growth and evolution, several poets seem to have added to the richness and variety of the text. The term 'Vyasa' in this sense perhaps does not refer to a single person, but a succession of compilers of considerable creative imagination.1

This explains that every new version of the *Mahabharata*, in a way, is a rewriting. *The Great Indian Novel* is also viewed as a rewriting of the *Mahabharata*. For instance, Tabish Khair observes: "The novel itself presents a modern rewriting of the ancient epic, *The Mahabharata* (literally Great India) which is turned into a parable of modern India".2 A host of writers have recast the *Mahabharata* in the vernacular as well as in the English language. This includes translations in various Indian and foreign languages, abridged forms, interpretations, commentaries etc. However, in modern times the compilers are not homogeneous in their perception. Therefore, they may be grouped under two broad categories. The first group consists of those who follow the original version with piety and reverence, like Rajaji, Kunjukkuttan Tampuran, Buddhadeva Bose, J.P.Sinha, Sujit Mukherjee, P. Lal, etc. The second group consists of those who have willfully distorted the original through various ways and means, like Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, Sarala Dasa and Shashi Tharoor. Lidchi-Grassi interprets the meaning of the *Mahabharata* from a European perspective, Sarala interprets the meaning of the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of subaltern Bhakti Movement and Tharoor interprets the same from the perspective of the modern history of India.

Tharoor has adopted four major devices to the original text of the *Mahabharata*. They are -- 1. Deviation and Reversal, 2. Incorporation of history in the original text, 3. Unorthodox and Irreverent attitude, and 4. Caricature. The first three are dealt with in this part and the fourth is dealt with in the part devoted to the study of ‘Characterization’ because the device of caricature is deployed to the maximum extent in the characterization.
1. Deviation and Reversal as a Device of Subversion: This device is employed from the very opening chapter which includes the title of the text and the titles of the eighteen cantos. The title of Tharoor’s novel ‘The Great Indian Novel’ is not in agreement with ‘The Mahabharata’ as the latter’s translation proper. It should rather have been ‘The Great India’. Though it is not a serious deviation from the original text, it reveals one very important factor concerning the influence of the electronic media on the author in making his art. The famous T.V.serial called ‘Mahabharata Kata’ is presumed to have influenced him because The Great Indian Novel fits well as a translation of the aforesaid title of the T.V.serial. This assumption is endorsed by Vanashree Tripathi in her article entitled ‘Polysemy at the Dead End: Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel”3. It must also be noted that the use of electronic media, in this regard, is a reflection of post-modernist art.

The Great Indian Novel gives an impression that it is based on Ved Vyasa’s the Mahabharata, because, like the original Mahabharata it also comprises eighteen parvas or books. But the eighteen titles in The Great Indian Novel are contrary to those in Vyasa’s the Mahabharata. This needs to be elucidated through a comparison between the two. Hence the following:


These titles have been retained in most of the adaptations of the Mahabharata of Ved Vyasa whether they are translations or abridged versions. Sometimes, the titles may not be found as they are in the original Mahabharata, but they are not deviations from the original episodes. This is the conventional mode of rendering the ancient epic into the vernacular.

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On the other hand, *The Great Indian Novel* of Shashi Tharoor is characterized by deviation in its replacement of the original titles with the mock titles, which are as follows:

**THE FIRST BOOK:** The TWICE-BORN TALE, **THE SECOND BOOK:** THE DUEL WITH THE CROWN, **THE THIRD BOOK:** THE RAINS CAME, **THE FOURTH BOOK:** A RAJ QUARTET, **THE FIFTH BOOK:** THE POWERS OF SILENCE, **THE SIXTH BOOK:** FORBIDDEN FRUIT, **THE SEVENTH BOOK:** THE SUN ALSO RISES, **THE EIGHTH BOOK:** THE MIDNIGHT’S PARENTS, **THE NINTH BOOK:** HIM-OR-THE FAR POWER-VILLAIN, **THE TENTH BOOK:** DARKNESS AT DAWN, **THE ELEVENTH BOOK:** RENUNCIATION-OR, THE BED OF ARROW, **THE TWELFTH BOOK:** THE MAN WHO COULD NOT BE KING, **THE THIRTEENTH BOOK:** PASSAGES THROUGH INDIA, **THE FOURTEENTH BOOK:** THE RIGGED VEDA, **THE FIFTEENTH BOOK:** THE ASHRAMA, **THE SIXTEENTH BOOK:** THE BATTLE WITH CLUBS, **THE SEVENTEENTH BOOK:** THE ASCENT and **THE EIGHTEENTH BOOK:** HEAVEN

When the titles of the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa are compared with those of *The Great Indian Novel*, the subversive tendency of *The Great Indian Novel* towards Ved Vyasa’s the *Mahabharata* is perceivable at several levels. Some of the titles, like the TWICE - BORN TALE for The Beginnings, FORBIDDEN FRUIT for Bhisma, DARKNESS AT DAWN for Night, RENUNCIATION - OR, THE BED OF ARROWS for The Woman, THE ACT OF CHOICE for the Asharama, THE BUNGLE BOOK - OR, THE REIGN OF ERROR for The Battle with Clubs and THE PATH TO SALVATION for Heaven indicate that the titles in Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* are farcical and contrary to those in Ved Vyasa’s the *Mahabharata* for they are lexically different from one another. For example, the title of the first book ‘TWICE BORN TALE’ implies that this novel is a retelling of the ancient epic the *Mahabharata*. Each title in *The Great Indian Novel* is connotative. The author has knowingly replaced the original titles with his own imaginative titles with ironical overtones. Though there is not much difference between the contents in the two novels, the change of titles definitely amounts to deviation from the *titles of The Mahabharata* of Ved Vyasa.
At another level, Tharoor has used the titles of some well known twentieth century authors' works, such as "The Sun Also Rises" which is a modification of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun also Rises*, "The Passage through India" with a slight modification of E.M.Foster's *A Passage to India*, and "the Midnight's Parents" with a slight alteration of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Regarding the above, the observation of M.F.Salat is startlingly revealing: "The parodic mode and intent, at the most obvious level, is evident in choice of his title which proclaims what is disclaimed by the writer even before the novel proper has begun. Similarly, in the choice of titles of the eighteen books that make the novel one can at once recognize parodic inversions of several well-known titles of books which have India as subject".4

There is also an implication of the post-colonial attitude in the choice of these titles. The texts of Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Foster, M.M.Kaye dwell upon India from the imperialistic perspective. Tharoor seems to indicate that his perception of India in *The Great Indian Novel* is contrary to the imperialist's perspective. In addition, it is also a device, as Shyamala A. Narayan notes, which provides" materials for puns".5 The title of the fourteenth book - 'THE RIGGED VEDA' is surely a signal to adulterate the 'Rig Veda' which is foremost of all the Indian Vedas. All these implications of the replacement of the original titles with the imaginary ones as a mode of re-writing of The Mahabharata, which is three thousand years old, reveal the fact that *The Great Indian Novel* is subversive.

Ved Vyasa's *The Mahabharata* is regarded as the fifth Veda. No traditional writer has ventured to meddle with the episodes in the *Mahabharata*. But Tharoor has in *The Great Indian Novel* willfully digressed from the facts in some of the episodes of *The Mahabharata*.

To begin with, Pandu wounds a male deer during its copulation with its mate. Actually, the male deer is a Brahmin's son whose real name is Kimindama. Since he is disturbed while mating, he becomes angry and curses Pandu that his spirit will leave his body when he mates with his wife. In *The Great Indian Novel* this episode has been recast by depicting the mythic Kimindama as a modern doctor who diagnoses the problem of Pandu. The epic
backdrop of forest, Pandu’s wounding Kimindama who is in the metamorphosis of a male deer and the subsequent curse are dropped. Pandu is portrayed as suffering from chest pain and Kimindama’s portrayal as a cardiologist amounts to subverting the original: “Massive coronary thrombosis,” said D. Kimindama, as Pandu lay paler than ever under the oxygen tent. ‘Or in plain Jhindustani, a whopping great heart attack. He’s lucky to be alive. If it weren’t for the prompt call,’ he added, looking with appreciation at the two not-quite-shevelled ladies beside the bed, ‘I’m not sure we could have saved him’.”

In the episode of Kunti, Pandu persuades her to get sons through some other suitable Brahmin, as there is a curse on him that he would die as soon as he indulges in love making. After a great deal of deliberation, Kunti agrees and gives birth to three sons through the three deities – Yama (God of Justice), Vayu and Indra respectively. When Pandu, who is not content with three sons, appeals to Kunti for one more son, she responds to him in the traditional version of *Mahabharata* by P. Lal as: “When Pandu wanted Kunti to have another son, she refused. “The wise have spoken against a fourth son. A woman who has intercourse with four men is defiled, and one who has intercourse with five is a prostitute. Why, my lord, do you forget the saying of the scriptures on this subject?”

But Tharoor has taken liberty with the facts in this episode and tampers with the number of men, which not only defiles her but also renders her a whore: “As far as I can tell, the scriptures say a woman who gives herself to five men is unclean and one who has slept with six a whore. You haven’t over looked that, by any means, have you, my lord?” While the traditional rendering shows that the intercourse with fourth and fifth man leads a woman to the state of defilement and whore, Tharoor diverges at this point by affirming that the contact with five or more than five men leads a woman to the state of defilement and whore. Like Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children*, Tharoor too drifts away from the verifiable fact, which is a sure sign of subversion.

It is needless to reiterate that one hundred sons are born to Dhritrashtra and Gandhari and they are called Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. The eldest son is
called Duryodhan and his brother Duhshasana. Besides the drastic change of the backdrop, Tharoor has not only done the unprecedented job of reducing the number of the sons from hundred to just one but also has changed the gender of that child from male to female. Thus a daughter is born and that she is named Priya Duryodhani. It is a distinct deviation from the original so far:

... the doctor emerged from Gandhari's room he was ashen with the strain. It had been most difficult delivery of the he, he said and it had taken a terrible toll on the brave young mother. She had survived, but she could never have children again. This one child would be her only offspring. ... For weeks the midwives had said that all the signs pointed to a male heir: the shape of Gandhari's breasts in the eighth month, the sling of her uterus in the ninth. 'How is he?'

'A girl,' the doctor said shortly. And she is very well.9

It is obvious that Duhshsana is an important character in the Mahabharata. He is next to Duryodhan among the Kauravas. It is he who drags Draupadi from her room and disrobes her in the presence of all at the court of Dhritarashtra. It is he whom Draupadi vows to get slain by Bhima, until which her tresses would not be tied up. On the contrary, Duhshasana is not depicted as a brother of Duryodhan but such an important character has been merged in the allegory of the misrule of Priya Duryodhani whose modern counter part is Mrs Indira Gandhi. This is a definite mark of subversion.

