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HYBRIDITY AND INDIAN CONFLICT OF IDENTITY IN SHASHI THAROOR'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper talks about the concept of hybridity and Indian conflict of identity in the novels of Shashi Tharoor. The work of Tharoor that includes his three most celebrated novels-*The Great Indian Novel*, *Show Business* and *Riot*. Tharoor's works demonstrates the involving nature of Indian identity in the essence of post colonialism. There is an idiosyncratic element of this quest for "who we really are", multiculturalism as well as the hybridization of Indian society as the consequence of globalization in all his works- in its theme, exploration of thoughts and characterization. Almost in all his works, Mr. Tharoor precisely exposes the politics of identity crisis, multiculturalism, creation of new trans-cultural forms or hybridization within the Indian culture and its effectiveness in dealing cultural diversity and dissimilarities.

Keywords: Hybridity, identity crisis, multiculturalism, globalization, cultural diversity, myth.

1. Introduction

The Indian literature, particularly the Indian English Literature is marked as radical transformation in terms of characterization, theme and plot in the postcolonial era. It now neither integrates nor combines any rosy color of romanticism while portraying India. The aftermath of three-hundred-years' of British slavery of a colonized country, the cankerous sore of partition as well as the problems of the newly acquired independence doesn't allow the modern Indian English Writers to indulge in any kind of romanticism. Instead it has become a voice to talk about the needs, desires, ambitions, determination, objectives, aspirations, successes and failures of the new India with ruthlessness and bluntness after meticulously scrutinizing and analyzing Indian social-cultural-political-religious identities as well as its hybridization due to multiculturalism and globalization. To quote Tharoor, as he said in one of

his interviews, "India is not, as people keep calling it, an underdeveloped country, but rather, in the context of its history and cultural heritage, a highly developed one." (Shashi Tharoor, *Globalization and the Human Imagination*, Opening speech of the 3rd International literature festival Berlin, September 10th, 2003)

Tharoor says that the endorsed and authorized histories of nation, particularly that of the colonized nations, are like hagiographies. He also says that reminiscences of one's memory can contribute in the creation of national history which in turn can help in building one's identity as an individual and as a nation.

2. Elements of Indian Identity Conflict and hybridization in Tharoor's Novels

India's national identity has been built on the slogan "Unity in Diversity". This Indian identity, according to Tharoor, is fictitious in diversity and each and every Indian is in minority. Shashi Tharoor

himself was born in England, brought up in Kolkata and Kerela. He is a student of history and has travelled far and wide in the capacity of UNO secretary and diplomat. As a result, his writing displays the multi-dimensional aspects of Indian identity along with its cultural and social aspects, India's crisis for a single identity and the amalgamation of different cultures. It is rightly said, "Indianness lies more in the soul of the country than in its body and the soul of the country lies in its thoughts, aesthetics, philosophy, science and technology, its way of living in entirety and totality, in a word, its entire culture from the ancient to the present day."

The characters of Tharoor's Novels are facing problems and striving to achieve their identities as Indians and as individuals in Indian society. Much like the African novelist, Chinua Achebe, Shashi Tharoor, though in a different note portrays the clash between the basic Indian cultural mentality, the effects of western influence and education. The cultural and ethnic patterns and the thought process of any society or nation plays a vital and central role in the formation of national identity. The post-colonial India though want to cling on to its age-old traditions, customs and culture could not necessarily ignore the ever growing influence of western thought pattern and elements on its culture. This results in the conflicts of one's identity as an individual and as a society.

3. Identity Conflict and hybridization in *The Great Indian Novel*-

Tharoor's novels have some specific and unambiguous agenda or stratagems to address several specific central issues of modern-day India. According to Edouard Glissant, the poet and critic, classical epics or literature exemplify and represent "root identity" grounded on a detached, far-fetched allegorical chapter of foundation. Nevertheless, this "root identity" is overwhelmingly disrupted by polyglossic postcolonial re-renderings of epics like Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, based on the voluminous epic Mahabharata. Edouard Glissant who is the father figure of Caribbean literature and criticism, calls such rewritings as "relation identity" which is not projected on the ethnic pureness of fabled ancestral parent of the work but is a

cognizant and conflicting effort of intercultural interaction.

In his fiction, *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor uses the theme of the great Hindu mythological epic, Mahabharata. Tharoor relentlessly overlaps and draws parallel between the original epic and the social-political scenario during the Indian Independence movement. All the characters of the mythological fiction are entwined or interwoven and are to re-live their lives in pre-and-post independent era. Even in the narrative structure, there is a continual oscillation between history and fiction. The narrator of the story renders the antiquity from a unbiased standpoint, refraining from any kind of verdict and reassuring multiple implications. Tharoor says, "... my fiction seeks to reclaim my country's heritage for itself, to tell, in an Indian voice, a story of India." (*Globalization and the Human Imagination, Opening speech of the 3rd International Literature Festival, Berlin, September 10th, 2003*).

4. Identity Conflict and hybridization in *Show Business*

Show Business is a boisterous novel on the great Hindi/ Indian film industry, Bollywood. It is actually a bitter sarcasm on Bollywood portraying the dark aspects of this show-biz world like egos, infidelity, glamour, seduction, politics, supremacy of privilege (nepotism) and double standards. The book closely follows the career of the film-star Ashok Banjara, modeled on real-life superstar Amitabh Bachchan. The narratives stretches from the time when Ashok was a struggling actor striving to find a footing in this glamour world to the time he met with a fatal accident in a film set and fighting for his life in a hospital.

Banjara's movies became block-busters and made his life a never ending fantasy and converted even his real-life as a bewildering but convincing and fascinating falsehood so much so that Ashok himself lost the touch of reality. The narratives include the detailed movies scripts along with 'Bollywood style' dialogues, monologues, songs creating a make-believe world, which in turn became the vehicle to draw the attention towards the deeper truth of life-love, death, ambition, desire, deception, greed and stark difference

between illusion and reality. During an interview Tharoor explained, "In the second novel, I... looked at stories... of the popular film industries. Why? Because our country is still fifty percent illiterate and films still represent the principal vehicle for the transmission of fictional experience." [Harry Kreister, "Conversation with Shashi Tharoor". Conversation with History 8 Feb 1999, 10 Dec 2001]

The social, political and professional portrayal of glamour world through the portrayal of Ashok Banjara epitomizes the postcolonial concept of 'hybridity' as propounded by Homi K. Bhabha. The novel faithfully renders the Indian film industry with all their nuances. Show Business is a hybrid of literature and cinema, which superficially cross-examines the antagonism between the literary medium and the silver-screen medium of fiction. In a way, Tharoor, re-discovers and reveals the contemporary India's ideas, stories and dilemmas.

5. Identity Conflict and hybridization in Riot-

This novel is written against the backdrop of Babri Masjid Demolition and the outbreak of communal riot as its aftermath. The story follows the murder mystery of twenty-four years old, highly motivated and idealistic American student, Priscilla Hart, who came to India as a volunteer in women's health programme. Tharoor true to the postcolonial aspect of hybridity did not follow the linear narratives or simple narration of events. The narration consists of journals, newspaper cutting, letters and often contradictory account of events given by dozen characters on Priscilla's death. On the other level, Tharoor scrutinizes the whys and wherefores of the communal tensions, giving much insight presenting both the Hindu angle and the Muslim version of the whole incident. Lakshman is an educated Indian who cannot share his intellectual ideas with any fellow Indian and feels quite comfortable with Priscilla, an American girl. But in his heart, he cannot completely forego his Indian identity and is aware of their irreconcilable gap between their culture, values and outlook towards life. Metamorphically, this is the conflict or clash between the east and west ideologies. Lakshman (India) falls in love with Priscilla (West). The affair is emotionally and intellectually satisfying but morally disgusting as he cannot bring himself to break his

ties as an Indian family man, as an Indian father, as a respectable man in the Indian society which gives him as sense of roots and belongingness.

Conclusion

Tharoor's novels are amalgamation of myths, history, culture, and different ways of narrative and postmodern techniques. His novels entertain and at the same time educate the readers about the dark realities of contemporary India- the diversity of pluralistic Indian society, the pains, pleasure, aspirations, dilemmas, cultural and political realities of postcolonial India. He uses "hybridity" which is an important streak of post-colonialism and postmodernism way of presenting things. His English displays a mixture of India's colonial past as well as its own rich legacy.

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