Chapter-VI

Conclusion

Shashi Tharoor has perceptive awareness of the challenges to country’s unity in diversity. Fundamentalism, religious or otherwise, has appeared at the turn of the country. It manifests itself as a strategy by which beleagured believers attempt to preserve their distinctive group identity. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary period the believers fortify it by selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs and practices from a sacred past. The selection is carefully done so that it is not only appealing to the audience but also readily acceptable. Gandhi, Nehru and their followers desired to found a secular democracy free from the turmoil of caste and religious violence. But from the very dawn of independence, sectarian rivalries have undermined that aspiration. Partition was followed by the two way exodus of Hindus and Muslims and the communal carnage that took the lives of thousands of innocent victims. Since then the country has constantly been plagued by increasing violent political turmoil—due to minority appeasement as well as a growing intolerance towards the minority communities. Tharoor has tried to show through his writings how fundamentalists do not understand Indian cultural history. They have resort to censorship, force and violence.

Shashi Tharoor is an outstanding Indian writer in English who is seriously concerned with multi-dimensional facets of Indian culture and society. As a matter of fact, diversity and plurality mark the cultural spirit of the country in toto.

Tharoor has firm faith in the diversity and pluralism of Indian culture. In his opinion, diversity emerges from India’s geography and is inscribed in its history and diverse forces. Hindu tradition, myth and scripture, the impact of Islam and Christianity and two centuries of British colonial rule have gone a long way to shape Indian mind and culture.
Tharoor finds the spirit of Indian culture embodied in its thoughts, aesthetics, philosophy, science, technology and in its way of living in totality. Tharoor's socio-moral vision is embodied throughout his writings. He shows India’s transformation from the path of righteousness to the path of evil and wickedness, from nobility to brutality. Though he fails to give measures to restore its past glory, he obliquely suggests ways to escape from the errors of the past.

It is unfortunate that Indian society is no longer the place where noble values like truth, honour and valour are the guiding principles of life. Tharoor mourns the disappearance of these values from life. The satirical and sarcastic tone in the novels clearly indicates the author’s serious concern for the absence of these values in life. It is sad that adulteration, black marketing, corruption, communal strife and dowry deaths still prevail in Indian society. Fundamentalism threatens to destroy India’s secular social fabric. Tharoor stresses the need of democracy, diversity and plurality which are the basic principles of Indian nationalism so as to escape from the mistakes of the past. He points out that more than collision of cultures, it is the global interaction that can pave the way to human happiness.

His books in different ways explore historical and philosophical traditions of India along with contemporary conditions which shape Indian identity. His treatment of pluralism and openness of Indian culture enhances Indian cultural identity and broadens our understanding of Indian culture and history.

Shashi Tharoor endeavours to chronicle multidivisional facets of Indian culture and society in all his writings. As a matter of fact, all his writings are an outcome of Tharoor’s intimate knowledge of inspiring and motivating culture and history of India. His three valuable novels *The Great Indian Novel, Show Business and Riot* articulate a vision of India as a home of rich diversity and rich pluralism that is manifest in its social
institutions and political democracy. The diversity and pluralism are something that we should cherish and feel proud of.

The foregoing discussion of all the fictional works of Shashi Tharoor, along with references to his non-fictional works, in the context of plurality of Indian culture and society brings out how Tharoor has portrayed multi-dimensional facets of Indian culture and society utilizing postmodern and postcolonial tenets in his writings. While post-colonialism comprehensively influences Tharoor’s fiction thematically, postmodernism extensively dominates his technique. Consistently exploring and revealing India’s inherent diversity and her unity, her plural and secular credentials, her culture and her civilization, her ethnicity and her modernity, her innocence and her experience in his fiction, Tharoor does not only reaffirm India’s true identity but also juxtaposes her essential beauty, with her banes of corruption, deceit, insincerity and profligacy. Writing in the language of the colonizers of his country, the British, he undoubtedly emerges as a ‘hybrid’ author essaying to undo the wrongs done by the prejudiced, unequal and uneven occidental representations of his country through his fiction. Correcting the manipulated representations of his country, Tharoor does not only try to re-assert and re-invent his own culture but also uses it to remove our misconception about Indian culture and society.

