

Intertextuality and Nuanced Perspectives on Nationalism- Shashi Tharoor's Political Allegory

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Abstract: Political Allegory (Latin/Greek *Allegoria*) employs a veiled language to convey complex political messages that go beyond the surface story and are prompting deep down to reflect the sensible real world issues which particularly include power dynamics, social change and injustice and bigger political moves of the countries of the world. Exemplars like *Animal Farm* (*totalitarianism*) and *The Hunger Games* (*Social Inequality*) have presented the hidden ideas in symbolic forms where the characters, events and story allows the author to critique the power governance and society safely and indirectly. Shashi Tharoor an eminent writer of Indian writings in English has employed political allegory in his works *Riot* and *The Great Indian Novel* through his matchless narrative art. The paper makes an attempt to study and analyze the intricacies of Tharoor's use of political allegory in the light of Intertextuality and his nuanced views on the Postcolonial Perspective of India with sprawling Nationalistic views. Tharoor's political allegory is a powerful critique honestly reflecting the social political issues of the nation acting as a social commentary on the socio- political realities of India.

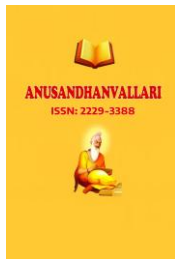
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Political allegories are the stories that employ imaginary characters and situations to satirize real life political events and changes witnessed in the political scenario of a nation or globe. Jonathan Swift, an Irish writer, in seventeenth and eighteenth century was one of the pioneer figures in Political allegory and in his most popular work *Gulliver's Travels* he has satirized the rulers of those times as Lilliputians, the tiny inhabitants of a fictional island. The plot moves English events to imaginary overseas country so that the English government could be freely satirized.

George Orwell was a great admirer of Swift and followed the style in his work *Animal Farm* but with a slight change when he brought the events of the Soviet Union in an English country to reflect that the events of Soviet Revolution were not far off from their own home. Orwell's works influenced many other writers of the allegories who utilized political allegory as a powerful tool for indirect commentary upon the contemporary political scenarios of those times and as a method of change in society.

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is yet another political allegory which allegorizes the European rulers by imagining them as typical school boys fighting over a tropical island. Through the skilful use of metaphors, symbolism and compelling narratives political allegories simplify the complex political issues for the common man to understand and provoke certain responses from them which is capable of swaying the public opinion.

The characters, situations and events are representing the real life political events and therefore the readers are able to correlate them very easily to adopt perspectives presented which increases awareness or critique sense of the people of the world in real life politics. Political allegories play an important role in the shaping of societal views and fostering of discourses around critical issues.



Shashi Tharoor is a great Indian novelist, writer, diplomat and well known political figure in the field of Indian Polity. One of the most acclaimed work of Tharoor that earned its nomination as the Political Allegory is The Great Indian Novel, a political satire written by him that captures the Indian political and social scenario of 1989.

The fictional work is an allegory as it allegorizes the characters and situations of Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics of India. The novel is recasting and resetting the characters and story line in the context of India's movement of Independence and the first three decades of India after gaining Independence from the British Raj.

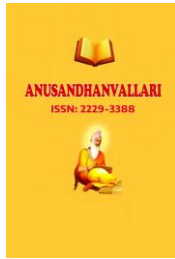
The mythological figures of Mahabharata have been parodied as the political figures in present and just as the epic describes the political struggle of a historical dynasty over the throne of Hastinapur and showed the tussle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the novel also showcases and recasts the story of the nascent India democracy as a struggle between group and individuals closely related to their personal and political history. Tharoor also throws light upon the persona of Mahatma Gandhi and Pundit Nehru who are treated with lot of reverence by Indians.