Draupadi is the dark-skinned daughter of King of Panchala. She is born from the center of sacrificial altar while Drupada offered a prayer to get a son to kill Drona. When she comes of age, King Drupad makes the arrangement for Swayamvara for Draupadi's marriage. A huge bow has been made. The Brahmin, who could bend it and address an arrow to hit the bull's eye of the target, is entitled to marry her. Arjun attends the Swayamvara in the disguise of a brahmin. It is attended by Karna, Duryodhan and several Brahmins too. Several persons fail in their attempts. When Karna is about to bend the bow, Draupadi announces that she would not marry any one lower than a brahmin. After Sishupala, Jarasandha, Shalya, King of Madra and Duryodhana, Arjun
makes an attempt recalling the Givers of Favour and Krishna. He emerges triumphant. Subsequently, Draupadi marries Arjun. Later, his real identity is revealed but is accepted by King Drupad and Draupadi becomes a common wife to all the five Pandava brothers as per the vow of the brothers to their mother. She gives birth to five children—one to each husband—Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadeva respectively and are called junior Pandavas.

Contrary to the above tale of Draupadi, Tharoor depicts Draupadi as an illicit daughter of Dhritrashtra and Lady Drewpad who is alleged to be Georgina Mountbatan. She is christened as Draupadi Mokrasi. The character of Draupadi is also a symbol of ‘democracy’. The master stroke of irony is that Draupadi, who is the daughter of Dhritrastra, is married to the Pandava paternal cousins. This marriage is unimaginable in the Hindu tradition because their relationship is that of sister and brothers. By introducing the novel idea of Pandavas marrying their own cousin sister is nothing short subverting human relationship.

Tharoor has made a deviation in the tale of Bakasura of the original Mahabharata. After the escape from the house of lac, the Pandavas, along with their mother, move from place to place in the forest. In the town of Ekchakra, they take shelter in a brahmin’s house. In this place, a demon called Bakasura used to torment and kill the people. In order to avoid the mass destruction, a truce was made by the citizens with Bakasura. As per this truce, they were required to send one villager and a cart-load of food drawn by two bullocks. Bakasura used to swallow not only the food and the bullocks but also the driver of the bullock cart. One day Kunti hears the wail of her host from whom she learns that it was the turn of that family to carry the food to Bakasura on that day.

Kunti consoles the family and asks her son Bhima to carry the food to Bakasura and destroy him then and there only. Accordingly Bhima takes the food to Bakasura to the appointed place and starts eating the food himself without offering it to the demon. Hence a combat ensues between Bhima and Bakasura in which the demon is destroyed by Bhima. The corpse of the slain demon is dragged to the city gates by Bhima in order to demonstrate his deed to
the people who would see the sight of dead Bakasura, be relieved from their fear and agony.

Tharoor has depicted this episode with digressions ironically. Bakasura is portrayed a wrestler as against a Demon: "We saw the posters all over the town," Nakul said excitedly, 'and everyone was talking about it. Bakasura the Invincible, they call him. It seems that he has proclaimed that he will wrestle with any man in Ekachakra who puts up a hundred rupees as a deposit, and if he is defeated he will pay the winner five thousand rupees. All sorts of local pahelwans have tried, but he's thrashed them all. Bakasura's become richer by several hundred rupees, and the stake he's put up remains intact. There's even a drawing of a five-thousand rupees cheque on some posters".

Yudhishtir states that if Bakasura is defeated by one of them, the cash prize would be of great help to them. So Arjun, instead of Kunti, suggests to Bhima that he should wrestle with Bakasura. Bhim turns down Arjun's request on the ground that he has to play with his new born son Ghatotkacha. Yudhishtir withdraws from this contest saying that he has to attend a lecture on the dharma of non-violence. Arjun wants to go to a library next door to continue his reading. Nakul pleads with his brothers not to miss the opportunity because Bakasura is leaving for the next town the following day.

Finally, Sahadev is selected for the fight with Bakasura. Ironically, Bhim, who destroys the demon Bakasura in the original Mahabharata, chooses Sahadev for the wrestling with Bakasura. It is also approved by the rest of the Pandavas. Sahadev meets Bakasura in the ring. Yudhishti, Bhim, and Arjun also come to witness the match without pursuing their schedules as they had proclaimed earlier. This explains that they have lied in order to avoid the fight with Bakasura out of fear. Sahadev is defeated by Bakasura in the ring: "... Sahadev stepped differently into the ring, his slim, lithe and lightly muscled figure a startling contrast to the gleaming oiled barrel of solid flesh that was Bakasura. Sahadev turned to acknowledge the cheers and heard them become a roar – a roar, though he was to realize it only later, of fear and warning. He raised his hands in a grateful and graceful namaste and suddenly found himself being picked up from behind, spun above Bakasura's head like the blades of a human
helicopter and flung bodily into the row of seats occupied by the judges of the contest".11 Bakasura leaves for the next place as there is no opposition in Ekchakra.

In the episode of Bhismas also, there is deviation. In the Mahabharata of Vyasa, Bhismas is made invincible by the boon of his father Shantanu. At the time of the Kurushetra war, he joins the Kauravas as the Commander-in-Chief with a condition that he would not kill Pandva brothers. Under his leadership, a huge amount of destruction is caused to the side of the Pandavas. On the third day, Krishna loses his patience and reminds Arjun that if he delays to hit Bhismas, he would do that job himself. Arjun hits Bhismas hiding behind Shikhandin because Bhismas does not raise his hands against Shikhandin who is an eunuch. He is laid in a bed of arrows until he wishes to die.

But Tharoor has taken liberty with this event and depicted Bhismas as being killed by one who is a combination of Amba and Shikhandin without Arjun any where in the scene. Moreover, Bhismas is killed before the disrobing of Draupadi and the battle of Kurushetra: "The twisted figure bent sideways in pain, then straightened itself with a visible effort of will. They say, Bhismas, that you will go only when you, no longer wish to live. Amba/Shikhandin coughed. Look at the mess you've made. A hand swept out to the world beyond. 'You don't still want to live, do you?'. Gangaji looked steadily at his nemesis and slowly, wearily, emotionlessly shook his head. I thought so! The hand swept back. It was holding a gun. Sarah-behn screamed. Three bullets spat out in quick succession".12

The fabrication of the original is found in the episode of Kama. His earlier life has been neglected and he is depicted as a Muslim in his adulthood. In Vyasa's none of the epic characters is a Muslim for the obvious reason that the epic was recited many centuries before the invasion of Muslims into India. Yet the story of the nature of Kama's birth is used without deviation in The Great Indian Novel. The subsequent portions of Karna are marked by the note of reversal:

One day the young Mohammed Ali, bathing in the river with his father, asked him why he was different in that crucial respect.
Because you are not really my son, the gray-haired chauffeur, replied. God allowed me to find out you, but that did not give me the right to change the way. He had made you.

But I am your son; the boy decried. I do not care what I was before you found me; my past abandoned me. I will be like your oj here upon he seized a knife and circumcised himself”.

Karna as a Muslim is the adaptation of the Mahabharata Karna and it is a wild imagination. By incorporating the Muslim character in The Great Indian Novel, the novel emerges as a rewriting of The Mahabharata in the subversive manner. It is a contemporary Mahabharata which is contrary to the Mahabharata of Ved Vyasa. Vanashree Tripathi’s observation is very revealing: “The effusive description of Jinnah as Karna could be read as gross misreading of the Mahabharata”.

There are instances of inaccuracy in the episode of Drona. In Ved Vyasa’s the Mahabharata, Drona becomes a guru to the children of both Pandava and Kaurava. After the fall of Bhishma, Drona joins the army of Duryodhan on his request as the commander – in – chief. He kills Drupad, and his death is conspired by Krishna and Yudhishthira. Drupad’s son Dhrishtadyumna beheads Drona.

In Tharoor’s ‘The Great Indian Novel’, Drona remains with the Pandavas from the beginning to the end. Yudhishthira kills Drona without giving any chance to Krishna and Dhрисhtadyumna. This is a fabrication because it does not account for the conspiracy of Krishna in provoking Yudhishthir to tell Drona that his son has died. It also evades the fact of Drona being beheaded by Dhrishtadyumna who is the brother of Daupadi and the leader of the Pandavas armies in the Kurukshetra battle. Though Vyasa was not physically present there at this hour, Vyasa is depicted to be present with Yudhishthir in The Great Indian Novel.

On one more occasion also the subversive tendency of The Great Indian Novel towards the Mahabharata of Ved Vyasa is explicit. It is in respect of the narration of the scene of Drona and Ekalavya. This needs to be elucidated through the comparison between the narration of the episode in the traditional
text and that of the same in *The Great Indian Novel*. In the original text, Drona asks Ekalavya to give his thump as the fee: “Drona then led Arjuna back to the forest where Ekalavya was practicing archery. Seeing them approaching, Ekalavya came forward, touched Drona’s feet, and prostrated himself on the ground:

> You have not paid my fee”, said Drona. “Command me, sir. There is no daksina in the world that I will not give to my revered teacher.

> “Give me the thumb of your right hand”, said Drona.

Without a moment’s hesitation and quite cheerfully Ekalavya sliced off his thumb and handed it to Drona. But when he began shooting arrows again, he was no longer so dexterous.15

The deviation of this scene in Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* appears as follows:

> You have been learning from my lessons and you haven’t paid my fee.

> Your... your fee, sir? I’ll gladly pay what I can.’

> What you can, boy? And how much is that I pray?”

> Sir, not very much, Sir. My mother is maidservant here!

> ‘A maidservant’s son presumes to call himself my pupil? Very well, I shall name my fee. Do you promise to pay it?

> If I can, sir, of course’, says the boy, still looking down at Drona’s rough calloused feet and horny nails.

> No conditions; boy. It is a fee you can pay. Will you promise to pay it?

> The boy’s voice is soft and trembly under the intimidating line of questing. ‘Of course sir, he whispers, Yudhishtir looks troubled but says nothing. ‘Good. My fee, Ekalavya, is the thumb of your right hand’. . .

> The ...the...th... thumb of my hand, sir?” asks the bewildered boy, I ... I don’t understand.
Don’t understand? Drona bellows. ‘You come first in class, boy, and you don’t understand? You promised me my fee, if you can pay it. And I want the thumb of your right hand’. B... but without my th...thumb, sir, I won’t be able to write again! The boy looks despairingly around the room, and finally at Drona who stands impassively, his arms folded across his chest! Oh, pl... please, sir, not that! Ask me for anything else!” The tears smart at his eyes, ... I cannot pay it’, he says. Cannot pay it? You call yourself my pupil, and dare to refuse me my fee?’ ... ‘Yes’. He affirms. ...