Highly impressed, inspired and thoroughly saturated with the diversity and the plurality evidenced in India’s rich cultural heritage, her history, her languages, her topography and her people, Tharoor attempts to portray the subcontinent’s gradual evolution from its ancient golden past to its colonial and postcolonial present. Although his obsession with India, her past, her present and her future, dominates the subject of all the four pieces of his fiction, yet it is observed that they deal with themes radically different from one another, due to his diversified approaches and ways of expression.
The Great Indian Novel is Tharoor’s first novel. A political satire which rewrites the ancient epic the Mahabharata in terms of both structure and issues. The novel fuses the epic narrative of the Mahabharata and the twentieth century political history of India. The period of Indian history it covers is from the advent of Mahatma Gandhi as the undisputed leader of the freedom struggle against the British Raj to the Emergency rule of Indira Gandhi, highlighting en route some landmark events like the Champaran satyagrah, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Salt March, the Quit India Movement, the Partition of India and Independence, the country’s war with Pakistan and China, the birth of Bangladesh and the dismemberment of the Land of the Pure, the horror of the emergency and its aftermath. The Great Indian Novel centres on themes of the epic narrative: power, politics, schisms, conspiracy, personality clashes leading to fratricidal war, institutional structures, and individuality as well as collective dharma. Thus the novel offers a fresh interpretation of the epic as well as the recent political history of India. The novel affirms Indian cultural identity by highlighting its pluralism and openness. Moreover, the narrator’s attitude in The Great Indian Novel is that of an ironic observer; he has no emotional involvement in the experiences of the nation. Therefore, his story that combines parody with polemic, does not emotionally involve the readers. In fact, Tharoor strikes an impersonal note in The Great Indian Novel. He records his experience in the context of contemporary socio-political conditions, exploiting the mythical patterns present in epics like Mahabharata. The parallelism of the ancient epic with the story of modern India provides him an appropriately vast narrative framework for representing the complex cultural and political environment of India. So the re-vitalization and re-telling of the epic becomes a strategy of the retrospective interrogation of the recent past which marks many texts of the 1980s.
The Great Indian Novel is a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the Mahabharata in order to present the contemporary political reality in terms of myths and legends of India’s remote past. The novelist has very effectively presented an India of multiple realities and the multiplicity of truth. It stresses the need of accepting diversity so as to escape from the mistakes of the past. It is sad and unfortunate that in modern India “dishonesty is the most prevalent art” and that “power is an end in itself rather than means, where the real political issues of the day involve not principles but parochialism” (412). The narrative technique admits that in a state of confusion and chaos, right and wrong, real and unreal have lost distinctions and man must follow his own code of conduct. People in general do not care for “the basic values . . . which do not change” (418). What makes matter worse is the role of “midnight’s parents” like Dhritarastra who have “the blind man’s gift of seeing the world not as it is but as they wanted it to be” (85). The novelist feels unhappy about the widespread corruption and moral degradation in contemporary Indian society.

On the whole, Shashi Tharoor shows his socio-moral vision and mourns for the lack of ‘Dharma’ in modern times. In a post modernistic world, where all moral values are gone with the wind, there are very few committed artists with a philosophic vision who can wage a strong war against the collapse of basic human values. Tharoor considers his art as a medium through which he tries to resurrect the lost dignity of the human being. Art, therefore, seems to turn into a didactic weapon by which he reinstates the lost glory of the past. At the same time the author has said that it is necessary to shack off the shackles of traditions: “Yudhishthir saw to his astonishment that the resplendent deva besides him was changing slowly back into dog” (418).

Thus, in the light of the above analysis, it may be said that Shashi Tharoor affirms and enhances Indian cultural identity through his novel by reflecting on pluralism and
openness in India’s kaleidoscopic culture. He also aims to broaden the understanding of Indian culture and historical heritage. More specifically, his *The Great Indian Novel* is an outstanding postcolonial text abounding in the use of postmodern techniques of inversion, distortion, parody and pastiche.

Shashi Tharoor’s *Riot* is a book of great moral, social, religious and political complexity. It brings into focus the secular credentials of India along with highlighting its cultural and religious pluralism. The novel explores the social and cultural aspects of contemporary India. Tharoor brings before us some burning and relevant issues which may threaten the dignity and peace of our nation. The demolition of Babri-Masjid ignited Hindu-Muslim riots and the worst aftermath of it was the brutal killing of many innocent people. So the relevance and sanctity of religion, secularism, democracy, human values, decency, personal freedom, god and goddess, power and politics etc. in India are again open to discussion and are being addressed but in a fictional garb.

The *Riot* portrays the disastrous upheaval in Hindu-Muslim relationship brought about by Ram janam bhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. The novel begins with pre-independence Hindu-Muslim unity and ends with the riots pertaining to Ram Shila poojan widening the rift between the two communities. Hindus and Muslims have lived together in peace and harmony for centuries. We have, especially in the North India, an extraordinary tradition of heroes—warriors or saints who are worshiped by both communities. One hears a lot about the composite culture of North India. A number of Muslim religious figures like Nizamuddin Aulia, Moinuddin Chisti, Ghazi Miyan are worshiped by Hindus. Hindus and Muslims fought together the war of independence in 1857. They were in a joint campaign in the Khilafat agitation against the British who systematically promoted divisions between Hindus and Muslims as a policy of ‘divide and rule’. The Muslim League broke away and called for Pakistan. As a consequence the country was partitioned in 1947. The
decades since the partition have witnessed several communal disturbances pitting one group against the other.

