



## **TREATMENT OF NEMESIS AND MIMESIS IN SHASHI THAROOR'S "THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Great Indian Novel is a satirical novel by Shashi Tharoor, first published by Viking Press in 1989. It is a fictional work that takes the story of the Mahabharata, the Indian epic, and recasts and resets it in the context of the Indian independence movement and the first three decades post-independence.

**Key words:** Nemesis, Punishment, Adversary, Myth, Rhamnusia, Retribution, Xenophobia Sin, Vengeance, Imitation, History, politics, Riot, class struggle etc

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Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel goes back to the Pro-independence era with the scenes of 20th century Indian political movements. The Great Indian Novel is a wonderful title derived from the word Mahabharata, in Sanskrit "Maha" means 'great' and "Bharata" means "India". Personifying contemporary events in an ancient myth is mostly used in postmodern Indian English

Fiction, started by Salman Rushdie in his work *Midnight's Children*, Tharoor enriched this method in his very first novel "The Great Indian Novel". According to Tharoor it is necessary to use myth and history to recreate the value of past reality and to develop knowledge about the Legends of The Indian Freedom struggle. Historical writing is not the actual reality of the past, it is based on literature. Literature plays a vital role in the presentation of historical events.

Different interpretations of the same past historical events decide the social and political versions of that event. Tharoor showed his historical consciousness in the representation of Indian historical events like the partition of India and Pakistan in his work "The Great Indian Novel". Tharoor represented partition as metaphor to the past reality, according to Tharoor's view "Partition" Is 'fractured perception of history'. In 'The Great Indian Novel' Tharoor altered Indian history as mythical and democracy as caricature. Madhu Jain mentioned in his review, "Shashi Tharoor has taken the Mahabharata as a blueprint and filled it with a contemporary cast for his witty send-up of independent India. A sort of India revisited with the dramatis personae of the epic getting quite a bruising". This novel object modern myths of Indian independence and a narrative of democracy. Tharoor's creative knowledge lies-down on revealing how the methodology of the ancient epic can recreate modern India's political system.

Tharoor collaborates the creativity of fiction and factual information to establish the historical figures like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah with their mythical counterparts. 'The Great Indian Novel' is a reconstructed novel blending myth and history. Tharoor mocks the great national leaders like Gandhi and Nehru, Tharoor says that they are trapped in the local politics and forget their moral norms. He says that India has been decolonized by Indians after independence. Tharoor casts major characters as the binary opposite of tradition and modernity. Ramayana and Mahabharata are the two great epics written by Rishi Valmiki. Religious texts like these two epics have influenced the great Indian civilization. In both these epics Rishi ved Vyas reflect the culture of the sub - continent people. Mahabharata reveals the rich civilization and a highly evolved society of the great and ancient land of Bharata.

The Mahabharata establishes the intrinsic humanity which rejects the limitations created by caste, colour and language boundaries. Rajagopalachari, in his preface to the translation of the Mahabharata states, "Mahabharata is one of our noblest heritages..... It Strengthens the soul and drives home-as nothing else does – the vanity of ambition and the evil and futility of anger and hatred." (P3) The Mahabharata is an epic tale portraying the Successional struggle for the throne of Hastinapur between pandavas and kauravas – two branches of heirs of Hastinapur kingdom. In this novel Tharoor identifies the story of developing Indian democracy as a struggle between groups and individuals closely related by their personal and political histories. In this novel, Tharoor recreated the epic Indian tale with narration of the history of twentieth century India. In this novel, Tharoor

used digressional method of storytelling and made a conscious use of mythical events and situations to develop the effect of the contemporary scenario. History and myth are inseparable. Indeed, the farther back in time one goes, the more a nation's history becomes entangled with (and inseparable from) myth. In the accompanying paper, I discuss how Rushdie uses myth-making to revision India's history in *Midnight's Children*. However, history can be revisioned by mimesis just as effectively as it can be by myth-making; indeed, to the diasporic mind, mimesis is an essential tool of survival. Diasporic mimesis takes on two forms.

The first is a mimesis of the homeland's myths and traditions, in order to maintain a sense of belonging and identity that is congruent with one's ethnic ancestry. The second is a mimesis of the customs of the new land--the land to which the diasporic individual has traveled. This second form of mimesis is only natural, since geographical displacement (and re-placement) requires a considerable degree of intellectual and emotional adaptation. Thus, the diasporic mind is in a state of perpetual translation, in which both forms of mimesis intercept and merge. This merging of narratives--native and foreign, familiar and unfamiliar, ancient and new--is the fruitful "Third Space" (Bhabha 74-75) to which Homi Bhabha refers. It is by no means a stable space, being as tumultuous as the merging of Ganga and Yamuna, the two greatest rivers of India. What makes this analogy particularly suited to the diasporic imagination is the fact that the mythical river, Saraswati, is crucial to the merging Ganga and Yamuna. Also known as Triveni Sangam or "Union of Three," this triple knot of rivers--two geographical, one mythical--is also considered a symbol of life (Lane). The third river--that of myth--is what allows communication and transference between the two halves of the diasporic mind.

