



Pluralistic Heritage and Cultural Diversity in Literary Landmarks of Shashi Tharoor

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Abstract— India is a land of diverse culture, language, religion and multiple regional and indigenous identities which define the country as Unity in Diversity. All these existing identities in the nation are connected with each other through a shared democratic history and as per Tharoor they more or less appear like a platter of various dishes. Tharoor's core idea emphasizes the thought that India and its essence of Indianism is defined purely by the idea of embracing multiple identities. He popularly uses the term *thali* to represent India as a harmonious whole. The idea of India's unique multiculturalism has been reinforced in his works *Riot and India: From Midnight to Millennium*. The present research paper is an attempt to reflect Tharoor's perspective of Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in his literary landmarks reflecting the Pluralistic concept of Hinduism and Cultural Inclusivity of India.



Keywords— Cultural Diversity, Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Identity

The idea of India is not based on language, not on geography, not on ethnicity and not on religion.

The idea of India is of one land embracing many.

On the global platform India has been reputed to represent a parallel universal power balance but internally the idea seems to be shattered and shaken by the disorders and petty conflicts on nation on casteism and class discrimination fired by sudden religious and communal riots. In most of the speeches delivered by Shashi Tharoor India's greatness having a majestic past and a promising future of the challenges and global opportunities has been signified. However the destiny of the nation takes a to and fro step every time when there is a question of Pluralism and cultural diversity working together to achieve as a whole. At this instant the think to wonder about it is that how India will foresee its future in the midst of dystopia fuelled by massacres and massive annihilation. As Tharoor puts up strongly in his own words in *India: From Midnight to Millennium*:

We were brought up to take this for granted, and to reject the communalism that had partitioned the nation when the British left. In rejecting the

case for Pakistan, Indian nationalism also rejected the very idea that religion should be a determinant of nationhood. We never fell into the insidious trap of agreeing that, since Partition had established a state for the Muslims, what remained was the state for the Hindus. To accept the idea of India, you had to spurn the logic that had divided the country.

The idea is the basis of Tharoor's lifetime literary mission where he strongly believes in embracing rather than accommodating and assimilating. Tharoor has emphasized cultural confrontation and interaction to learn and grow and this has always been his idea of the global vision. His work *Riot* has the central theme of the contrasting features of the west and the east culture where the American protagonist of the novel Priscilla Hart falls in love with an Indian District Magistrate Lakshman. Both Priscilla and Lakshman represent the two diverse cultural attitudes towards love, sex and marriage along with their struggles to achieve identities as Indians and individuals in Indian society.

Laxman is quite comfortable to lead his entire life with Priscilla but he is unable to forgo completely his Indian identity which makes him, conscious of the cultural gap existing between him and Priscilla along with a vast difference in their outlook towards life and values. This represents a strong cultural clash between the east and the West, but Tharoor neither gives preference to East nor to west and in fact he focuses his entire attention on the diversity of Pluralistic Indian and its realities in Postcolonial India.

Throughout the novel he restricts to be judgemental and shapes the novel as an unprejudiced work. The idea of cultural riot has been reflected through the characters of Laxman and Priscilla as on one hand Priscilla is indifferent towards Laxman's past and present and she is least concerned about the cultural differences despite which she madly loves Laxman but it is Laxman who seems to be torn between his family responsibility and love for Priscilla. Laxman is haunted by Priscilla's past which she does not hide and tells him very honestly. He reflects : *"It was not lightness I felt at her revelations. I had known all along that her life must have been something like this, an American Life"* (82). Laxman goes through the loss of sense of selfhood and insecurity due to which he is unable to accept Priscilla. Laxman is torn between his cultures and despite his efforts he remained knitted to the Indian culture.

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* by Shashi Tharoor speaks of past , present and future existence . The novel is an account of the pre independent and post independent history which begins with the arrival of Gandhi on the political stage along with his moral politics and ends finally with the moral degradation of his followers and successors . Through the novel Tharoor tries to emphasize the roles played by various political figures and thoughts in evolution of Indian culture and the formation of Indian nation what people see today. Tharoor admits that for this novel he had taken Mahabharata as the basis as he strongly believed that it was a secular narrative that consisted of intriguing characters reflecting human flaws like greed, jealousy, resentment, power play and deceit which one can witness in every political scene (Geeta Pandey).

The concept and ideology of Pluralism is strongly connected with the liberal democracies in which it speaks against the concentration of power in any elite or group of elites and believes that power must be dispersed equally among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups so that it can be enjoyed by functional and cultural groups within a diversity. Pluralism was a reaction against Capitalism by group of writers Frederic Maitland, Samuel

G Hobson , Harold Laski and Howard Cole who spoke for the alienation of the individuals under Capitalism. They felt the necessity for integrating the individuals in the social context to give them a sense of community.

As per the concepts of modern economy Tharoor views India as hybrids that is managing and balancing the market forces or capital powers with social welfare or socialism. Therefore he always advocates for pragmatic approach which should make best use of Capitalism to generate growth and ensure social justice and equality. Tharoor is not purely an idealist and he firmly believes that the lived experience of the people is far more important than the theories of socialism and capitalism therefore he envisions a society where less people fall through the cracks. Not only India is a cultural hybridity but also an economic hybridity for him and as per his own words it is an amalgam of market forces and state intervention. On a historical perspective Tharoor explains that Indian nationalists did not trust Capitalism as the British came to India for trade but later they stayed and ruled the nation , therefore capitalism is concentration of power in few hands that limits the freedom leading to economic exploitation.