The novel is an account of the closely witnessed political incidents by Tharoor during his political career. He is a member of Indian Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. Previously he had served as the Under Secretary of the UN for communication and Public information. He also served his role as the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs. The plot of the novel allegorizes the Mahabharata where the People's Front designed as the Pandavas is defeating the Kauravas' Party in election. Priya Duryodhani, the Prime Minister loses his power and no more holding his position after defeat but she is gathering her political strength again so that in the next election she can become a reason for the fall of the government. The character of Priya Duryodhani embodies all the evils aspects of the archetypal villain from Mahabharata. In the novel she is reflecting the same aspect in the post colonial context that aligns with Indira Gandhi's political legacy. The characters of Dhritrashtra and Pandu maintain their original traits of blindness and paleness. However the character of Gandhari has been depicted as a grim, submissive, blindfolded figure that is subverting traditional representations of women in the epic. Mahatma Gandhi's caricatured character in the novel is Ganga Dutta, portrayed as a Mahaguru whose leadership at the same time is dignified as well as absurd. Speaking on India's identity and decay of the culture his statement seems to be contradictory as he utters :

"India is not an underdeveloped country but a highly developed country in an advanced stage of decay....everything in India is over developed, particularly the social structure, the bureaucracy, the political process, the financial system and the university network."

Tharoor's novel employs lot of contradictions and contradictory statements given by the characters that itself create a sequence of political allegory and satire. By merging the mythological character of Bheeshma with that of Mahatma Gandhi, Tharoor reflects in the novel that what were the paradoxes of the Gandhian philosophy and to what extent it impacted post colonial India and its people. The paradoxes occur in the presentation of the character of Gangaji when he gives his reactions against the Western label of India as an underdeveloped nation. He switches to the logic that India's problems are not a result of underdevelopment but because of being too old and too structured. He terms India as an advanced nation which is in the stage of decay after advancement. This statement given by Ganga ji is a critique to the idea that India is badly in need of modernization. It clearly shows that the too developed structures have become much rigid and stiff that are preventing the growth of nation.

The novel represents an irrational character aspect of Ganga ji as a spiritual saint as well as a cold and calculative politician. Tharoor allegorizes the idea through the statement, "We are not led by a saint with his head in the cloud, but by a master tactician with his feet on the ground." The statement itself strips away the "Mahatma" myth associated with the name of Gandhi ji. He emphasizes that Gandhi's 'spiritual' fasts or



Satyagrahs and his vows were not just moral acts but they were in fact very potent manipulative weapons against the British and their followers.

There is also a great contradiction reflected in Gandhi ji's philosophy of Truth as the path to achieve it was through suffering. It was true that Gandhi advocated for 'Truth' or Satyagraha but the definition of Satyagrah was paradoxical as it advocated that the idea of finding truth through peace alone was not possible but through active pursuit of pain. He said, " *If you believe in truth you have to prepare yourself actively to suffer for it.* " This again contradicts his belief of Non Violence or *Ahimsa* and while Gandhi preached *Ahimsa* but his methods incited massive social disruption and also the blackest chapter of Indian history that witnessed the violent bloodbath of Partition.

Democracy is regarded as the foundation of the post colonial India that favours equality and non discrimination between people of the country. However Ganga ji's reflection on democracy seems to be contradictory when he said, " Democracy ...is the most arrogant of all forms of government ...our people would be the first in the world to vote on their own subjugation. This critiques how Gandhi's "will of the people" eventually led to the dynastic rule of the "Kaurava Party" (The Congress Party) and the authoritarianism of Priya Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi).

Tharoor pointed out that Ganga ji's preaching were considered to appeal universalism and speak about Hindu Muslim Unity, still his implementation of his own preaching is exclusionary in nature. The character Karna (representing Muhammad Ali Jinnah) finds Ganga ji "too much of a Hindu." The contradiction is that by using Hindu symbols (like the *Ram Rajya* or the spinning wheel) to mobilize the masses, the "universal" Mahaguru unintentionally alienated the minorities he sought to include.

