CHAPTER -II

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"The London-born half Malayali, the peace keeper by day and writer by night".¹ This is how Shashi Tharoor is described by Amitabh Kant in Kerala God’s own country. Shashi Tharoor who is very popularly known as the ‘Marunaadan Malayali – the expatriate keralite’ is a native of Palakkad in Kerala.

Shashi Tharoor, the writer and U.N. Official, was born in London in 1956 as his father was working in London for a leading news paper the Statesman. As his father was later transferred to India, Tharoor was brought up in India. He was educated in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. Later he completed his Ph.D from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in America at the age of Twenty two.

Tharoor had recently contested for the United Nations Secretary General’s post but could not make it till there. Before contesting for General Secretary’s post, Tharoor since 1978 was working for the United Nations in the beginning with the High
Tharoor's aunt adds “as children we were not permitted to bring...
books to the dinning table and Shashi was always chastised for this. In fact, we would hide his books, come dinner time”.3

His Uncle reveals, “what is so special about Shashi is that he really relishes being with the family. A strict vegetarian he is fond of typical Malayali dishes like avail, molakashyam, olar and pulisserri”4.

Shymala Narayan points “His operation Bellows (1967) – Bellows, a Royal Air Force pilot, is a kind of imitation Biggles – was serialized in the Junior Statesman”.5 At that time Tharoor was only Eleven years old. Later at the age of twenty, in the year 1976 he won the “Rajika Kripalani Young Journalist Award” for Indian Journalists under thirty. Many of his stories published in his childhood in Journals have again found space in his book The Five Dollar Smile.

Tharoor was brought-up in India he had to remain outside India ever since 1978 after joining United Nations, but his love for India has remained unparalleled. He quotes “I have lived in Switzerland without feeling Swiss. I have lived in Singapore without feeling Singaporean. I carry my Indian “identity and Indianness with me”.6 This feeling of Tharoor speaks in volumes about his love for India.
Even all his works also speak about his concern about India and her problems. His fascination for India never fades; on the other hand it increases by every passing day. He owes so much to India as he says “My formative years, from the age of three to nineteen, were spent growing up in India. India shaped my mind, anchored my identity, influenced my beliefs and made me who I am. India matters immensely to me, and in all my writing, I would like to matter to India”.7

Tharoor, a multifaceted personality who was a civil servant at United Nations in the day time and writer at night has managed to keep both his worlds apart. He has never used his powers as United Nations official to help India. At the same time he has written nothing other than India. Once when he was “asked whether he would consider setting a novel outside India, Tharoor replied, “I’m, not done with India – there are many themes and facts I still wish to explore. My need to write about India is like an itch that refuses to go away”. And so he’s just begun to scratch away at his next book – a novel set in a little village in Kerala”.8
For this man, Shashi Tharoor, India alone matters and his respect and concern for India are second to none. His roots are deeply rooted in a small village of Kerala, in India, though the branches have grown in America. Tharoor says “all my thought processes are Indian; my parentage, religion and schooling are Indian, all my formative factors are Indian.” This foundation in India has helped Tharoor to write about India. He knows not only the facts but the pulse of this country, which is undoubtedly his country.

It is astonishing to know that all his books, which speak in volumes of India, are written outside India. He knows paradoxically “ours is a country where things are always getting both better and worse at the same time.” He knows the oldest ‘civilization’ and the richest ‘culture’ on the earth is at the cross-roads. He is afraid that the land, which was once divided, is preparing itself to divide the human souls. He thinks that the politicians of the biggest democracy on the earth are bent-upon ruining the Great India.

Tharoor eats no words to tell Indians that there are many challenges they have to face and many more realities that they have to accept and live with. The author of eight books, he states “My eight
books have all, in different way, been about my personal exploration of India, of the forces that have made and unmade it, of the historical and philosophical traditions that have shaped the Indian identity”.