The Third Space is, in this case, a mythical one--a psychological Saraswati, where storytelling becomes the unifying force between "home" and "abroad." Invisible landscapes remain important in the mythologies of all the great religions. Every 12 years at Allahabad in northern India, a great Hindu pilgrimage called the Triveni is made to the point at which three sacred rivers converge: the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Saraswati. The third river is the most sacred of all, but it is not to be found on any map. This is a mythical river, having long ago disappeared from the earth, thought now to flow underground, in hidden fields of the spirit. (Lane) Pomo literature blends literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful and they also resist classification according to traditional literary rubrics. It has parallels with post-structuralism in literary theory says M.H Abrams in his book 'a glossary of literary terms'.

Shashi Tharoor's novel 'The Great Indian Novel' (1989), was written when post-modernism was about to come to an end, to find the elements of post-modernism we will analyze the novel based on the following features; intertextuality, pastiche, paranoia, satire, hyper-reality, late capitalism, post-world war 2 and metafiction.

Fredrick Jameson says that postmodernism is a sign of hollow world in which any sense of history has been lost and replaced with a stream of images. These fragmented images of history and epic compressed together can be seen in 'The Great Indian Novel'. Is the novel a parody of the epic form? Does it mock the ancient text of Mahabharata? No, the novel very creatively and brilliantly takes the plot and character of the epic and puts in them the very soul of the Indian independence movement. The term epic according to M.H Abrams "is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in formal elevated style and centered on heroic figure whose actions determine fate of the nation". In the novel there is no fixed heroic figure, but the fate of nation does depend upon a certain few. The novel definitely imitates a grand narrative style of epic and starts in medias res but it does not mock the form. It celebrates the form and takes it ahead as something necessary for the story telling. There is no exact date as to when post-modernism began, but artists because of the Holocaust and World War 2, began employing certain techniques and attitudes in their work and these later on became the criteria of post-modernist novel. So is the novel then modernist, proto- modernist or post-modernist? The novel was written in 1989 which is basically when post- modernism was coming to an end and contemporary novel was starting to make its place in literature.

The time period depicted in the novel is however before during and sometime after the Indian independence. The novel also depicts Pandu (Subhash Chandra Bose) going to meet Hitler and Hitler in action. Pandu says "Do you know who I am? Herr Hitler's best friend". (P.249). Hitler is someone who is shown as didactic, Pandu wishes to indulge in non- violence like Hitler to get India's freedom. "No more "truth- force" only yuddha. It's time to learn from that chap Hitler". Tharoor makes both of their attempts go in vain. There is a similarity between Hitler and Pandu; Pandu knew if he indulges in sexual act he would die. So was he committing suicide? "P...Pandu! What hath happened to you? (p.202). Hitler also commits suicide. Both give up their life after encountering failure. The novel is thus post-modernist since it was written in a time when the techniques of postmodernism were very well known to the writers as well as audience.

Late capitalism began after World War 2, it shows a world full of Mass Media (Arjun is representative of Mass Media in the novel), consumerism, globalism and big corporation. So, in the novel after India has attained its independence Arjun emerges as a journalist "I thought of Arjun with his paradoxical mixture of attributes, as the spirit of Indian people, to which he so ably gave voice as a journalist." (p.459). After the independence there comes a time when Arjun is confused about his role, it is then Krishna, who tells him he should do his Karma without wishing for a reward. Their talk is equivalent to the Gita in Mahabharata. Journalism and Mass Media became very important in a capitalistic society. After the independence we see that the morals were getting pushed back by profit. The officials were more interested in earning profit than doing their work responsibly. Election funds were also seen in trouble; corruption had taken its place in the "world's largest democracy

“(p.562). Everyone was thinking of power and money. Different parties had different ways of running the country but the common thing was they both wanted profits and power. The showcasing of this society as capitalist is one of the features of post-modernism. Pastiche is a work of art it imitates the style or character of work of one or more artists.