Tharoor describes India as a land of belonging rather than that of blood. It is a nation which according to him has sustained a shared history and believes in Pluralistic Democracy. The secularism of the country is a profusion of religions and none of them are privileged by the state. Therefore the idea of a single religion is impossible in a culturally diverse state like India and as history knows this was only the main reason behind the Partition of the nation into separate states of Hindus and Muslims.

Throwing light upon the concept of Pluralism in India and the Pluralistic Democracy he speaks that this aspect allows citizens to hold multiple and non conflicting identities simultaneously like an individual can be a good Muslim, a good Keralite and also a good Indian at a time. Tharoor main idealism and message for the upcoming generations is to preserve Pluralism calling it essential for the nation's survival. He speaks:

My generation grew up in an India where our sense of nationhood lay in the simple thought: That the singular thing about India was that you could only speak of it in the plural. This pluralism emerged from the very nature of the country; it was made inevitable by India's geography and reaffirmed by its history. There was simply too much of both to permit a single, exclusionist nationalism. (*India- From Midnight to Millennium*)

In his first hand article he writes that in India everything exists in countless variations and there is no single way of life and culture therefore Pluralism is acknowledged in the country in the way India arranges its all affairs whether it is taste, faith, religion or ideologies. Tharoor elaborates that India is not just a country but an adventure where all avenues are open and everything is possible. According to the British historian E P Thompson, "*There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind.*"

Tharoor reflects that Pluralism emerges from the very nature of the country India therefore it is a synonymous thought which is an integral part of the nation. It has a deep impact of the British Raj, the vedic age and ancient Hindu times, Islam and Christianity and the result is unique. Many observers and thinkers in the west are greatly astonished at India's survival as a pluralist society. The name of the country itself has been derived from the River Indus that flows in Pakistan and was once the part of nation. There is an anomaly in this explanation and many other explanations also breed anomalies in them.

The singularity of India has always stood for peace and could be described as the very embodiment of peace in a war mongering war stricken world – an oasis in the desert of unending. India is a land where history, myth, and legend of so many different religious sects and philosophical themes overlap so much so that sometimes Indians themselves cannot tell the difference.

Since centuries, many saints from India across all religions have always advocated peaceful coexistence as the only key to many problems of the country. However, since the turn of last century there has been a nationwide wave of fanaticism and bigotry, open and fearless expressions of religious intolerance and hidden forces fully active creating deep rifts between hitherto peaceful communities.

One after the other, there or here, these or those incidents creeping up like catastrophic mushrooms further widening the old gaping wounds in the minds of two major religious groups of India both burdened with centuries of bitter memories and baying for the blood of each other. The tragedy is further aggravated by governmental lethargy verging on indifference leading to insidious support and encouragement to religious factions creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear psychosis.

The danger is so real and tangible yet officially brushed off as insignificant exaggerations. Added to this is the mounting tension at the borders shared with a hostile country that is absurdly provocative and unreasonably uncouth and hitching for a nuclear confrontation. Further exacerbating the situation is the fact that external mercenary groups working secretly underground to

undermine the very integrity of the great nation. Add to this the uneducated and unqualified milieu of politicians and a hysteric media - that completes the picture of the ugly side of the modern India.

However, the actual image abroad of India and Indians is totally a different one in the present world. From the international perspective, India is a utopia of endless possibilities, the most promising land of future potentials and a unique nation that has the control to change the power balance of the planet. Tharoor explains in his own words what Secularism means for India and how with changing times its facets have changed in the nation:

Western dictionaries defined secularism as the absence of religion, but Indian secularism meant a profusion of religions, none of which was privileged by the state. Religion was too pervasive in the popular culture for unreligion to become public policy, despite the open agnosticism of Nehru. But the notion that religion had no *place* in public policy was easily accepted in India, where the distinction between God and Caesar had been enshrined since time immemorial.

Speaking upon the idea of minorities and majorities in India Tharoor puts up in very simple words that all are minorities in India and there is nothing like majority. Whether he is a typical Indian stepping off a train, a Hindi speaking individual from Uttar Pradesh might sometimes cherish that he is representing a majority but that is not true because as a Hindu he belongs to the faith adhered to by some 82% of the population, but a majority of the country does not speak Hindi; a majority does not hail from Uttar Pradesh; and if he were visiting, say, Kerala, he would discover that a majority is not even male. Worse. our archetypal UP. He reflects :

How can one approach the India of snow peaks and tropical jungles, with seventeen major languages and 22,000 district "dialects" (some spoken by more people than Danish or Norwegian), inhabited by nearly 940 million individuals of every ethnic extraction known to humanity? How does one come to terms with a country whose population is 51% illiterate but which has educated the world's second-largest pool of trained scientists and engineers, whose teeming cities overflow while four out of five Indians scratch a living from the soil?

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