Ekalavya stands his ground, but swallows, his dark face burning darker in his dismay. ‘...I’m sorry, sir but I can not destroy my life and my mother’s to pay your fee,’ he says faintly but firmly.16

The rewriting of the original text reveals two facts regarding the author’s intention. Drona’s image is projected as ruthless which is contrary to the image of Drona projected as a strict disciplinarian. The depiction of Ekalavya as disobeying Drona by making him refuse to pay his right hand thump is an innovative fabrication in the whole history of the re-writing of the Mahabharata. It amounts to subversion because the author distorts the original text deliberately. This factor can be substantiated from text. When Yudhishtir seeks clarification from Drona whether he would have accepted the thumb as fee if Ekalavya were ready, Drona’s response proves this: “If the boy had readily agreed to the fee you asked of him, guruji would you have taken it? Drona laughs shortly, waving the question away ‘Study’, he says, study your epics, young man”.17

Tharoor is aware of his misrepresentation of this episode, and he does so for two purposes. The first, as A.S.D.Pillai notes, is “exposing the defects of the elite class of Indian society”.18 The second is that the text of this episode of the original Mahabharata is not conducive to the present day situation. In any case, it is clear that the author subverts the received notion of the Ved Vyasa’s
Mahabharata. Shyamala A.Narayan aptly observes in this regard as follows: "Tharoor writes the Mahabharata twice. Once without changing ground where he is faithful to the original plot and episodes to the epic. Then he writes against it, that is from a twentieth century perspective. This method is tellingly exemplified in the scene where the modern day Drona orders Eklavya to cut off his thumb and give to him as fees for having eavesdropped and thereby having tied with Arjuna for the first place. Thus far the scene is true to the spirit of the original episode. But then Tharoor writes against the scene with the modern day Ekalavya defying Drona and pragmatically refusing to gift him a chopped off thumb".

The narrative misses the pivotal role which Krishna plays in the Kurushetra battle. It is a well known story that Krishna provokes Yudhishtir to lie to Drona that Ashvathaman is dead. But in *The Great Indian Novel*, Krishna is absent from that episode. Instead, Ved Vyasa is present when Yudhishtir tells a lie to Drona: "As we entered, he turned to Yudhishtir with a desperate anxiety even his frailty could not efface. 'He tells me this terrible fate has befallen my son,' Drona said. "Tell me Yudhishtir, is it true? I can not believe it unless it comes' from you. Tell me, is Ashwathaman safe?' A look of genuine sadness appeared on the Prime Minister's face. 'I am sorry, Dronaji,' Yudhishtir said. 'Aswathaman is dead'.

With regard to belittling Krishna in *The Great Indian Novel*, T.N.Dhar writes: "Though Tharoor manages to fit the main events and personalities of pre-and post-independence India with in the plot-outline of the main narrative, there is no special place for Krishna in the account. A friend of Arjuna, he is just a small-town MLA and even performs the retrim of giving a short spiritual discourse to him".

A very startling innovation has been employed by the author to subvert the narrative of the original *Mahabharata* in the portrayal of the deaths of Karna, Bhishma, Drona, the story of whose roles in the battle of Kurushetra has been immortalized in every house hold in India.

Karna's death is conspired by Krishna by making him forego his natural armour with which he is born. Indira and Kunti are used by Krishna in this
regard. Then in the battle, Krishna saves Arjun from the first arrow of Karna and subsequently Karna falls prey to the arrow of Arjun. Karna attains a heroic death in the original Mahabharata. On the contrary, Karna, a Muslim, is shown to die in an accident in The Great Indian Novel.

Bhishma is elevated to the state of invulnerability on his father's bestowing that boon as a reward for his vow to celibacy. He is never killed by anybody in the original Mahabharata. Though he is hit by Arjun, he remains alive and protected by a bed of arrows all through the battle. He dies only at his will after having preached dharma to the Pandavas. As opposed to this original story, Bhishma is murdered by the person who is a combination of Amba, Shikhandin and Godse without any reference to the battle of Kurashetra in The Great Indian Novel.

Drona, who is known as an invincible and great teacher of war craft, is also trapped into the net set by Krishna. He goads Yudhishtir into telling a lie to Drona while he is in the battle field that his son Ashwathaman is dead in the battle. On hearing the sad news from Yudhishtir, whom he holds high as a speaker of truth, he throws up his weapons and goes into meditation in the battle field itself. Taking undue advantage of this moment Dhrishtadyumna—brother of Draupadi—avenges his father's death by chopping off his head there. Antithetical to this original version, Drona is depicted to be on the sick bed when Yudhishtir approaches him for telling the lie and dies on hearing the news of his son's death from Yudhishtir. None of them is delineated to have died in the Kurushetra battle which is a major deviation from the original Mahabharata. Here M.K. Chaudhury infers that: "Ved Vyasa refuses to be convinced that the epic warrior died on the mythological battle fields".22

The strategy of deviation from Vyasa's the Mahabharata is employed in The Great Indian Novel as a mode of subversion. The role of Krishna is undermined in the narrative. It is a major deviation. It is obvious that Krishna is the nucleus in the Mahabharata, though it is believed that episode of Krishna has been annexed to the original. But in the subsequent versions of the Mahabharata, Krishna is regarded as pivotal The Mahabharata of Vyasa by P.Lal, which is a
major source for Tharoor, has provided a great scope for the narrative of Krishna.

But the role of Krishna is very fragile in The Great Indian Novel. While the other characters whose modern counterparts are the most popular national leaders, the modern counterpart of Krishna is an ordinary M.L.A from Kerala and the secretary of the Congress Party. Ved Vyasa, Bhisma, Drona, Dhritrashtra, and Priya Duryodhini are modelled on Rajaji, Jayaprakash Narayan, Nehru and Indira Gandhi respectively. But Krishna is modelled on Krishna Parthasarathi which amounts to a farce. By casting the mantle of Krishna on the shoulders of a very ordinary member of the Congress, the image of Krishna is belittled.

There are deviations in some more important episodes. The disrobing of Draupadi lacks seriousness and the battle of the Kurukshatra has been transformed into a farce. The Gita from Krishna is delivered in a lighter vein. All these sections in the narrative of the original Mahabharata are considered significant, but the author of The Great Indian Novel has ignored their importance. The deviations which T.N.Dhar identifies in The Great Indian Novel and writes about them with unequivocal clarity are as follows:

Some deviations from the original also become inevitable. For example, there are no one hundred Kauravas; Priya Duryodhani has to represent them all with a changed sex. The parentage of the Pandavas in the narrative mismatches with the original. Adjustments in time-scheme and sequel ordering of events also become necessary. Relating the epic to the actualities of history also produced awkward incongruities. For example, in Tharoor's version, Yudhistir has to share power for sometime with Duryodhani, which is unimaginable in the original. Gangaji has to die before he witnesses the disrobing of Draupati.

(ii) Transformation of History Into Mythology As A Device of Subversion: The range of history depicted in the novel as follows: The Jallianwala Bag massacre; the salt satyagraha; the Accession of Kashmir, the partition of Indian;
the formation of INA; the Emergency; the formation of Janata Government; an
the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Transformation of history into mythology is viewed by K.Satchidanandan as subversion. Indeed, there is a rich chronicle of the historical events of the contemporary India in the narrative of *The Great Indian Novel* mixed with a pinch of pungent satire. Regarding the tone of the author on the contemporary history of India in *The Great Indian Novel*, M.K.Chaudhury comments interestingly as: “Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), a biting commentary on the political history of modern India, is modeled on ancient epic the *Mahabharata* in terms of structure and issues.”24

Like Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, *The Great Indian Novel* has brought some selected historical episodes from the National Movement led by Gandhi to the return of Mrs. Indira Gandhi to power after the Morarji Desai’s incomplete rule.

The history of the political career of many great men has been transformed into the epic of *Mahabharata*. The first event that is found in the narrative is the peasant movement which was led by Gandhi. The Motihari peasant movement episode is a recast of the *kisans* movement that took place in Bihar in 1917. The event of Jallianwallah Bagh massacre is recast under the pseudo name — Hastinpur massacre or Bibigarh Gardens Massacre. The bagh garden is changed into Bibigarh Gardens. This historical massacre is transformed into *The Great Indian Novel* as follows: “The soldiers fired just 1600 bullets that day, Ganapathi. It was so mechanical, so precise; they used up only the rounds they were allocated, nothing was thrown away, no additional supplies sent for, just 1600 bullets into the unarmed throng, and when they had finished, oh, perhaps ten minutes later, 370 people lay dead, Ganapathi, and 1,137 lay injured, many grotesquely maimed”25

The 1918 Mill Strike in Ahmedbad is followed by another very important event in the history of National movement under the leadership of Gandhi, namely, Dandi March or The Salt Satyagraha. The movement began on 12th March, 1930 with the historic Dandi March from Sabarmati to Dandi coast. On 6th April, Gandhi broke the salt laws and salt was made all along the coastline of
India in violation of legal prohibitions. Tharoor has inducted this event into the narrative under the pseudo name 'Mango March':

From this moment, let the call go forth, from this ashram where I have lived for Truth, to all our people across the length and breadth of India, to launch civil disobedience of the mango laws. These laws can be violated in many ways. It is an offence to pluck mangoes from any tree which has not been marked as having been duly registered and taxed. The possession, consumption or sale of contraband mangoes (which means any mango from any such tree) is also, in the eyes of our British rulers, an offence. The purchasers of such mangoes are equally guilty. I call on you all, then, to choose any or all of these methods to break the mango monopoly of the British government.26

This sort of intervention of historical event affects the myth by preventing the readership from reading and appreciating the episode of Bishma in The Great Indian Novel.

The history of the Indian National Congress from the time of Gandhi to Mrs Indira Gandhi occupies the central position in the narrative. In its evolution, the author records the politics of leadership realistically in the guise of myth. It shows how Gandhi preferred Jawaharlal Nehru to Subhas Chandra Bose in the national movement and in the subsequent national politics for the premier position in the Free India.