*Riot* is a fictional departure in the career of Shashi Tharoor as a writer. Here he takes liberty with the fictional form. The story is unfolded in an unconventional style through newspaper cuttings, interviews, letters, journals, poems and even birthday card. This helps him in portraying and perceiving a single event from various angles. Several aspects of India as a nation are explored through the characters of the novel. Each character stands as an ideology articulating its views. The social condition of India is presented through many characters the foremost among whom is Priscilla, an American social worker. Her father Rudyard Hart, the senior Marketing Executive with Coca-Cola, who has been in India in late seventies, explores the industrial facets of the country. Randolf Diggs, the New York journal reporter, probes into the political and religious side of India. Ram Charan Gupta is a Hindu spokesman who articulates Hindu ideology whereas Mohammed Sarwar gives vent to Muslim views. V. Lakshaman, the District Magistrate and Gurindar Singh the Superintendent of Police, are the custodians of secular democratic fabric of the country which does not make discrimination in terms of caste, creed, language, religion, region or gender.

The most striking aspect of this book is its form of narration. Tharoor has used a vast range of styles to tell the story through letters, interviews, conversations, journal entries, poetry and so on. The narration runs back and forth in time, between characters, with many differing points of view. It is a book one can read in any order.

Tharoor’s satirical novel *Show Business* lampoons the Indian film business and its superficiality. It is the best example of Bollywood’s fantasy element in the novel. Nothing is as it first appears, as the movie mega star Ashok Banjara finds out. Tharoor explores the Bombay movie industry; he explains the culture of this industry. It is a satirical tale of
Ashok’s hits and misses in the world of politics and cinema. He allows the complexity of India’s social fabric--economic realities, the political exigencies of an enormous entrenched system built equally of corruption and necessity--to arrange itself around his protagonist. The overarching drama concerns nothing less than free will, and Tharoor handles the big topic--the role of dharma, the belief in predestination.

Tharoor asks whether a society that has such deep affection for fantasy will not ultimately suffer for it; he also makes us eager to find out what happens in the end. Arriving at its apex of irony is one of the book’s great joys though it hurts. As in the larger-than-life movies it both lampoons and celebrates pain and pleasure mixed until the final fade out.

In India, popular cinema emerges from, and has consistently reflected, the diversity of the pluralist community that makes this cinema. Most of the stories they tell are silly, the plots formulaic, the characterizations superficial, the action predictable, but they are made and watched by members of every community in India. Muslim actors play Hindu heroes; South Indian heroines are chased around trees by North Indian rogues. Representatives of some communities may be stereotyped but good and bad are always shown as being found in every community,

It is evident that Tharoor has tried cinema as a new metaphor to explore different aspects of the Indian condition. He illustrates the film culture in India against the background of contemporary myths. He selects the Mumbai film world only to present a satirical story of hits and misses in the world of films and politics. The Show Business not only entertains but also enlightens us about some dark realities of contemporary India; it not only transports us to a magical world of sensual pleasure but also highlights some of the social, cultural and political realities of India. In addition, it reflects the diversity of pluralist society as well as the pleasures, pains, procrastinations and predicaments of the majority of Indian people. “Even the most commercial film-maker” as Tharoor remarks,
“contributes towards, and helps articulate and give expression to, the cultural identity of the society” (*TETTTC* 113-114).

Shashi Tharoor shows his socio-moral vision and mourns for the lack of *Dharma* in modern times. In a post modernistic world, where there is change in moral standards, very few committed artists with a philosophic vision can wage a strong war against the absence of basic human values. Tharoor considers his art as a medium through which he tries to resurrect the lost dignity of the human being. Art, therefore, seems to turn into a didactic weapon by which he reinstates the lost glory of the world. In a society with the “transvaluation of values”, a rigid, inflexible value system is an anachronism. Neither Ashok Banjara nor any character is interested in that rigid system. Sometimes personal interest blinds one’s *dharmic* eye. Then man falters and makes errors. Of course, the novel has a point; it describes the happenings and mishappenings of our present day society and the novelist mourns for the lack of dharma in our society. Thus the *Show Business* proves the plural identity of India and her culture through cinema and its celebration of diversity; simultaneously, it is transformed into a postmodern piece of fiction.

