PREFACE

Shashi Tharoor is a well-known Indian writer in English today. The popularity of his novels confirms his emergence as a powerful fictional author and, simultaneously, the same excellence is occupied in the realm of non-fiction. He has devoted all his writings to explore the forces which have made (and nearly unmade) the culture of India. He is outstanding and remarkable for the sequence of four pieces of fiction and nearly half a dozen non-fictional works, on the basis of which he has been referred to as one of the finest writers of satirical novels currently writing in English.

Nobody can deny the significance, relevance and influence of the concept of culture in contemporary times. Undoubtedly, the concept of culture is a complex as well as comprehensive and in recent years has become a site for heated discussion. Indian national identity is based on the notion of “unity in diversity” or “pluralism”. This plurality and diversity has given India a unique cultural identity. No other country in the world has witnessed the growth and functioning of so many castes, creeds, cults, cuisines, languages, religions and faiths at one and the same time of history, and, what is more interesting is the fact that in spite of so many diversities there is an underlying current of unity which occupies the focal point in the exploration of Shashi Tharoor’s fictional works.

The thesis contains six chapters:

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Synchronizing the Mythical and the Contemporary: The Great Indian Novel

Chapter III: Reel Life versus Real Life: Show Business

Chapter IV: Exploring Culture in Unnatural Times: Riot

Chapter V: An Adolescent’s Peep into Culture: The Five-Dollar Smile

Chapter VI: Conclusion
The first chapter is introductory and comprises four parts. The first part briefly deals with various views moving around the term ‘culture’ showing its relation to literature. It also tries to highlight the complexity of the term and its various implications. The second part is chiefly concerned with a brief social, political, religious and cultural history of India in plural contexts. It gives a clear view of the cultural identity of India as well as the continuity and change of India’s culture and society. The third part is designed to show Tharoor’s idea of India’s plural culture having diversity as the main force running through the fabric of Indian society. The last part is designed to show how Tharoor’s views about Indian culture get an articulation in his fiction. Along with a brief biographical account Tharoor’s fascination for India’s cultural heritage has been focused. Highlighting the scope of the present enterprise, it is followed by a brief review of the critical reception Tharoor’s fictional writings have received so far.

Chapter II analyses and illustrates *The Great Indian Novel* in the light of India’s cultural diversity. In this novel Tharoor has used the great epic as the framework or bedrock to re-invent, re-tell and re-interpret the political history of modern India. Thematically, the novel covers a small period of 20th century political history of pre- and post-colonial India but technically it occupies a post-modernist strategy which allows the author to play with ideas, celebrated events and incidents of both epic and the history. We gather from the analysis that the avowed aim of the literary artist is to re-affirm and re-enhance India’s cultural identity.

Chapter III discusses postcolonial Indian culture and politics in Tharoor’s second novel *Show Business* from cultural points of view. The analysis leads us to assert that he has chosen a new metaphor of cinema to explore the cultural diversity of his native land. Indian film industry is the largest in the world and to Tharoor this Bollywood film world of India embodies the very idea of Indian diversity in the very way in which it is organized, staffed and financed. He also draws on the distinction between the ‘Real life’ and the ‘Reel life’ which the novel sustains thoroughly.
Chapter IV studies Tharoor’s latest novel *Riot*. It is an exploration of Hindu-Muslim riots in India which raises many fundamental questions like the nature of truth, the construction of identity, the invention and reclamation of the past, the uses of history and various collisions life offers – collisions between cultures, attitudes, ideologies, religious communities, and men and women. Through Priscilla Hart, the protagonist at the centre and the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992 at the backdrop, Tharoor weaves a beautiful story, set in 1989, which raises many genuine questions pertaining to religion, secularism, democracy, human relations, communal violence, women’s condition and so on. This novel is analyzed from social, political, religious and cultural points of view in order to unravel his views on India’s pluralistic culture. It is the only novel of Tharoor which is not satirical.

Chapter V discusses Tharoor’s comparatively immature work *The Five Dollar Smile* -- a collection of fourteen short stories from cultural points of view. The stories deal with the predicament of man and depict effectively the contemporary human situation in all its humour and pathos. These are mainly stories of character creating scope for emotional coloring.

Chapter VI sums up the findings of the thesis critically evaluating the fictional works of Tharoor in terms of their relation to Indian culture and society stressing their relevance to post-colonialism, postmodernism and globalization. Through his works he has affirmed the cultural identity of India reflecting on its diversity, pluralism, multiplicity and syncreticism. These works do succeed in broadening and enlarging our understanding of the country’s great cultural heritage. Through frequent use of Indian myth, history and culture, Tharoor boldly asserts that Indian culture is pluralistic and different people have different views of it.