The political history of the partition of India has been transformed into a myth. Karna as a Modern Jinnah fights and wins a separate state for the Muslims. Pakistan is transfigured as Karnistan in the narrative. This is followed by the transfer of power from the Nehruvian family Mrs Indira Gandhi to the next generation represented by the Janata Party under the leadership of Morarji Desai patronized by Jayprakash Narayan. While the party of Mrs Indira Gandhi is portrayed as the Kauravas, the party of Morarji Desai is portrayed as the Pandavas. The feud between them is depicted as the battle of Kurukshetra. Mrs Indira Gandhi is shown as the betrayer of the parliamentary democracy. P.Rajan views this device as a parody of the ancient epic: "The novel indeed
has its sterling qualities. The splendid inventiveness of the artist, for instance, is in evidence in most part of the work, not only in the yoking of myth to contemporary reality but in the very selection of historical events for dramatization. . . . The novel does not, therefore, provide an interpretation of reality in terms of myth, it only parodies myth in terms of contemporary facts - a method which is at times felt to be forced, arbitrary, contrived and artificial with the result that parallelisms tend to be unconvincing or seem to crumble at certain crucial points".27

The impact of the transformation of history into myth of Mahabharata is realized in the distortion of the very notion of Mahabharata. The narrative moves away from the mythology of Mahabharata to the modern political history. The vaulting image of Mahabharata as a national pride and Indian cultural heritage is put to an acid test with the deployment of double entities in The Great Indian Novel. The novel emerges more a history than an epic. K. Ayyappa Panikar makes an apt observation in this regard : "The transformation of the ancient myth into contemporary politics seems to have been more successful than the transformation of contemporary politics into myth of some kind or the other."28

An examination of the manner of the depiction of these historical events is required to highlight the fact that the novel does not only subvert the notion of the received Mahabharata but also the notion of history. The author has used the device of allegory and pun for attaining his objective.

(Hi) Unorthodox And Irreverent Attitude As A Mode of Subversion: As myth in the novel, there are several other instances of unorthodox and irreverent attitude in the handling of the epic narrative.

None can question the magnificence of the personality of Ved Vyasa who is the son of one of the most powerful Brahmin rishi Parashar and the father of Dhritarashtra and Pandu in the real sense of the word. He is a luminary in all sorts of knowledge and wisdom, and well-versed in all the Vedas. He is reverently known as Ved Vyasa for his scholarship in the Vedic scriptures. He is the author of the Mahabharata. But he is described in an indelicate manner on
more occasions than one. A person of such a status and nobility is introduced by Tharoor's Ved Vyasa as one: "born with a century, a bastard, but a bastard in a fine tradition, the offspring of a fisher woman seduced by a travelling sage." 

Vedas are considered a spiritual treasure in the Hindu tradition. Though it is said that the Vedas are three thousand years old, the reverence for them has not diminished. They are found in the life of the Indian people in one form or the other. Insult to Vedas is not tolerated in any section of the society in India. Such an image of Vedas is ridiculed by Tharoor who says that: "Perhaps someone slipped a copy of the Kama Sutra into a volume of the Vedas." 

The Mahabharata is hailed as an encyclopedia of Hindu spiritual and cultural life. It is believed that anyone who listens to it in its entirety is cleaned of impurities, and all his or her defects are dispelled. It makes one enjoy the celestial experience of the realm of Vishnu. Such orthodox and reverent disposition is undermined by Tharoor in his sharp satire on the Vedic philosophers as: "Our philosophers try to make much of our great Vedic religion by pointing out its spiritualism, its pacifism, its lofty pansophism; and they ignore or the gloss over its superstitions, its inequalities, its obscurantism".

It is well known that Bhishma and Drona hold key positions in the Mahabharata. They are endowed with extraordinary martial powers. They are two eyes in the Kurukshetra battle as the commander-in-chief. Bhishma dies of his own wish surrounded by the Pandavas in the original Mahabharata. But he is shown to be murdered in cold blood in The Great Indian Novel. Bhishma is hit by Arjun in the original. But he is shot dead by the two-in-one Amba and Shikhandin in The Great Indian Novel. It amounts not only to deviation from the original but also to the subversion of orthodox and reverent tendency of the Hindu faith towards the Mahabharata.

Drona dies in the Kurukshetra war but the narrative shows that he is already in his death and dies of grieving over the death of his son Aswathaman. Drona's martial caliber and status of the guru of the Kauvaravas and the Pandavas and a man of great learning are all ignored in The Great Indian Novel.
This is a blatant distortion of the mythic image of Drona. It obviously offends the orthodox and reverent attitude towards the popular image of Drona. Chaudhury’s following observation in this regard is worth noting: “Ved Vyas refuses to be convinced that the epic warriors died on the mythological battle fields”.33

Bhishma strengthens the side of Kauvra. Bhishma is so powerful that Krishna alone can encounter him. Arjun struggles to manage Bhishma’s attack. Krishna plays a trick by asking Arjun to hit Bhishma who is endowed with a special boon that he will never die unless he wishes it. He survives through the war with his body being covered with arrows.

Drona succeeds Bhishma as the commander-in-chief of the army of the Kuravas at the request of Duriyodhana. He is also an expert in martial art. He plays havoc causing a lot of damage to the army of Pandavas. He also has a special boon of protection. He can be killed only when he is in meditation. When Krishna conspires to make Drona throw up weapons, and go into meditation Dhrishtadyumna kills him.

Bhishma and Drona are not only war heroes but the guardians and gurus of the Kuru cult. They are pacifiers between the Kauravas and Pandavas. They try their best to dissuade from Duriyodhan from waging a war against Pandavas but fails. Their glory in the Mahabharata is unquestionable. But both of them are killed outside of the Kurushetra battle.

Bhishma’s vow of celibacy has been regarded as a virtue of high rank. He takes this vow in order to fulfil his father’s love for Satyavati. On the occasion of his taking this vow he is blessed by his father with an eternal life. He will die only when he wishes. His nobility of being a staunch celibate is ridiculed in The Great Indian Novel. He has been held very high in dignity and reverence among the Kauvaravas and the Pandavas in the original. But he is abused in The Great Indian Novel:

What a wreck you are, Bhishma! the voice went on. What a life you’ve led. Spouting on and on about our great traditions and values, but I don’t see the old wife you ought to be honouring in your dotage. Advising every one about their sex life, marrying
people off, letting them call you the Father of Nation, but where is the son you need to light your funeral pyre, the son of your own lions? I've been looking where, Bhishma, but he is nowhere to be found! The visitor spat redly on the flour. "You make me sick, Bhishma. Your life has been a waste, unproductive, an impotent old walrus sucking other reptiles, eggs, an infertile old fool seeking solace like calf from the udders of foreign cows, a man who is less than a woman".34

The above lines are self explanatory of the unorthodox and irreverent attitude of Tharoor towards Bhishma who is a predominant character in the *Mahabharata*.

In the portrayal of Kunti the element of unorthodox and irreverent attitude of Tharoor is traceable. Kunti is the mother of the noble children. She bears a son through the sun god Surya and he is Karna. But her bearing a son during the virginhood has been narrated with a great degree of piousness. Though her sons Yudhistra, Bhim and Arjun are born through her union with the god of Justice, the god of Wind and Indira respectively, she remains chaste. Her image is preserved with dignity and reverence.

Tharoor has taken liberty in the portrayal of Kunti. He treats Kunti's relationship with Surya during her virginity as a scandal. He depicts it as: "that miss Yadav might have conducted a brief and entirely unwise liaison with a certain Hyperion Helios".35

It is needless to state that the traditional approach to the life of Kunti has never treated her relationship with Surya as an illicit liaison at all. In the *Mahabharata*, there is evidence of such liaison with many mythic characters. Their deeds are pious. But Tharoor treats it with scant respect:

You know, if you read our scriptures you will realize that there was a time when Indian women were free to make love with whomsoever they wished, without being considered immoral. There were even rules about it; the sages decreed that a married woman must sleep with her husband during her fertile period, but was free to take her pleasure elsewhere the rest of the time. In
Kerala, the man of the Nair community only learn that their wives are free to receive them by seeing if another man’s slippers aren’t outside her door. Our present concept of morality isn’t really Hindu at all; it is a legacy both of the Muslim invasion and of the super imposition of Victorian prudery on a people already puritanized by purdah”.36

The age-old Hindu tradition is ridiculed by the parodic description of it. What was considered as virtue in the Mahabharata is considered as vice in The Great Indian Novel. The author renders a revisionist version of Hindu tradition, which amounts to caricature.

Kunti’s personality is depicted in the most offensive manner as an ultra modern woman. She, who is known as a faithful wife and dutiful mother and known for upholding the ideals of Vedic tradition, is given a modern appearance in The Great Indian Novel: “Kunti shuddered. She had become an elegant woman of the world; as she spoke, she inserted cigarette into an ebony holder and waited, Pandu disapprovingly refrained from lighting it for her.”37

On another occasion as: “She was seated in the living room, half-smoked Turkish Cigarettes overflowing from a near-by ashtray whose silver matched the tint of the hair at her temples. Her Banaras Sari, Bombay nails. Bangalore Sandals and Bareilly bangles all advertised her fabled elegance”.38 A picture of perfect hybridity.

Kunti is a mother figure in Hindu tradition. She is an elevated figure in Indian myth. She is an adopted daughter of king Bhoja, a wife of Pandava and mother of four great sons Karna, Yudhistir, Bhim and Arjun. She has been regarded as a good looking and doting mother, who plays a prominent role in the Mahabharata, but such a traditional image of Kunti is derided by portraying her as a fashionable lady with a cigarette and cosmetics. This certainly is an assault on the mythic figure of Kunti with sublime character.

In the portrayal of Karna also, the unorthodox and irreverent attitude of the author is explicit. Karna is a son of Surya and Kunti. He is an adopted son of a charioteer Adhiratha, a grateful friend of Duryodhan. He is second to none in the art of archery and in giving gifts. He is on a par with Bhisma, Drona and
Kripa in archery. It is said that Arjuna is afraid of him as a deer is afraid of a lion. He dies only because of the foul play of Krishna.

Karna, who is known for such a high degree of magnanimity and magnificence, is made a Muslim, a square peg in the round hole of The Mahabharata. It is a heavy blow on the very spirit of Mahabharata for The Mahabharata is universally known as a Hindu epic. He conducts circumcision to him himself. He is also shown to die outside the Kurukshetra war. Thus the depiction of Karna as a Muslim amounts to an exposition of unorthodox and irreverent attitude of the novel towards the original Mahabharata.

The unorthodox and irreverent attitude can be seen in the utter disregard for Lord Krishna in The Great Indian Novel. Krishna is regarded as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu born to set right the dharma gone wrong in the world. He performs various roles to help the Pandavas to destroy the evil forces represented by the Kauravas. Krishna as seen in the Mahabharata is deeply rooted in the affairs of the world around him. He manipulates the action and seems to maneuver the occasion several times in such a way as to suit the interest of the Pandavas. When Arjun shows reluctance to fight with his own kith and kin, Krishna discloses his identity as Vishnu. Indeed, Krishna is the protagonist in the Mahabharata.