Tharoor’s works are published in the following chronological order:

1. Reasons of State 1982
2. The Great Indian Novel 1989
3. The Five Dollar smile and other stories 1990
4. Show Business 1992
5. India: From Midnight to the Millennium 1997
6. Riot 2001
7. Kerala: God’s Own Country 2002
8. Nehru: The Invention of India 2003
9. Bookless in Baghdad 2005

Tharoor who is an author of eight books and his first novel ‘The Great Indian Novel’ written in 1989 “received rare reviews and went on to win the HT/Federation of Indian Publishers’ Literary Award for the Best Book of the year and Common wealth writer prize
Tharoor’s first novel ‘The Great Indian Novel’ written in 1989 bought him the Common Wealth writers Prize and the Indian Publisher’s Literary Award for the Best Book of the year. In this novel he presents the picture of India through a parody. He makes one believe that the characters of Mahabharata are none other than present day politicians. The characters of two thousand year old epic have come in flesh and blood on the streets of modern day India.

His characters are comically exaggerated but authentically exposed. He feels he is transcribing the song of modern India which is not an underdeveloped country but an over-developed country at the decaying stage.

A. S. Rao explains Tharoor as “The great Indian seeks to expose the dubious distinction of contemporary political history raven with factionism, intrigues, maneuverings and manipulations now here, now there, obtaining both in pre and post independence days extending up to the dark days of emergency declared by Mrs.Gandhi”.

Shyamala Narayan interprets Tharoor’s the Great Indian Novel with a difference. She thinks “Tharoor’s imagination seems, however, to falter in the second half of the book; increasingly he takes recourse to dream sequences”.

Tharoor almost prophesied the riots of Gujarat in his next novel Riot as it was published months before the heinous crime was conducted in Godhara in Gujarat. Though the title of the novel suggests that it is about riots, it is a novel with a larger canvas of India. It talks about the ‘psyche’ of Indians, which they are carrying and living with, in contemporary India.

Even Shyamala Narayan who is critical about Tharoor’s first novel ‘The Great Indian Novel’ is full of praises for his Riot. She writes, “in fiction, an authentic picture of contemporary India is one of the factors which goes to make Shashi Tharoor’s Novel RIOT the best Indian English novel in 2001. His first book The Great Indian Novel (1989), was marked by exuberant word play and satire, so was Show Business (1991), a novel about India’s popular cinema. Riot marks a new departure in his work – unlike his earlier novels, it is not
satirical. It is a mature, thought provoking novel about contemporary India, and the basic human emotions of love and hate”.15


Tharoor’s second novel ‘Show Business’ is also a political and social satire of India presented through the reels of Bollywood. Like ‘The Great Indian Novel’ here also it is found that India is telling a story of her own.

To his credit, Tharoor has got a non-fiction - India: From Midnight to the Millennium which he has written for the fiftieth year of Indian Independence. This book magnificently presents what India has achieved in her fifty years of Independence. This book does not just focus about economic progress of India but also its political, social and cultural history. Tharoor through his book wants to stimulate the Indians and the feeling of Indianness.
In his works one thing that can be distinctly noticed is that his concern for India is never at the back seat. The most commendable thing about Shashi Tharoor is that he is having so much of first hand information about the facts and problems of India, even after staying away from India for so many years. It is amazing that a person who was at the helm of world’s affairs, has so much of time and creativity. In Bookless in Baghdad he explains “I write, as George Bernard Shaw said, for the same reason a cow gives milk: it’s inside me, it’s got to come out, and in a real sense I would suffer it I couldn’t”.16

At times, to the people like Narayan Shyamala, The Great Indian Novel may not be interesting or for some critics India : From Midnight to the Millennium may seem to be dairy of statistical facts, but Tharoor can be undoubtedly placed amongst the forefront writers of contemporary India who are so much concerned about India. Tharoor himself makes it clear that his “creativity is a compulsion and my artistic integrity cannot be comprised, even by my needs as a human being”.17
REFERENCES:


