



SATIRE OF CHARACTERS IN SHASHI THAROOR'S THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

The euphoria that was generated when India won her independence soon turned into a deep sense of disillusionment even as the reign of Nehru was on. When the country did not develop as it should have, many Indians came to distrust the very system. The continued border problem with China and the troubles that Pakistan created for the country, put under the microscope the role played by the national leaders during the entire freedom struggle. The role played by Nehru and Gandhi in particular, came under the scanner, and writers like Girish Karnad, Mukul Keshavan, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor etc., have looked at the freedom struggle with a critical eye. If Mukul Keshavan has looked at the plight of the survivors of the freedom struggle, Rushdie has critically assessed and observed the consequences of the freedom struggle. Girish Karnad, in his play Tughlaq has shown the disinterestedness and disillusionment that had enveloped the Nehruvian era. Shashi Tharoor, a controversial personality that he is has ended up parodying the freedom struggle in his novel. "The Great Indian Novel". At the same time, Tharoor has caricatured many of the national leaders article

This seeks to focus on the caricature of the nationalistic figures as drawn by Shashi Tharoor in his novel. "The Great Indian Novel". Shashi Tharoor has shown through his novel that the freedom movement has been a failure. The frame work of this novel is the world's longest epic. "The Mahabharata" written by Vedavyasa. The characters in both the works are the same but the heroes of the Mahabharata are non-heroes in Tharoor's novel. Yudhistir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev have nothing heroic about them. In the same breath, Tharoor has also caricatured the great nationalist figures like Gandhi, Nehru, Rajaji, Indira

Gandhi, Morarji Desai through the mythical characters, For example, Phishana the Pitamah of the Mahabharata is Ganga Dutta in Tharoor novel and he is the caricature of Gandhiji. By subverting the myth in his novel, Tharoor has sought to question the validity of the Gandhian values in the 21 Century

This paper intends to bring out the satire and the parody that Shashi Tharoor has indulged in, and the caricature that he has drawn of the great national figures in order to drive home the point that the Gandhian values are no longer relevant and that on the hindsight, the freedom movement itself has been a failure.

Keywords: Controversial figure, sidelined, personality, freedom me historical incidents

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The Indian Freedom Struggle is indeed a significant chapter in the history of India. And this struggle has been immortalised in the literatures of almost all the Indian languages like Hindi, Marathi, Telgu. Tamil etc. Poets like Makhanlal Chaturvedi and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan in Hindi, Veer Savarkar and Sane Guruji in Marathi, Subramany Bharti in Tamil have immortalised the saga of the freedom struggle in their works. Likewise, the writers of Indian writing in English were not left out in any way. Novelists like Mulk Raj Anand R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao have eulogised the freedom struggle and its leader Mahatma Gandhi in their works.

However, with the passage of time and as the Nehruvian Era passed into history the initial joy of freedom was over and the hard reality of life and the price that was paid to gain freedom began to dawn upon the Indian populace, the role of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders came under the scanner and writers like Mukul Keshavan, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor etc., have looked at the freedom struggle from different angles. If Mukul Keshavan has looked at the plight of the survivors of the freedom rights, Rushdie has focused on the consequences of the freedom struggle and the rule of Jawaharlal Nehru and that of his daughter Smt. Indira Gandhi in his novel, Shashi. Tharoor has ended of parodying the freedom struggle in his work "The Great Indian Novel." The present paper focus on the caricature of the nationalist figures and movements as depicted by Shashi Tharoor in his The Great Indian Novel.

Shashi Tharoor is a controversial figure he always lands into controversies every now and then. However, he is a well-known literary figure. He has written articles for "New Review" "Gentleman" and "The Illustrated Weekly of India". He has also written short stories, dramas, and a novel that deals with the world of cinema "Show Business". Shashi Tharoor's style is quite ornamental in his, "The Great Indian Novel" and this novel is known for magic realism.

If Raja Rao a prominent novelist in his Kanthapura eulogised Gandhi and the Gandhian method of Satyagraha and his way in which he procured independence for India, a modern writer Shashi Tharoor holds a diametrically opposite view. In his "The Great Indian Novel" written in 1989, Tharoor looks at the Gandhian freedom movement as a total failure. This novel was, written nearly fifty one years after Raja Rao's Kanthapura which was written in 1938. In this novel, Tharoor has questioned the validity of Gandhian values and principles. The framework of "The Great Indian Novel" is the world's longest epic, Mahabharata written by Vedavyasa. The characters in both the works are the same, but in The Great Indian Novel, Tharoor has indulged in subversion of the myth. His characters are all caricatures in the novel. The great heroes of the Mahabharata are non-heroes. The five Pandavas of Tharoor, Yudhistir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev have nothing heroic about them. They are not men of action. Even the real hero of the Mahabharata, Krishna, is reduced to a non-entity. He is a mere MLA of a South Indian District. However, he is a far-sighted gentleman. The gender of Mahabharata's villain Duryodhana is changed from male to female in the character of Priya Duryodhani. The brothers Dritarastra and Pandu retain their original characteristics of blindness and paleness. Dritarastra's wife Gandhari is not only blind-folded by choice, but is also grim by nature. Kunti who is a paragon of purity and virtue is virtually depicted as a woman with easy virtues. Madri does not have any personality of her own.

She speaks oddly saying "thweet" for Sweet. Karna, the illegitimate son of Kunti is present in the novel as Mohammad Ali Karna, the president of Karnistan, Tharoor's equivalent of Pakistan. The narrator of the story is Veda Vyasa and Bhishma is the elderly patriarch of the novel. Drona and his son Ashwaththaman are also present in the novel. The events of the Mahabharata are twisted in order to make the novel a mock-heroic parody. For instance, in the novel it is Sahadeva who fights against the powerful wrestler Bakasura of Ekachakra instead of the powerful Bhima as in the original. And since, nce, the Great Indian Novel is a parody it is quite apt that Sahadeva is defeated in this unequal battle and becomes a butt of laughter. Looked at from another angle. Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel" is also a parody of Gandhiji's freedom struggle. The oldest character of the novel Ganga Dutta as he is known is the patriarch of the great Indian family. He is a "Mahaguru" to his followers. He is a caricature of Mahatma Gandhi and is addressed as Gangaji instead of Gandhiji. He is at once a dignified and ridiculous figure. He is a Gandhi-like figure who is out to subvert all the values that Gandhi stood for. The narrator of this story is V.V. or Vedavyasa, who, in reality is Rajaji who translated the Mahabharata into English and India's first Governor-General. It is through his eyes that the entire story is looked at. Dhritarastra is Jawaharlal Nehru, whose blind trust of the Chinese, led to the failure of India's foreign policy. Gandhari-the grim is Kamala Nehru. Draupadi is the daughter of independent India, as she is the representative of democracy, is born after independence. Really, she is the illegitimate daughter of Dritarastra and Georginia Dwepad who was the wife of Lord Dwepad the last Viceroy of India. Lord Dwepad and Lady Georginia can be identified with Lord and Lady Mountbatten. Pandu, who was consciously sidelined by Gangaji is really Netajo Subshash Chandra Bose, while sidelining Pandu and the manner Gangaji goes about doing it, he is depicted in very poor light. One cannot imagine that Gandhiji could be so scheming. Drona who was the second commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army is named as Jayaprakash Drona, in reality, is Jayaprakash Narayan. His disciple is Yudhistir, the eldest Pandava who is in fact Moorarji Desai. The novel begins with Gangaji's entry into the freedom movement and into the Kaurava (Congress) party and ends with the failure of the Janata Party experiment led by Moorarji Desai and mentored by Jayaprakash Narayan. The villain of the piece is Priya Duryodhani, who can be identified with Indira Gandhi who subverted the democratic process by imposing internal emergency. In fact the subversion of democracy is signified by the stripping of Draupadi in full view of the public by Dushahasan. Even the historical incidents are satirized Shashi Tharoor introduces a few historical incidents in the novel and has either presented them comically or ludicrously. For example the Champaran Satyagraha is pictured as the Motihari Satyagraha where was collected from the poor peasants by the British government. Gangaji was brought to the place by a person named Rajkumar and Gangaji managed to inspire the poor farmers into a non-violent agitation and Gangaji himself wrenched free the first indigo plant and vowed a symbolic fistful of grain in its stead. And as a result he has to face a trial and is asked to leave Motihari without conducting an inquiry. But the magistrate gave him permission to expose the misdeeds of his own people. If he was a success in Motihari it was because of the co-operation that was given to him by the magistrate and the other British authorities and it was also equally true that he faced difficulties when authorities were less co-operative. And in such instances, Gangaji went to the jail without any protest. He, in fact, did not abandon non-violence but directed it against himself. Shashi Tharoor says that Gangaji had the capacity to startle his followers with his demonstration of the lengths in which he was prepared to go in the defense of what he considered to be right. Here, Tharoor seems to comment on the mode of protest as employed by Gandhiji against the British. It is ironic that the powerful British Empire had to give in to the demands of a frail gentleman.

Next, Shashi Tharoor raises the issue of the Dandi March or the Salt Satyagraha which met with resounding success due to the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In the novel, the incident is narrated as the Great Mango March which was directed against the Britishers, for, they denied the people the right to consume their own fruit without paying taxes. They were required to attach their trees to the control of the local landlord as the mango was supposed to be a cash crop. Gangaji went on to protest this injustice in his own way. Tharoor again says that though there were mango trees in the nearest vicinity, Gangaji opted to walk about two hundred and sixty eight kilometers to the orchard of a Kaurava party sympathiser, pluck a mango from his tree and break the law. The satire is on the Dandi March and in the present instance, Gangaji opted to break the law by walking into the orchard of a Kaurava party sympathizer. This was not at all heroic on the part of Gangaji to have walked into the groove of a Kaurava party sympathizer. Instead, Tharoor seems to suggest that Gangaji would have been a hero if he had plucked a mango from the tree of a person who was antagonistic to him. Thus Tharoor satirizes the famous Dandi March, which infact 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 Jalianwalah 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. This is the third millennium perspective that Tharoor seems to project in the novel. The kind of relationship that India shares with her neighbors, 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 upto 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 non-co-operation seems to be quite outdated. But the fact remains that the values of truth, non-violence, 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.

However 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.

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