

## **Elements of Historical Satire and Fantasy in Shashi Tharoor's Major Works**

**Ram Naresh Pandey**

Shashi Tharoor is one of the eminent English novelists of modern era. His works reflect a specific understanding of historical satire and fantasy of India. He has also reinvented India with a dazzling marriage of Hindu myth and modern history. Hence, he became famous as a winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). *The Great Indian Novel* deals with different strategies to narrate hints to the great epic, *The Mahabharata*. It also offers historical significance and fundamental source of knowledge for the validity of the past. In the realm of historical satire and fantasy, he disillusionments to illustrate India's declining political culture. His other novels like *Yoking of Myth to History* (1990), *Riot* (2001) and *The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cell Phone* (2007) present historical satire and fantasy of modern era. *Yoking of Myth to History* represents historical satire with disillusionment and *Riot* depicts love, hate, cultural collision, religious fanaticism and the impossibility of knowing the truth and psychological motivations of modern Indian people. In *Riot* we find a description of a rioting mob which killed Priscilla Hart, a twenty-four years old American girl student during Hindu-Muslim riot. *The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cell Phone* is a reflection of India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It presents the most important documents relating to a challenge of dramatic changes to lend the facts a new perspective. The novelist here discusses the role of modern men in the challenges of the future. To him, no case poses a cold question of law. Every case is transformed into human problem and demands just solutions. This may be due to the sensitivity of the subject of satire and fantasy.

*The Great Indian Novel* deals with the episodes of *The Mahabharata* and political issue. The novelist has tried to begin his account of the love of King Shantanu for Satyavati. The birth of the five pandavas, the incidents of the adventures of pandavas during the course of their exile, Bhim's affair with Hidimba, Arjuna's banishment for a year, his love for Subhadra and disrobing scenes of Draupadi present dramatic scenes. These scenes have digressive quality of the original and emblematic modes of life. There are parallels between the historical and mythical implications. The first chapter, 'The Twice-Born Tale' of *The Great Indian Novel* tells about disillusionment of modern people. To the novelist, modern people used to tell that India is an undeveloped country. They also offer manners

of stuff and nonsense. The Brahmin is no novice in the art of seduction. Dhritarashtra's blindness was a severe handicap. Besides Yudhisthir, Pandavas have been conceived as embodiments of many institutions. Here we find dramatic changes in characters. In this way, *The Mahabharata* has awkward incongruities. Thus, the novelist has tried to reveal a reasonable degree of semblance between the mythical and historical in the novel.

Like Rushdie, Tharoor is thoroughly acquainted with the historical sense in a literary perspective and possibility of historical reconnections in his novels. He has faith in the value of history. To him, Indian history is shaped by his consciousness of the historiography context. Hence, Tharoor has pointed out in his novel:

The India of which Dhritarashtra assumed the leadership on 15 August 1947 had just been through a cathartic process of regeneration, another stage in this endless cycle. But you must not think, Ganapathi that the trauma of partition represented a disruption of this contrast process a side-step away from a flowing dance of creation and evolution. On the contrary, it was a part of it, for the world is not made by a tranquillizing wave of smoothly predictable occurrences but by sudden events, unexpected happening, dramas, crises, accidents, emergencies. This is as true of you or me as of Hastinapur of India, of the world of the cosmos.

(*The Great Indian Novel* 245)

Here the novelist is unhappy with versions made current after disillusionment. His description is dominated by the leading lights of the present day.

Tharoor has portrayed the historical account of Gandhi and Mrs. Gandhi. Gandhi is represented through Bhishma. Mrs. Gandhi returned to power after the defeat of the Janta Government in India. Tharoor's vivid satire as a source of truth about the part is stated by T.N. Dhar:

...This is suggestively reinforced by Bhishma's continuance in the court of

Dhritarashtra, even after he knew of the falsity of the Kauravas. Another contender for power is a member of the same clan but the circumstances of his birth prevent him from coming to the forefront. He is Karna, who stands for Jinnah. He succeeds in taking away a chunk of territory from the country to set up the state of Karnistan, which stands for Pakistan; this particular detail is a deviation from the original...

(Dhar 214-215)

*Riot* depicts many noble social attitudes and history of India. It deals with India's recent history, the problems and challenges that India has faced in the wake of Priscilla Hart, a twenty-four year old volunteer of Help-us, a non-government organization who was stabbed to death at Zalilgarh, Uttar Pradesh. She had been researching for a doctoral degree at New York University for ten months. She was also involved with developing female awareness programmes. Hindu-muslim riot of Zaligarh deeply affected Delhi and other places. Of course, Zalilgarh was influenced by religious movement of the Hindus and the Muslims. During riot of Hindu and Muslim, Priscilla was working on her project. The people found tension in Ayodhya for constructing the Ram mandir temple at the Ram Janmabhoomi. Zalilgarh authorities failed to stop the riot.

Tharoor has stated that the Hindus of Zalilgarh were very busy with Ramsila poojan programme. Young men were making flags and women were sewing, bunting and painting placards for the men to carry to Ayodhya. On the fixed day, the muslims refused to acknowledge the celebration of Ramsila poojan programme. As a result riot occurred in many parts of India. It is indeed hard to discover the real cause of Priscilla's death but it's not expected that she was murdered in communal frenzy. Her death is described by the novelist in *Riot*:

Her eyes were closed, her bare arms in that sleeveless blouse flung back, her legs were replayed as they dangled from the desk, and I was on top, deep inside her, her conqueror. (*Riot* 38)

Thus, we see that the novelist has presented that India is a civilization in decay that its moral and social order is breaking down now. The group

consciousness of Hindus and Muslims emerges antithetical due to the partition of India. No one is saying that the impact of partition is praiseworthy. Pain and suffering achieve a critical momentum. During riot, the people of Zalilgarh were disheartened. The Hindus were worshipping gods in temples for safety and they were also opposed to fraternity. The national pride was low and there were the scenes of night in which people were victims and scapegoats. Hence, the novelist has accounted in *Riot*:

...Ram and Rahim were the same deity and that if Hinduism ever taught hatred of Islam or of non-Hindus, "it is doomed to destruction." The rage of those who feel themselves supplanted in this competition of identities, who think that they are taking their country back from usurpers of long ago, they want revenge against history, but they do not realise that history is its own revenge. (147)

In making these observations, the novelist has presented that modern people can be faulted on several accounts. Thus, *Riot* deals with politics of influenced impact of the partition, violence and pressure group. The author has studied in detail: press, mass violence, inhumanity, communal frenzy and problem of governmental control. After independence, power politics in India has diverted its approach towards religion. The Buddha adorned women in his sermons :

Visakha, an immensely rich householder of Savatthi was held in high esteem by him. She is stated to have got conceded from him her Eight Requests. (Oldenberg 168)

*The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cellphone* is a reflection of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the present volume Tharoor has tried to mention together over sixty articles. It is not a survey of modern Indian history or politics but it is familiar with many of the principal events of the last six decades. To the novelist, India appears as a young country towards the future. It also contains records of dramatic changes and a number of directly struggle-oriented groups in both urban and rural areas. Modern people act on behalf of the victimized and deprived classes of India. In this way, they have added of late more radical groups that are questioning many of

the assumptions underlying current thinking on technology and its development. India is a land of contrasts where millions live wretched lives amid poverty. The crucial element is the emphatic articulation of the contradiction between the industrial big bourgeoisie. Now, we have a large issue: the reservation policy for the weaker section of society in general, the threat to India's pluralism, the danger to India's Democracy, the persistence of poverty, the strains of overpopulation, the risks of unemployment, the politicization of development, the failure to curb corruption, the risks of demographic imbalance, the limitation of federalism and neglecting the 'Software' of human development all are the dangers to India's future.

The appearance of *The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cellphone* is a landmark in modern era. Culturing the mind is more essential. Today's our India is seriously trapped in a tight corner by the spread of violence. The growing tension is seen in the following passage:

Violence is an inescapable reality for the ordinary India. We cannot escape being sickened by the daily occurrence of riots, rapes in custody. Murders of those who believe their power confers immunity and rampant incidents of the powerful taking the law into their own hands. If that sounds like an exaggeration, one reads far too often of episodes of poor women in rural India being stripped naked and paraded through streets to humiliate them or members of their family into doing as they are told.

*(The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cellphone 125)*

The Chapter 'Reconstructing Nalanda' deals with education system of India and Buddhism. As we know that the Buddhist Literature stresses that Nature and human beings need to live in a close harmony. Buddha was born at the foot of a tree in Kapilavastu and he attained Enlightenment at the foot of the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya. To Tharoor, the year 2006 was a curious year because it began with the hugely divisive reservation controversy and ended with the impetus being given and inspired by the former President of India Abdul Kalam Azad. Of course, Nalanda was the oldest and the greatest of India's Universities of the world. The name 'Nalanda' comes from a combination of 'nalam' (Lotus, the symbol of

knowledge) and 'da' meaning to give, so Nalanda means 'giver of knowledge'. It had intellectual excitement where Buddhist texts, the Vedas, Linguistics, Astronomy Medicine, Mathematics etc were taught to the students of Japan, Korea, Persia, Srilanka, Tibet, Turkey and India. It was destroyed three times by invaders but it was rebuilt twice.

We have found that the Buddhist Ecological Ethics got a momentum at the time of King Ashoka, a patron of Buddha's doctrine. We have abundance of references in *Tripiṭaka* about Buddhist Ecology. Pillar Edict VII accounts light on the welfare activities of Ashoka. The novelist has also described about Ajanta and Ellora in *The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cellphone*. He has described that Ellora and the medieval distractions on our way prepared us well for the wonder that is Ajanta. The novelist has pointed about Ajanta in very clear words:

Ajanta looks more like an organized tourist destination. As soon as we parked, we were inundated with hawkers offering tchotchkies with the most tenuous connection to the caves we had come to see. Young boys thrust mineralized chunks of rock into our hands as free gifts to entice us into their shops. We fled but were drawn up short at a paved ascent that curved upwards from the car park to the caves. A wiry porter emerged to carry our possessions for us—eight rupees (two dollars) for the entire duration of our visit. I accepted with alacrity, since the Taj Residency appeared to have given us an even more generous supply to bottled drinks than on the previous day. (342)

In this era of disillusionment, who is going to listen to the religious and ethical teaching of the ancient monuments and practice them? Our existence is emerged to things—earth, water, fire and air. Infact, Buddhism does not believe in a creator. To the 'Agganna Sutta' the evaluation of society is a subject to a natural process.

Thus, in the present paper, I have given an outline of historical satire and fantasy of the novelist, Shashi Tharoor. The novelist has presented issues of history and fantasy of human beings in his novel. On the one hand advancements in science and technology are matter of pride while

on the other they are also responsible for disturbing the world's ecosystem. My above survey not only underlines the historical satire but also illustrates a continuous pattern of fantasies of human beings. A cruel and selfish individual who tramples over the natural rights of others is like poisonous germs or diseases in the body. A pure mind does not offer pollution in the environment. So before cleaning the polluted atmosphere of the society, it is necessary to clean his/her mind from all the injurious activities. After the male-female division, we have the class-caste distinction in our society. The human rights groups must develop greater sensitivity towards the problems posed by various technocratic projects. It is true that physical torture is violence against the human person. Obviously enough all issues become satire, fantasy and critical as we realise that the traditional problems of justice for the oppressed are going to be overwhelmed by problems of demands of specific community in disillusioned world.

#### **Works Cited**

Dhar , T.N. *History-Fiction Interface*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999.

Oldenberg, Hermann. *Buddha, His life, His Doctrine, His Order*. New Delhi: William Hoey, 1997.

Tharoor, Shashi. *The Great Indian Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Riot*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Elephant, The Tiger and The Cellphone*. New Delhi:Penguin Books, 2007.