But a step-motherly treatment of Krishna is explicit in The Great Indian Novel. The author has willfully chosen a local politician from Kerala to represent Krishna. This surely is a deliberate act of belittling the magnificent epic hero Krishna.

The episode of Arjun's abduction of Subhadra complies with that of the original. But the characteristic feature of piouinness is absent from the episode in The Great Indian Novel. It is depicted as it is done in the thrill films. Krishna has been reduced to a caricature in this episode because he lacks the wisdom, dignity and divinity of the epic Krishna.

The most unfavourable subversive feature is noticeable in the character portrayal of Subhadra. In the ancient epic, Subhadra is a daughter of Vasudeva who is a brother of Kunti and father of Balarama and Krishna. In turn, she is a sister of two mythological giants Balarama and Krishna. She is known for her
devotion to her brother and god-figure Lord Krishna. Indeed she is abducted by Arjuna while returning from a temple. She becomes a faithful wife to Arjuna and is well received by Draupadi herself. She is admired by her mother-in-law ‘Kunti’. She gives birth to a son ‘Abhimanyu’ for Arjuna. She is a perfect woman with spotless character in the ancient epic.

But Tharoor’s portrayal of Subhadra is beyond imagination. In *The Great Indian Novel*, she is changed into Kameshwari, a cheap call girl. That the epic quality has been disenchanted by the irony of the episode of Subhadra is illustrated from the novel as follows:

‘I love you, subhadra,’ he breathed afterwards, dropping his head on to the gentle swell of her breast.

His partner laughed, a hush, guttural sound. ‘Ghosh, you really were in a hurry, weren’t you? I’ve never done it this way before.’

The voice was coarse, and Arjuna, realization pouring on him like iced water on a cold morning, reached up to switch on the car light.

‘That’ll be forty rupees,’ said a rouged and painted woman, blinking into his fate. ‘and my name isn’t Subhadra, it’s Kameshwari.’

She swung thick legs off the back seat. Though you can call me Subhadra if you like, sweetie.’ She shook her head ‘How impatient you young boys are! Couldn’t you have waited to find a room in a hotel?’

In the re-writing of *The Mahabharata* even *The Bhagavad Gita* is not spared from unorthodox and irreverent attitude. M.Hiriyanna states:

In point of popularity the Gita is second to no work in the world of Indian thought. It has always commanded great admiration and its popularity now, if anything, is on the increase. This unique position it owes to a variety of causes. It forms a portion of an epic whose study has enraptured generations of men and women. The two characters that figure in it are most fascinating, and the occasion which calls forth its teaching is one of extreme

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seriousness when the fate not only of the country but of righteousness (dharma) itself is at stake.\textsuperscript{40}

In the light of the above, \textit{The Great Indian Novel} can be seen as a subversion on account of its unorthodox and irreverent attitude to the \textit{Mahabharata}. Firstly, the depiction of Krishna and Arjun in \textit{The Great Indian Novel} proves that it has failed to adhere to the original to portray them as fascinating. The depiction of Krishna as a weak person has already been dealt with. Arjun also is portrayed as a weak character in \textit{The Great Indian Novel}. Arjun is not the one who is eminent in archery. He is portrayed as a coward in the episode of Bakasura. As a representative of the press, his cutting a sorry figure as being afraid of Bakasura is suggestive of the pathetic condition of press which is called the fourth pillar of democracy. He is not the one who leads the Kurukshetra war to the final victory of destroying the Kauvras. He stands for the journalist in arms and there by suffers a weaker portrait. Thus the portrayal of Krishna and Arjun is not so fascinating in \textit{The Great Indian Novel} as in the \textit{Mahabharata of Vyasa}.

Unlike \textit{The Mahabharata}, \textit{The Great Indian Novel} is not characterized by dignity and decorum. The high seriousness of the original is at stake due to the incorporation of the modern environment in the \textit{Gita}, though it still preaches the principle of action. The narrative mode is characterized by fun and playfulness as in: “Of course, there be will be many fumbles: Some will run, some will fall, some fail. But that’s the way lad the ladoo crumbles” You don’t have to shudder and wail”\textsuperscript{41} By using ‘ladoo’ to describe the act of dispersions of warriors with Kurukshetra war the seriousness of the message of the \textit{Gita} is spoilt.

The device of pornographic narration is employed in order to subvert the orthodox and reverent attitude towards the great epic. There are episodes depicting the copulation of Vyasa in the \textit{Mahabharata} but they are narrated with sublime subtlety. They are represented with spiritualistic overtones so that they do not become vulgar.

But that spiritualistic element is absent from \textit{The Great Indian Novel}. The relationship between Parashar and Satyavati is described in a subtle manner
without any exciting instances in the seduction of Satyavati. In The Great Indian Novel the episode of Dhritarashta and Gandhari, there is not without a touch of eroticism: "His fingers tickled her and at last she laughed too. The swing rocked with their love, at first slowly, then with accelerating rhythm, casting moving shadows on the walls that neither could see". And on another occasion as:

No-Pandu-don’t! his loved one cried
As his hands explored her buttons:

No-Pandu-don’t! his loved one cried
As his hands explored her buttons:

I want you! His hiss, was urgent
As he peeled off layers of clothes:
In the cold seat, his passion emergent
Repulsed his wife’s feeble ‘No’s.
Poor Madri! Denial was not in her nature
No was not a word she liked to speak;
Indeed (at the risk of caricature)
Her flesh was willing, and her spirit weak.
And Pandu was in no mood to be denied;
His hands moved with a probing persistence.
He caressed her: ‘I want you!’ he cried,
You’re the only joy left in my existence!’
In love and heat, Madri conceded defeat,
And yielded to her husband’s great ardour.
Soon, despite her fears and the tilt of the seat,
She was gasping. Oh yeth! Harder! Harder!
Oh yes!’ He breathed back in pneumatic bliss.
Onward! That is my immortal credo!’
But then his lips, after a pulsating kiss,
Turned blue, and exhaled a croaking ‘O...O...

She lifted his head, kissed him slightly swallowed;
Then lowered him gently, his mouth to her nipple. Here the theme of death is retained in its original form. Curse works on him when he has a courtship with his wife due to his uncontrollable passion and lust. But the words chosen to describe this event are pornographic and provocative. The emphasis on the warning of the violation of the curse is shifted to the erotic copulation of Pandu and Madri.

The episode of the Rajah of Kashmir does not fit anywhere in the narrative of the Mahabharata of Vyasa. The sexual intercourse of the Rajah with a French woman takes place in front of Vidur in the former's bedroom. The Rajah participates in the Annexation of Miamir to Delhi while he is having an intercourse with his mistress. This shatters the sacred image the Mahabharata has been enjoying from time immemorial.

In these episodes, the narrative deviates from the mythic and spiritualistic treatment to the pornographic treatment. They are characterized not by religiosity and divinity but by voluptuousness and provocation. Therefore, they amount to deriding the popular holy image of the Mahabharata of Vyasa. The incorporation of pornography and its repercussion is summed up very appropriately by Vanashree Tirupathi: “The account of Parashar impregnating Ambalika and Ambika could serve the purpose of titillating readers without forming any link with the main course of events in the novel. The Subhash Pandu-Madri scene, in which he dies just at the moment he is to reach the greatest sexual climax of his life is outrageously grotesque. The orgiastic details of the Raja of Kashmir\ Manamir Vyabhichar Singh is another variety of Tharoor's talent for writing pornography with as much dexterity and originality as Thomas Pynchon in Gravity's Rainbow. Arjun's farcical sexual escapades with a prostitute also evoke disgust”.

The Mahabharata of Vyasa is the greatest epic of India and has a unique place in world literature. In comparison with the Iliad, and the Odyssey put together, the Mahabharata is estimated to be eight times longer. It defies all definitions by being a myth, a legend, a poem separately and unitedly. It is a unique embodiment of several branches of knowledge, including philosophy,
law, ethics, statecraft, warfare, history, and ethnology. It has been enjoying an elevated status of 'Sacred text'.

The narrative of the Mahabharata has grown over several centuries and has been transformed from the oral narrative into the written narrative. Obviously, the Mahabharata in its evolved form seems to be the work not of a single author for it is presumed that several poets seem to have added to the richness and variety of the text. The process of this evolution for a period of three thousand years may be termed as re-telling or re-writing. Despite the additions and deletions the original spirit has been cautiously preserved during the process of its evolution.

There are several versions of the Mahabharata re-written in the conventional mode by adhering to and preserving the original to the maximum extent possible. They include A Van Nooten's The Mahabharata, J.A.B. Van Butenen's The Mahabharata, Kabnala Subramanian's Mahabharata, Shanta Rajeshwar Rao's The Mahabharata, C. Rajagopalachari's The Mahabharata, V. Rallavan's The Mahabharata, Kisari Mohan Ganguli's The Mahabharata and Mahabharatha Nath Dutt's The Mahabharata etc. These works represent the ancient Indian epic with great degree of fidelity to the original both in spirit and content by adopting the traditional mode.

But The Great Indian Novel, on the contrary, belongs to the postmodern trend to subvert the original Mahabharata. The author installs the narrative of the original Mahabharata to a certain stage to impress upon its readership that The Great Indian Novel is telling the story of the original Mahabharata. After having created such an impression, he plays mischief by distorting the story of the main episodes, main characters and the main backdrops which, in turn, makes the novel subversive of the original epic. This mischief is not committed by the author unconsciously but intentionally. What K. Iyyappa Panikar says in this regard is very apt: "Tharoor too has felt at home in his creative misreading of what may be called the ancestral property of every Indian".45

The device of deviation is achieved by fabrication and falsification of the narratives of the original. The transformation of universal myth into the contemporary history affects the myth/epic - the Mahabharata as a universal
text. It lends the contemporary outlook to the text. Above all, the epic as a myth is distorted and demystified. This has an adverse impact on the original.

Through the device of caricature, the epic characters and events are reduced to mere mockery. It ridicules the characters like Lord Krishna, Bhima, Drona, Karna, Yudhistir, Draupadi who have divine and immortal stature in the Hindu tradition ever since the birth of the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata as a sacred text is contested through the device of the unorthodox and irreverent attitude by belittling the magnanimity of the characters and the dignity of the narrative of the original Mahabharata. Through the use of erotic limerick, the high seriousness of the original Mahabharata is challenged. The Great Indian Novel reads as a popular novel with cheap taste. Thus, The Great Indian Novel proves to be a novel of subversion in the post-modernist fashion. Ultimately, The Great Indian Novel of Tharoor, in the author’s choice of theme and its satiric treatment, certainly amounts to subversion of faith.