Tharoor’s *The Five Dollar Smile* is a collection of fourteen short stories and a play published in 1990. Most of the stories were written when the writer was in his late teens and early twenties. With the exception of ‘Solitude of the Short-Story Writer,’ the stories are set in India and they deal with cosmopolitan city-dwellers who, in spite of being increasingly seduced by western culture, still retain an emotional attachment with the countryside they had left long ago. The most moving piece in the anthology is, of course, the title story in which a lonely orphan, who is used as the poster child of an organization that raises money for the purpose of charity, is determined to visit the family in America that have adopted him. He writes to them touching letters about his ambition which
results in an air-ticket for a three-week visit to the U.S.A. But during the flight, the boy-surrounded by strangers—experiences a bout of intense and inexplicable loneliness that leaves him completely dispirited. By turn funny and touching, the stories also deal with the trauma of youth as well as death, deceit, hypocrisy and the conflict of cultural change. He writes in the early pages of the book regarding his purpose of writing the stories:

The stories largely reflect an adolescent sensibility: with one or two exceptions their concerns, their assumptions, their language, all emerge from the consciousness of an urban Indian male in his late teens. If I presume to inflict them years later on a new public, it is not because I think they represent an enduring contribution to literature, but because I hope that, in their own modest way, they might be fun to read . . . . For one thing, they reflect aspects of modern Indian life which are still relatively ignored in more serious writing. (TFDS 10)

After a proper evaluation of the stories in The Five-Dollar Smile it may be observed that the writer has dealt with different shades of life—love, hate, loss, hypocrisy, deceit, sycophancy, pride, immorality, ego, etc. He has also referred to some social evils like early marriage, the dowry system, unmatched marriages and caste system. Most of his stories are saturated with social realism, but some of them are deliberately kept away from realism. Even as a teenager, Tharoor could look into some mature subjects like death, hypocrisy, deceit, loss and honour. The majority of his stories are about urban life but a few like ‘The Village Girl’ and ‘The Death of a School Master’ depict Kerla village life realistically and vividly.

Capturing life in the raw seems to be one of the chief sources of appeal in all Tharoor’s creative writing be it a fiction or non-fiction. His short stories have emotional coloring, which enhances the emotional and imaginative impact of the story. Character is the
central focus of many stories in which one can see the revelation of a psychological portrait of a disturbed personality. His stories are about delightful childhood and early adulthood anecdotes.

Tharoor successfully evolves a new political paradigm of oppositional alternatives in tune with the changing socio-political atmosphere of the present or contemporary India. In all his writings he explores India and repeatedly re-invents and re-claims the diverse and plural cultural heritage of India in a satirical way. He, in a way, uses proper indigenous methods of usage aimed at decolonizing the colonizer’s language and the value system based on it. He also chooses to question certain fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of truth and religion. One can say that Tharoor is pre-occupied with the quest for identity that is cultural rootedness. He seeks to re-interpret contemporary socio-political history through the use of mythical pre-figurations. By using epic narrative Tharoor succeeds in evolving a radical world view to make literature meaningful to society. The epic possesses enough potential to present a common background, which permeates the political unconscious of the nation. He focuses on the politico-historical aspects of society that has political independence but not the independence of mind. People are not fully awakened to consciousness. The realization of self and the knowledge of potentiality are wanting. The attempt for ‘order’ and attempt for the feeling of nationality is a must. He stresses the facts and reality of the idiosyncratic society and he feels anxious about it. The politicians who are really expected to educate the society and bring them necessary awareness become the part of the rotten pattern themselves. History--the world, the universe, human life, and every institution under which we live--is in a constant state of evolution. The world and everything is being created and recreated: “Each hour, each day, each week, going through the unending process of birth and rebirth which has made us
all. India has been born and re-born scores of times, and it will be reborn again. India is forever; and India is forever being made” (TGIN 245).

While the themes of Tharoor’s fiction, which essentially highlights the myriad complexities of India, are replete with evidences of post-colonialism, the language, structure and attitude reflected in the technique he uses are largely dominated by postmodern dictates. Attempting to reclaim and reinvent India, and dealing with provocative issues in his fiction, Tharoor richly tempers his works with wit, satire, irony and humour. Thus expressing his concerns about the plural culture of India through postcolonial and postmodern means, he creates an intellectual potpourri in all his fictional works. Consequently The Great Indian Novel, Show Business and Riot: A Novel emerge as exquisite and perfect amalgams of both the movements.

Thus it is observed and asserted that a critical study of all the four fictional works reveals Shashi Tharoor’s repeated exploration of India by highlighting its diverse and plural cultural heritage with the intermingling of a postcolonial and postmodern flavour.