It is different from parody since pastiche celebrates the work it imitates and doesn't mock it. Pastiche adopts the stylings of original but doesn't comment or make fun of the material. But what is post-modernism doing then? According to Plato's theory of mimesis “art is twice removed from reality”. But in the case of post-modernism isn't art thrice or even more removed from reality? Can we even consider an imitation a work of art or even more, a work of literature? Tharoor mixes and matches works and characters, he doesn't really create anything. One is definitely overwhelmed seeing Draupadi as democracy, Bhisma as Gandhi ji, Dhritarashtra as Pt. Nehru, Priya Duryodhani as Indira Gandhi and Karna as Mohammed Ali Jinnah. This combining of works as a celebration is what classifies the novel as post-modernist. But why is postmodernism even considered literature?? It's just an imitation of works; wouldn't it be equivalent to plagiarism? The novel adopts the plot line of Indian epic Mahabharata and also its characters but Tharoor replaces the names of those characters and important movements with the name of Indian Freedom Struggle.

By combining Mahabharata and Indian Freedom Struggle ‘The Great Indian Novel’ qualifies for the category of pastiche making it a post-modernist novel. Paranoia believes that there is an ordering system behind chaos of the world. Having no control of what is happening currently. In the novel there are many instances of Paranoia, some people want something done but some don't, everyone had different views and thus different actions take place which result in Paranoia. The most significant examples are firstly of Pandu's actions, he goes to Berlin , Singapore and other foreign countries to accumulate military help but fate goes entirely against him and he commits suicide. The second is the partition of India. Mohammed Ali Karna wants a separate country “the party resolved unanimously to accept in principle the partition of the country. It was the first time we had ever gone against the expressed wishes of Ganga ji”. (p.311).

Ganga ji who was not in favor of this, died soon after. “And he was gone, and the light as Dhritarashtra was to say, went out of our lives”. (p.327). Does paranoia lead to death? The third is when Yudhishtir is the deputy Prime Minister but Priya Duryodhani does not listen to him and Yudhishtir resigns; “he resigned” (p.493). Later on Duryodhani loses her position as the Prime Minister but soon she comes back to power and we see VV ji dreaming about the journey to afterlife of Pandavas and Draupadi. We see that this chaos that things are just not going your way was what happening in the real world. There were so many people of authority wanting more power and asserting their rule that the result was a chaos. In the process of trying to control everything nobody was able to control anything. Hyper reality distinguishes reality from a simulation of reality. In this

real and fiction are so seamlessly blended together that there's no clear distinction between the beginning and end of each other. This feature of hyper reality perfectly describes the novel; the epic and the freedom struggle which are as real as they are fiction are blended into each other. The fact that the narrator calls the text a story indicates that it can be real as well as unreal. The truth validity of Mahabharata is also in doubts so we know that the text is definitely a combination of fiction/ real or real/real. But is the freedom struggle real? Is the inside information that we get real? It is Tharoor who is writing and he is someone with a position and perspective both. So is the text hyper real or the imagination of Tharoor? Isn't the text a product of imagination? If it is it must be biased and if it is biased it can't be completely real. So is the text entirely fictitious? Fragmentation is quite popular as a feature; it was in Romanticism, Gothicism, and modernism and even stuck to post- modernism.

The difference however is that Post- Modernists' play with the idea of fragmentation and others only mourned in that way. To post-modernists the fragmentation is a tool they use to explore the chaos of the world. Is there fragmentation in the novel? Well the novel moves from theme to theme and character to character telling us the story but in between VV ji or the narrator tells Ganapathi that he forgot to tell about a certain character. He gets so engrossed in the character and what's happening that he completely forgets about a character, he talked in the past. But is this even fragmentation? If we look at the literal meaning it means a break in the text or narrative, basically a non-linear narrative.

The text is surely linear, it moves from what happened first then second and so on. But there are many breaks in the narrative. "Let us leave them there for a minute, Ganapathi and take a quick look at others" (p.205), "I can take story from here" (p.408) are some examples. The dreams that VV ji sees are also an element of fragmentation and magic realism since it takes us away from the reality. There are supernatural elements in the story which otherwise in the real epic were quite a part of the text. The dreams of 'disrobing of Draupadi' (p.551), 'Arjun meeting Lord Shiva' (p.577) and the 'path to salvation of Pandavas with Draupadi' (p.604-607) are all in the text to explore the features of fragmentation and magic realism. Satire is used by Tharoor to ridicule the human or individual voices, follies, abuses and short comings. The purpose of satire is to show what the author disapproves of. But can satire tell us about morality since the author only satirizes of which he personally disapproves of. In book sixth 'Forbidden fruit', Dhritarashtra becomes the head of Kaurava party and Pandu deprived of his positions leaves the party. Ganga ji starts the Mango March (allusion to salt march) and dies in the middle before any of the major conflicts with national political parties starts. 'The Great Indian Novel' which translates as Maha- Bharata is a Postmodernist novel according to theme of intertextuality, metafiction, fabulation, pastiche, paranoia, satire, feminism, late capitalism, and hyper reality. Tharoor smartly puts in the Indian freedom struggle in the ancient epic Mahabharata and creates a fantastic fictional text.

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