III. Subversive Technique in The Great Indian Novel: Tharoor has employed various literary devices in the structure, characterization and diction but they do not comply with those of the realist novels. Rooted as they are in the tradition of Desani and Rushdie, they are experimental in nature. The author has rewritten neither all the episodes of the Mahabharata nor all events of the modern history of India in his two in one narrative of The Great Indian Novel. On the other hand, he has borrowed only some selected sections from the epic and history and mixed them into form of a novel. Thus, the author has but to narrate the stories in the episodic manner. The stories - Prashar and Satyavati, Shantanu and Satyavati, the marriage of Vichitravirya with Ambika and Ambalika, Vyasa’s inseminating the widows of Vichitravirya, the birth and growth of Dhritrashtra, Pandu and Vidur, the birth and growth of Pandavas and the only child of Dhirtrashtra are presented in the episodic manner. These episodes lack cohesion and are of loose structure.

(i) The structure of the Novel: As in other texts, post-modern modes such as parody and intertextuality are used in The Great Indian Novel also.

Intertextuality: The structural pattern of The Great Indian Novel is built on the post-modernistic devices which have already been touched at tangent in the
thematic analysis of the novel. The main title 'The Great Indian Novel' is a clever manipulation of the Mahabharata of Vyasa. Besides the title being suggestive of the title of the ancient Indian epic, it also explains that the latter has been used as a device of intertextuality, for The Great Indian Novel is an adaptation of the Mahabharata. The eighteen titles of the eighteen Paravas or chapters are an imitation of the eighteen books of the Mahabharata of Vyasa. The original titles are replaced with the titles of the popular books. M.F. Salat views it rightly as "Parodic inversions".46

The Great Indian Novel is a post-modernist narrative of the ancient Indian epic and Indian history, which are assimilated in the structure of the narrative through the devices of digression and hybridity. The episodes of the epic and the history are intertwined so much so that the narrative reads like the epic and the history simultaneously. Indeed, on the Indian epic and the history itself amounts to intertextuality because they are not only complementary to each other in the narrative structure but also serve as a source of intertextuality for they are equally yoked together in the narrative pattern. The episodes of the epic from the birth of Ved Vyasy to the journey of the Pandavas to Himalaya are skilfully mixed with the episode of history from Gandhi's entry into Indian Freedom struggle to the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The narrative reads as a two-in-one story. At the same time, the author reviews both from the contemporary perspective. As A.S. Rao comments on this feature, "Shashi Tharoor skillfully handles the literary situation in altering, adding, combining and finally shaping them to tell a contemporary story."47

Tharoor has incorporated E.M. Forster's A Passage to India in the plot structure of The Great Indian Novel. The character of Heaslop from A Passage to India is embedded in the mythic character Drupada. The conflict between Drupada and Dron charyya is recast as the dispute between Heaslop and Jayaprakash Narayan. With a strong implication of post colonialism, this echoes the watch word of Edward Said to strike back the British Imperialism.

The text of Midnight's Children of Rushdie is pressed into service to narrate the episode of the birth of Draupadi. There is an employment of parody as the title of one of its books altered as Midnight's Parents. Dhritrashta-
Nehru and his Vaishya wife as Georgina Drupad are depicted to give birth to Draupadi who, in turn, stands for Democracy. This suggests that the doctrine of democracy is born of the union of the Eastern and Western thoughts. M.K.Chaudhury's observation in this regard is worth noting: "E.M. Foster is another novelist whom Tharoor had constantly in mind for obvious reasons. Rony Heaslop reappears in the novel as a representative of the colonial rule, contemptuous of the natives and is shown as being paid back in the same coin after Indian Independence. Tharoor's: "Passages through India", title of one of the books of the novel, turns the table on passage to India but it should not be forgotten that Tharoor too tries to create passages. At certain places, as it is shown later, he echoes Forster".48

The Autobiography of Gandhi and Nehru's Discovery of India and An Autobiography have also been used as a source material by the author. The episodes that depict the political career of Gandhi and his ethics are borrowed from Gandhi's autobiography. The ideas pertaining to the image of Gandhi as a national figure and as the father of the nation are the replica of Nehru's books. This explains how the device of intertextuality is employed in the narrative structure of The Great Indian Novel. The use of intextuality in The Great Indian Novel can be summed up in the words of Rao as follows: "In The Great Indian Novel the Ancient Indian Sanskrit poetic line is extra. It recalls the whole body of literature which all Indian writers have inherited. There are literary references and cross references as well suggesting the traces of the traditional literary output in its entirety, that is to say, modern and ancient in the writing of this novel. The entire novel is replete with father anecdotes and several other literary and para literary digressions on the epic line, justifying the very title."49

MixedGenre: In the typical post-modernist fashion, the novel is an amalgamation of multiple genres. They include poetry, letter, anecdotes and jokes etc.

Interpolation of verse: Though the novel is of prose genre, the author has depicted various episodes in the poetic medium. The birth of the Pandavas children is narrated in prose and the subsequent pleasant mood is rendered in
the poetic medium. The author seems to be convinced that the birth of these children symbolizes of the birth of India as a free nation which is rendered as:

With the birth of the boys
Followed all the joys
Of the kingdom of Hastinapur;
The flags were unfurled
All was well with the world
From the richest right down to the poor.\(^{50}\)

The episode of Pandu is depicted in the poetic form. By changing the medium from prose to poetry the author attempts to foreground the discrimination meted out to Pandu-Subhas Chandra Bose by Bishma-Gandhi. The mythical Pandu is deprived of his right to procreation. Thus the situation is filled with both bathos and pathos. The author resorts to poetry to represent this critical state of Pandu-Bose. The whole episode of Pandu and Madri in the recluse and the subsequent fatal temptation for copulation with Madri is rendered in one hundred and thirty seven quatrains. To illustrate this feature, the last two stanzas are cited from the text:

As Pandu plummeted to the fiery tale
That all Hindus know as we leave this world’
Madri, his devoted (through second) mate
Kept the proud banner of sati unfurled;
She attained eternity-an all-too-rare case-
In the glorious blaze of a purifying
Finding, in the flames of the plane fire her,
On her husband’s aluminium funeral place pyre.\(^{51}\)

Kanika’s advice to Dhritarashtra on the political diplomacy is in verse form. In the original *Mahabharata*, this is imparted to Duryodhan to defeat the Pandavas through wily manner. The episode of Vidur’s precaution to the Pandavas in the lac house is also given in verse. Finally, the preaching of Krishna to Arjun in Kurukshetra which forms the *Gita* is rendered in poetic form, as it could not be effectively expressed in prose. Nevertheless, it is a parody of the original *Gita*. The text is in concord with the original *Gita* so far as
the theme is concerned but the tone of the text is ironical and farcical. For example:

So Arjun, stop doubting; rise and serve India
Serve me, the embodiment of the spirit of the nation.
I am the hills and the mountains, Himalaya-Vindhiya;
I am the worship, the sacrifice, the ritual oblation;
I am the priest, the sloka, the rhythmic chant;
The do and the don't, the can and the can't.
I am the Ghee poured into the fire, I am indeed the fire;
I am the act of pouring, I am the sacred pyre.
I am the beginning and the end,
The aimer and the goal;
The origin, the part, the whole,
The bender and the bend.
I am lover, husband, father, son, Being and Not-Being;
I am nation, country, mother, eye Seeing and All-seeing.52

The underlying irony in the above is that it is preached by Duarakaveetile Krishnankutty Parthasarathi Menon to Arjun. The selection of an ordinary M.L.A from South India to represent Krishna who holds the key position in the whole Mahabharata borders on absurdity. Arjun, who is not at all the epic Arjun but an allegory of democracy is farcical. The preaching of The Gita in this sense becomes a waste. Even the grandeur of the diction of the Gita has been reduced to an ordinary dialogue in the local dialect. Thus it becomes clear that the medium of verse is employed not only as a device of mixed genre but also as a device to serve varied purpose. The intention of the author incorporating verse in the prose narrative is to subvert the notion of the novel form. Sharma points out this aptly: “The purity of form of the traditional novel is discarded by large admixture of verse”.53

Epistolary Device: The form of letter is also used in the narrative. This device is found in most of the texts selected for the study in this thesis. The correspondences between Gandhi and the British administration are not rendered in the form of summary. The full text of letters presented in the novel
adds a touch of reality to the Gandhian politics. To illustrate this, a portion of Gandhi’s letter is cited from the novel:

Dear Friend,

As you are aware, I hold the British rule to be a curse. Your presence as its representative makes you the chief symbol of the injustice and oppression that the British people have visited upon the Indian nation. Yet I write to you as a friend, conscious of immense potential for good that your post holds.54

With the use of verse, prose and letter forms to narrate the epic, history, politics etc the definition of the novel as a form of prose gets blurred in The Great Indian Novel. On one hand, it echoes the narrative structure of the great epic and it appears to suggest a new poetics of the novel form in the post-modernist fashion.

The structure of the novel is in the circular pattern. The novel ends with the same statements with which the narrative begins. The narrative opens with “They tell me India is an underdeveloped country”;55 and closes with:

They tell me India is an underdeveloped country…”.56

The narrative is very deceptive as it leaves the novel open-ended. The author-narrator tells the story of the ancient great Indian epic and the Indian history for about four hundred pages and at the end he suddenly withholds the conclusion of his narrative by saying that he has narrated the epic so far from a completely mistaken perspective. And proceeds to say “I have thought about it, Ganapathi, and realize I have no choice. I must retell it”.57 A sense of incompleteness is generated at the end by the confession of the author that he has told the story so far from a wrong perspective. By repeating his first statement at the end, he suggests that the same narrative will be repeated again. At the same time, his realization of the wrong perspective and proposal to retell it implies that a new story will follow. In any case, it suggests very clearly that the Mahabharata has an unlimited range of interpretations. He leaves the readers with the anticipation of a very unconventional climax which is post-modernistic. Tharoor’s refusal to provide a closed structure is a prototypical post-modern fictive strategy.
(ii) Characterization:- Rao notes that *The Great Indian Novel* deserves to be called Adhunika *Mahabharata*. Tharoor has struggled a great deal in his obligation to choose the politicians that are identical with the characters in the ancient epic in order to re-write the Adhunika *Mahabharata*. Though he has not succeeded in this job completely, his trial and error method has given a new direction to the art of characterization. The author has relied upon two major devices for characterization. They are caricature and allegory. Both of them are a parody of the already prevailing notions of characterization. Since almost all the characters in *The Great Indian Novel* are a combination of more than one person, it amounts to hybridity as well.

To begin with, Rajaji is recast as Ved Vyasa in *The Great Indian Novel*. The mythic character of Ved Vyasa who is being reduced to a mortal one such as Rajaji becomes a caricature. The character of Ved Vyasa represents the author of *The Great Indian Novel* Shashi Tharoor as well. There are some implications for such an assumption. There are as many as three persons that are blend into the creation of Ved Vyasa in *The Great Indian Novel*. The epic Ved Vyasa whose episodes are included in the narrative is the first person. Rajaji is the second person who is the modern counterpart of the epic Vyasa. Tharoor is the third person who resembles Vyasa by virtue of being the author of this 'modern' *Mahabharata*. Owing to this factor, it may be concluded that this character is hybrid.

There is a considerable accountability in the creation of this three-in-one hybrid character. As far as the model of Ved Vyasa is concerned, the dependence upon this character is a prerequisite to depict the episodes of the ancient *Mahabharata* by being the authentic author and authority on the *Mahabharata*. In addition, he is also a character in the novel. He is the son of Parashar and Satyavati and father of Dhritarashtra by Ambika, Pandu by Ambalika and Vidur by a slave girl. Thus his presence in the re-writing of *Mahabharata* is essential.

Rajagopalachari is a model for the creation of the modern Vyasa in *The Great Indian Novel* for more than one reason. Firstly, he is the author of one English version of *The Mahabharata* where by he is viewed as Vyasa. Secondly,
he has played a very significant role in Indian's political life. He is one of the faithful followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Since The Great Indian Novel dwells upon the theme of Gandhi's political career to a large extent, the incorporation of Rajaji in the creation of Vyasa is justifiable, because Gandhi and Rajaji were together in the national movement. There is a limitation to incorporate Rajaji in the character of Vyasa for Rajagopalachari believed in monogamy. Rajaji's character is contrary to Vyasa who inseminates Ambika, Ambalika and the slave girl stealthily: "I slipped out as quietly and unobtrusively as I had come, leaving the secret of my visit in three wombs".58

In the characterization of Bhishma, the author has made many a daring manipulation. By depicting Gandhi as Bhishma's counterpart, this character is a hybrid of Gangaputra and Mahatma Gandhi combine. There are some identical features between them, such as Bhammacharya, committed to his vow of celibacy and support for the Vedic ideology.

The abuse of Gandhi that he shows undue favour to Dhritarasaira-Nehru is not in agreement with the epic Bhishma though Gandhiji shows some favour to Nehru when the choice is between Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose whereas Bhishma remains neutral to both Dhritarasaira and Pandu. Bhishma's sympathy for the Pandavas in his resolution that he would not destroy them in the battle while he is the commander in chief of the Kaurava's army is in sharp contrast with Gandhi's being partial towards only Dhritarasaira i.e., Nehru. And against Pandu i.e., Bose.

Gandhiji's practice of non-violence, enema, experiment with sex does not suit the character of Bhishma. Bhishma is a great exponent in Martial art. He is invincible in the war. Therefore Bhishma and Gandhi combination is not a successful experiment. In fact, they are mutually destructive since both are caricatures.

Dhritarasaira and Nehru are combined to represent the ancient and modern Dhritarasaira respectively. His wife Gandhari is combined with Kamala Nehru. To incorporate Nehru's liaison with Georgina Mountbattan, the author has created Georgina Draupad. The episodes dealing with these characters are
more interested in the modern Dhritrashtra-Nehru than in the epic Dhritrashtra. His blindness is suggestive of Nehru's lack of perspective on the issues pertaining to the rural mass. The blindness of Dhritrashtra is symbolic of Nehru's lack of foresight in his national policies as the Prime Minister. The political rivalry between Nehru and Shubhas Chandra Bose as Dhritrashtra and Pandu seem to be a hoax. The episode of Dhritrashtra-Nehru combine dwells more on the private life of Nehru than on the life of epic Dhritrashtra. Therefore the creation of Dhritrashtra also amounts to caricaturing.

To represent the character of Pandu, the author has chosen Subhas Chandra Bose. Here the narrative from the birth of Pandu to his marriage with Kunti and Madri is in agreement with the original epic. Then the author concentrates on the depiction of Bose's career in the Freedom Struggle. Towards the end of his career, the mythic tale of Pandu and Madri who perish on account of love making despite knowing that it would cause death to Pandu. The event of Pandu's killing of a sage who was engaged in courtship with his wife in the form of a deer is left out. The sage Kimidama has been transformed into modern Dr.Kimindama in *The Great Indian Novel*.

Kunti and Madri are without Parallels in the modern-setting. Although they are not combined with any contemporary persons still there is some evidence of cultural hybridity. Kunti is portrayed as a woman with a cigarette in her hand, and in the modern garb and cosmetics. It can not be gainsaid that both are caricatures.

The device of caricature in the creation Drona's character is obvious in making Jayapraakash Narayan as his modern counterpart. This combination is more fruitful for the depiction of the political history than for the epic tale. There is distortion of the original in the creation of Drona's character. The author is purposefully faithful more to the modern political history than to the epic story. What Chaudhury notes in this regard is very apt: "In portrait of Modern Drona, Tharoor makes a free use of the epic story. Drona sided with Duryodhana as it was his duty to support his employer, but his modern prototype fights against Duryodhana for the sake of truth and justice. The
question remains: who is greater, the modern Drona or his original?. Such a free play with the story jeopardizes our idea of epic characters”.

In the creation of Karna, Tharoor's innovation is unrivalled. Karna has been depicted as modern Jinnah. Imagination staggers to find likeness between the two. Karna is a hybrid product because Karna is born to Kunti from her union with a foreign traveler. Above all, he is a Muslim in Tharoor's novel. This is nothing short of magic realism. The combination of Karna and Jinnah gives rise to a great farce, for such a combination is unimaginable in the Hindu epic. Vanashree Tripathi notes this effort of Tharoor as: "... attributing Karna's characteristics to Jinnah is a grossly infantile venture". Undoubtedly, there is gross injustice to both Karna and Jinnah in The Great Indian Novel.

Among the five sons of Pandu, only Yudhishthir is a human character. He is in the guise of Morarji Desai. His brother Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev stand for the Army, the Press, the Bureaucracy, and the Foreign Service respectively. Through the creation of Yudhishthir, the author highlights the failure and betrayal of Morarji Desai as a Prime Minister. He is shown as being responsible for the death of his political mentor and patronizor 'Jayaprkash Narayan' and the return of Mrs Indira Gandhi's regime, owing to the collapse of his government in less than two years.

In the creation of Duryodhan, the author has attempted an unprecedented experimentation. The gender of Duryodhan is changed into female in order to suit its contemporary counterpart 'Mrs. Indira Gandhi'. In place of Duryodhan, Priya Duryodhani is installed. The second part of Indira Priyadharshini and the name of Duryodhan with the suffix 'ni' are combined to create the modern Duryodhan of India in The Great Indian Novel.

In addition, the number of the Kaurava sons is reduced from hundred to one only. This is a very fascinating fantasy of Tharoor. Dushhasana, who is the brother of Duryodhan, is not depicted as a human character but as a symbol of Priya Duryodhani's misrule as the Prime minister of India. This practice amounts to fabrication of the original epic.

The character of Draupadi is symbolic in The Great Indian Novel. Draupadi represents parliamentary democracy. Her birth falls on the Republic
Day to suggest this: "At last on 26 January 1950, as the constitution of the New Republic of India was solemnly promulgated by its founding fathers, Georgina Druapad, her face awash with tears, delivered herself of a squalling, premature baby". 

Draupadi is a hybrid in both human and allegorical forms. In the sense of Draupadi as a human being, she is born to an Indian father Nehru and an English mother Georgina. In the sense of democracy, the parliamentary democracy is an adaptation of Indian pluralism and English socialism. The author seems to be more interested in concentrating on the contemporary political history than in the narration of the epic story through the character of Draupadi.

The author has not paid adequate attention to the creation of the character of Krishna. The modern counterpart of the epic Krishna is D.Krishna Parthasarathi Menon from Kerala. The belittling of the towering divine image of Epic Krishna by equating him to a local politician amounts to caricaturing. This blend does not do justice to the portrayal of Krishna in the epic.

The device of two-in-one and three-in-one characterization has become inevitable for the author because he has to weave the story of the ancient epic and the modern history together into a single narrative fabric. At this critical juncture of doing justice to characters from the myth and history, Tharoor has ventured to combine two and three in one character. Though there are noticeable flaws in some of them, Tharoor's method of characterization is unique. Shashi Tharoor sets out not only to parody the great epic, but also to lampoon its heroes in The Great Indian Novel.

Tripathi also holds a similar opinion regarding the device of characterization: "Significantly enough, the archetypal names that Tharoor uses are loaded with meaning and once these names are applied to the ordinary mortals of the modern age the result is farcical". 

It becomes clear that by using the device of combining the personalities of the epic and history in the art of characterization the heroic figures are burlesqued and caricatured as men and woman of straw. It also suggests the characteristic feature of the post-modernistic characters in general.
iii) Diction: This part of the analysis can be opened once again with the comment of Dhar on the stylistic pattern in the novel because it serves as an appropriate backdrop for the study of the diction in the novel: "... he chose several forms of irreverent style – puns, word play, light verse, irony, sarcasm, jokes, playful stories and witty digressions". Since some of the elements from the above, like light verse, sarcasm, playful stories and witty digressions have already been dealt with in the earlier parts, only the aspects that are related to the language part are examined here. The diction of Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel* is marked by diverse stylistic devices. To begin with, various types of pun are embedded in the diction. Proper names – names of persons, places, books etc – provide a rich feast of pun. The use of vast titles of the famous literary works for the subtitle of the eighteen cantos in *The Great Indian Novel* and the use of some of the names of characters from the other texts into the characterization in *The Great Indian Novel* is viewed as a rich material for pun. To illustrate this, some professor by name Kipling is mistaken for the colonial Rudyard Kipling of the Fifth Batch who orders the soldiers in the Bibigarh Gardens Massacre and killed by a nationalist. Thus the professor-imperialist Kipling and Rudyard kipling are used as a pun. The humorous references to the contemporary writers such as Sardar Khushkmat Singh for Khushwant Singh, and the reference to Nandy for Pritish Nandy etc. are examples of pun.

There is also the employment of bilingual pun aiming at producing farcical effect. This can be traced in the utterances of Sir Richard in the book Two. Richard utters 'bhisti' mistaking it for 'scavenger' which is corrected by the aide as 'a water carrier'. One more similar instance is found in the novel: 'If religion is the opium of the Indian people, then godmen are god's little chillums".

The word 'Chillums' is used in the sense of pipe. This example may be considered as an analogy as well because analogy is a grammatical device for the comparison of this sort. Drona’s training the children of Kaurava and Pandavas in the Art of Archery is transformed into a course of the Bachelor of Arts in *The Great Indian Novel*. 