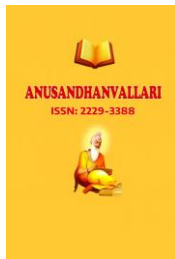
Through these reimagined incidents, Tharoor not only reflects on the disillusionment following independence but also critiques the limitations of non-violent resistance in the face of complex political realities. His satirical approach serves as a commentary on the state of contemporary India, suggesting that the romantic narratives surrounding the freedom struggle do not adequately capture the multifaceted nature of India's political landscape post- independence.

Shashi Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel" stands as a pioneering work that critiques the established narratives associated with the Indian freedom struggle. By parodying iconic figures and events, Tharoor prompts readers to reconsider the complexities and contradictions inherent in the Gandhian movement and the broader quest for independence. This critical satire invites further discourse on the legacies of nationalism in India, challenging the foundational stories that have informed the nation's identity. Tharoor's ornamental style and innovative structuring serve to enhance his interrogation of historical myth, merging literary prowess with a nuanced exploration of post-colonial realities.

Tharoor satirizes the famous Dandi March, which in fact changed the course of the freedom struggle in India. Mahatma Gandhi became a hero of the masses but in Tharoor's novel he is reduced to a comical figure.

Thus the entire freedom movement and Gandhiji's attitude towards Satyagraha, his views on truth and non-violence, his views on Khadi and the weaving of the Charakas are dealt with ironically by Tharoor and he seems to suggest that the milestones like the Chauri Chaura incident, the Jallianwallan Bagh Massacre, the Dandi March which finally led to the freedom of India were all failures and finally the attainment of freedom itself was a failure as the events that took place after the freedom-the war with Pakistan and the partition of the country itself showed.

It is the third millennium perspective that Tharoor seems to project in the novel. The kind of relationship that India shares with her neighbours, antagonistic with one and uneasy with another puts the entire foreign policy into question. The successors of Gandhi and his legacy did not seem to live up to the expectations of the people



of India and it is with this aspect in view that Tharoor has written this novel, and further when the youth of India seem to relish a shorter path to the solution of any problem the path adopted by Gandhiji his fasts, his atonements, his noncooperation seems to be quite outdated.

The fact remains that the values of truth, nonviolence, purity of thought and action taught by Gandhiji are universal though for a while it may seem that they are outdated. This is perhaps the message that Raja Rao wants to convey in his *Kanthapura*.

Shashi Tharoor presents a post-modernist and a post-colonial view of the freedom struggle and therefore his perspective while looking at the event changes. The values that were dear to Gandhi do not seem to impress him. Therefore, he has ironically presented the values propagated by Gandhiji and has ended up parodying the entire freedom struggle.

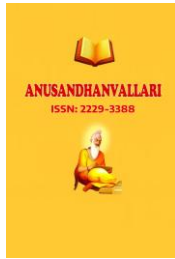
The Indian Freedom Struggle is a significant chapter in India's history, immortalized in the literature of various Indian languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, and Tamil. Notable poets and writers like Makhanlal Chaturvedi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Veer Savarkar, Sane Guruji, and Subramany Bharati have enshrined the freedom struggle in their works.

Similarly, Indian authors writing in English, such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, reverently depicted the freedom movement and its iconic leader, Mahatma Gandhi. As time progressed and the Nehruvian Era transitioned into history, the initial exuberance of independence began to wane.

The harsh realities of life and the costs paid for freedom came to light, prompting a more critical examination of the leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Writers such as Mukul Keshavan, Amitav Ghosh, and Shashi Tharoor began to explore the complexities of the freedom struggle from multiple perspectives. In *"The Great Indian Novel,"* Shashi Tharoor offers a provocative and satirical critique of the Gandhian freedom movement by reinterpreting the epic Mahabharata. Written in 1989, over fifty years after Raja Rao's *"Kanthapura"* (1938), Tharoor's work questions the effectiveness and relevance of Gandhian ideals. While Raja Rao embraced Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha and portrayed it as instrumental in India's independence, Tharoor presents a contrasting viewpoint.

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