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In the description of Morarji Desai's urine therapy, there is a pun on the line of a famous proverb as: “Our Hero piddled while home burned”. Shyamala A. Narayan describes this as “risqué flavour”.

Tharoor exhibits his wit in the use of funny nick names. The extraordinary use of wit is found is his world play such as “the sublime degenerates into sub-slime”.

There is an extensive use of world play to describe the physical personality of Gangaji-Gandhiji in the most irreverent manner. With regard to the epic character of Gangadatta, there are terms like Ganga Datta, GangaD, G Datta and Ganagji which typify pun, for they are synonymous with Gangadatta of the epic.

To describe Gandhiji, the author has used witty words and phrases, like ‘Porbandar baniya merchant’ as it is a well known fact that he belongs to the class of baniya merchant. The other epithets include ‘bald head, satyagrahi, Gangaji’s toothless smile, skeletal Gangaji, load more than toothless, boney hand, the master tactician. Regarding Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, there references like Mahaguru, Great Teacher etc. All these references which represent Gangadatta, Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru respectively are not only examples of wit but also the examples of the subversive intent of the author. It is so because these double entendres are meant to negate the reverence with which those persons are described in the conventional works.

Gandhi’s experiment with the principles of Vegetarianism, Non-violence and Brahmacharya are also subverted through the use of ridicule. To illustrate one of these, Gandhiji’s experiment with Brahmacharya is cited from the text: “Gangaji, from those gaps in his early years that the British had been so worried about, to the celibate experiments of his late life, when he got all those young women to take off there clothes and lie beside him to test the strength of his adherence to that terrible cow. He told us everything, Ganapathi, yet how little we remember, how little we understand, how little we care”.

Thus the author deviates the description of the characters by using wit instead of using words directly. Besides distorting the conventional diction, it is used as a major device of parallelism to the popular and received notions of
reality about the persons in the epic and history. By contesting the received notions through the device of ridicule, the author subverts the traditional notion of theme and diction of the prose fiction.

The use of alliteration adds rhythmic quality to Tharoor’s diction. Shyamala A.Narayan notices his fondness for alliteration: “Shashi Tharoor is inordinately fond of alliteration; he is quite aware of his fondness for it”.69 Alliteration is used even in the titles of some cantos. For example FORBIDDEN FRUIT and DARKNESS AT DAWN which are the titles of Book Six and Book Ten respectively.

In Book Six, alliteration is found in abundance. In the description of the failure of the Round Table Conference the alliteration is explicit: “Won no concessions from the circler and circumlocutions conferees”.70 The letter ‘c’ is repeated four times in this instance.

On another occasion the description of the Congress Party on a par with all kinds of minor parties is expressed in alliteration as in “To put the true leaders of the people on the same level as princes and pretenders and pimps is not virtuous but vicious,. In this instance, the letter ‘P’ occurs five times and ‘V’ occurs twice. Tharoor’s obsession with alliteration is uncompromising even while he narrates serious matter. When he describes the repression of the Nation’s Emergency, he uses the alliteration. For example: “more and more laws went on the statute books empowering Priya Duryodhani to prohibit, proscribe, profane, prelate, prosecute all the freedoms the national movement had fought to attain...” 71

Shashi Tharoor has six terms beginning with ‘F’ to describe Priya’s dictatorial rule which suggests that he has exhausted the number of words in this regard. Whatever the context, Tharoor can not help using alliteration. Shyamala rightly notices this habit of Tharoor: “Even if the context is quite serious Tharoor can not give up alliteration”.72

There are numerous examples of alliteration in the novel. Most of them are meant to hold to ridicule the state affairs both in the epic and in the contemporary politics.
Another feature of Tharoor's diction is assonance. Assonance is generally identified with recurrence of identical or similar vowel sounds. Indeed, in The Great Indian Novel there is abundant occurrence of assonance. There are epigrams distinctly marked with assonance. For example, when the author describes the intimacy between Dhritarashtra - Nehru and Georgina-Draupad, the effect of assonance is very striking: "They made a strange pair, those two the blond patrician and the blind politician".73

In this instance, the device of assonance as a mode of antithesis and balance is used to highlight of the difference between Dhritarashtra-Nehru as being a blind politician. On another occasion, Priya Duriodhani is described as: "Wearing an elegant shawl and inelegant scowl".74

The description of Pakistan-Karistan is: "Karistan was a country whose rulers usually overwhelmed the popular will with their unpopular won't".75

There are several similar instances in the novel. He plays with words to unfold the hidden reality of the images of nations and national leaders. Also the stroke of irony is explicit in all these instances. Their subversive tone is also explicit in exposing the weaknesses in the nation and national leaders.

Tharoor's diction in The Great Indian Novel is marked by the tone mockery which is distinct in derivation and word formation. He uses the words, like 'underemployed, or undereducated in which the prefix 'under' is used to denote the sense of below a certain standard. Immediately, they are followed by the words like underfoot, understood, and underline which do not form a derivation from the earlier usage of 'under'. Thus Tharoor laughs at the different implications of 'under' as a prefix in the word formation. This resembles Rushdie's diction in The Moor's Last Light to some extent.

There are analogies in the diction of Tharoor in The Great Indian Novel. Analogy is a mode of comparison between the attributives of persons. It also has the quality of pun. To cite a few examples: "He called an ashram the British Resident".76 "Between obedience to the law and obedience to my conscience".77

His word play is manifested in describing Gandhi too. He shows the shift in emphasis from one word to another which typifies the game of intonation: "Fasting is my business. How many ways those words can be read, Ganapathi."
Fasting is my business, fasting is my business, fasting is my business, (why not) fasting is my business. And those who actually heard him utter the words can not agree on where the Great Mann had placed his emphasis”.

In this instance, he ridicules Gandhi’s practice of ‘Fasting’ as a strategy. And he also indulges in the world play of showing the change of stress from one word to another not only among the content words but also the structural like ‘is’ which is not stressed. This appears as a discourse on the theory of ‘Intonation’. This also is suggestive of the post-colonial rejection of the English intonation.

Tharoor’s world play is made manifest in the pronunciation of Madri. Madri’s status as a second wife of Pandu is reflected in the adulterate pronunciation. She pronounces p’winceth for princess, th’ough for through, p’omise for promise, p’aspect, for prospect, therefore so, thrill for still, pleaseth for please, rite for rise, thw’er for smile, etc. She replaces pro with pw, thr with thw, and s with th. Though there is no sense in replacing the right sounds with the wrong sounds, it is evident that the author contests the notion of Received pronunciation.

He has also used the wireless message in the diction. The error in decoding is humorously highlighted. This is manifested in the episode of Pandavas being sent to stay in the palace built by Purochana:

FOR PUROCHAN LALL STOP MESSAGE RECEVIED STOP DO NOT DO ANYTHING TIL EYE TELL YOU TO START STOP CONTINUE YOUR PREPARATIONS AND DO NOT STOP PLEASE DRAFT CABLES MORE CAREFULLY AND DO NOT END SEE HOW CONFUSING THIS IS STOP THEY WILL NOT STOP ESPECIALLY IF YOU STOP STOP STOP.

In this instance, two things are important to note. First, the incorporation of the wire message is innovative in the narrative. In the traditional novel, any message is descriptive. But Tharoor has reproduced the message through codified diction. Second, the draft has violated the very norm which it prescribes. It prescribes that full stop should not be used at the end, but the same is done in this. There is also a hint of misreading the wire. The telegraphic
message is dictated orally. Since the English language is characterized by one to one correspondence between the pronunciation and spelling the pronunciation of I as /I/ is misunderstood while decoding as eye which is a homophone of L.

Hindi words are also mixed in the diction. Some of these are - Nameste, huzoor pani, chotta, huzzor. Hindi words are used as verbs as in whisky lao. Hindi phrases with English translation are also found as in: Khoon ka badka khoon-blood for blood-125. Because of all these distinctive stylistic varieties, the diction of Tharoor in The Great Indian Novel may be termed as hybrid diction. Thus, Tharoor deserves the compliment of Syamala A Narayan who says: “Shashi Tharoor is capable of every kind of writing”.

IV. Conclusion: The Great Indian Novel is contrary to the traditional novels in terms of theme and technique. The theme is characterized by the tendency of subversion towards the notion of metanarrative like The Mahabharata by Vyasa as unique and unquestionable. The themes, stories and characters of the ancient epic are consciously and consistently undermined. This method is in keeping with the post-modernistic trend, The Great Indian Novel installs The Mahabharata into its narrative and subverts the accountability of the same at various levels.

The author has adopted the post-modernistic mode of narrative throughout The Great Indian Novel. In its structure, the devices of intertextuality, mixed genres, flash back, interruption etc are used to distort the notion of an organic plot. The devices of caricature, allegory and personification have been engaged in the making of characters. These lead the characterization to hybridity which in turn challenges the notion of ascribing a single identity to the characters. The diction is characterized by diverse linguistic experimentations. There are bilingual and multilingual expressions in the diction. The phonetic variations are incorporated in the diction to not only to challenge the notion of standard English but also to add to it the native flavour.

Shashi Tharoor finds a successor in Arundhati Roy whose The God Small Things is pre-destined to subvert the notion of Endogamy. Roy leaves no stone unturned to expose the dictatorial practice of Patriarchy under the cover of Endogamy and its serious implication on the life of the underprivileged in the
society. She also goes to the extent of suggesting that the laws of oppressive endogamy should be broken. A detailed study of the subversive themes and technique in *The God of Small Things* is undertaken in the following chapter.
NOTES

15. Lal The Mahabharata of Vyasa, 88-89.
17. Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 199.
19  Narayan, "Verbal Pyrotechnics: A Note On 'The Great Indian Novel'" Litcrit, 47.
20  Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 40.
24  Chaudhury, "The Eternal Present: Shashi Tharoor's Story of India" Recent Indian Fiction, ed. R.S.Pathak, 104.
26  Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 121.
32  Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 412.
34  Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 232.
35. Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 44.
42. Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 65.
43. Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 189-90.
44. Tripathi, "Polysemy at the Dead End: Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel" Recent Indian Fiction, ed. R.S.Pathak, 126.
47. Rao, Myth and History in Contemporary Indian Novel in English, 62.
49. Rao, Myth and History in Contemporary Indian Novel in English, 68.
52. Tharoor, The Great Indian Novel, 397-98.
60  Tripathi, “Polysemy at the Dead End: Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel” *Recent Indian Fiction*, ed. R.S.Pathak, 123.
61  Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel*, 244.
62  Tripathi, “Polysemy at the Dead End: Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel”, *Recent Indian Fiction*, ed. R.S.Pathak, 123.
63  Dhar, History-Fiction Interface in the Indian English novel “Entering History through the Backdoor with Tharoor and Vijayan”, 211.


