

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SHASHI THAROOR'S THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

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ABSTRACT:

Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel tells the political history of the 20th century India through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the Mahabharata. According to Tharoor, the political history of the twentieth century India closely resembles, and can be properly understood only in relation to the events and the characters of the Mahabharata. In the postmodernist novels, aspects like colonialism, nationality and politics are discussed abundantly. Shashi Tharoor, being a diplomat and politician, we find the political perspective in his fictional and non-fictional works. The national movement for freedom from the British colonial rule and the people's uprising against Indira Gandhi's dictatorial regime marked the continuation of the epic struggle between dharma and adharma fought on the battleground of Kurukshetra. The present paper tries to analyze the historical and political perspectives of India from Indian freedom struggle to the regime of Indira Gandhi.

KEYWORDS: Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre, Emergency, political strategy, The Round Table Conference, provincial government

1. History plays a vital role in shaping the present world of man. On account of the deep-rooted connection between man and his past, almost all disciplines of knowledge which developed during the course of human evolution have had a close link with history. From among the various literary forms, the novel's connection with history has been the closest and had the most far-reaching cultural consequences. It is fairly understandable that the novelist's engagement with history may or may not be of the same kind as that of a historian, but this does not in any way lessens its significance. In fact, the novel's engagement with history was at the very root of its development. Jose Ortega Gasset had rightly said—

Man, in a word, has no nature; what he has is ... history. Expressed differently: what nature is to things, history, res gestae, is to man. (Gasset, Jose Ortega, 217)

In the wake of nationalist struggle, the Indian English novelists got more involved in the momentous events of their immediate past. For

understanding it thoroughly, they occasionally went into the country's farthest past as well. This increased the range of their interest in history. The Indian English novelists have consistently shown their interest in and awareness of history. They have used history differently in their novel. Some have evinced interest in the exciting experiments that have been made in the West in the interface between history and fiction.

The Great Indian Novel presents the image of contemporary India from the perspective of history. It portrays Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi against the British colonial rule. It was a movement against the Anglicized and the imperialistic attitudes of the British. Tharoor dexterously interweaves the freedom struggle and post-Independence India's political history with the Mahabharata's events and characters. Tharoor superimposes the modern politics on the readymade structure of the myth. The novel traces the events from colonial times of the British in India to the imposition of Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1970s and its consequences. P. Lal comments on The Great Indian Novel thus:

The Great Indian Novel is an attempt to retell the political history of the twentieth century India through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the Mahabharata.... The Mahabharata has come to stand for so much in the popular consciousness of Indians: the personages in it have become household words, standing for public virtues and vices and the issues it raises, as well as the values it seeks to promote, are central to an understanding of what makes India. (Lal, P., 9-12)

The national history of India is presented from the rise of the nationalist movement of Mahatma Gandhi to the post-Emergency period extended till Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Some important events like Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, the Salt Satyagraha, the accession of Kashmir, the partition of India, the Goa operation, wars with China and Pakistan, the abolition of privy purses and the nationalization of banks, the darkest period of the Emergency, the formation and fall of Janata Government, the re-election of Indira Gandhi in 1982 have been discussed in chronological order just as history itself portrays. All these events are

allegorically described by using the events of the Mahabharata in the same chronological order. Thus, the novel discusses of the two different periods running simultaneously – the first mythological period of the Mahabharata and the second, the modern period of India's freedom struggle till the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

The Historical account begins roughly from the time when Mahatma Gandhi entered into Indian politics till the time Mrs. Indira Gandhi returned to power after the fall of Janata government. Ved Vyas' claim for his account as definite memoir of his life and times is meant to characterize the historical account as well. Gandhi is represented through Bishma, also called Ganga Datta to bring him nearer our times. Like Bishma, he gave up claim to power and governance of the country. This claim left two main contenders – Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, who are represented as Dhritarashtra and Pandu. The historical narrative suggests that Nehru gained influence in the party hierarchy and succeeded in controlling the reign of power in post-independence India, because of the blessings of Gandhi. This is suggestively reinforced by Bhishma's continuance in the court of Dhritarashtra, even after he knew of the falsity of the Kauravas. Gandhiji preferred simple and natural life. During freedom struggle Gandhi was instrumental in the success of every movement. Gandhi's entry into Indian politics marked a change into the political-economical life of India. He carried his message into the villages and inspired everyone to participate in the freedom struggle. The people spontaneously responded to his calls for agitations. Gandhi followed truth, satyagraha and civil disobedience through non-violence as weapons in his battle against the British Raj. Gandhiji travelled widely and he used to be on the spot at any corner of the country, whether it be a labourers' predicament or the peasants. Gandhi's struggle and his way of organizing the people nonplussed the British. Gandhi's participation in the peasant movement at the village level attracted the national attention which contributed to the birth of 'nationalism' in the country. Champaran in the North-West Bihar and Kheda in Gujrat are the best instances for this. At Champaran, there had been a spordiac resistance since 1860s to the 'tinkatiya' system. European planters tried to pass burden on the peasants by charging rent-enhancement ('sharahbeshi') or lump-sum compensation ('tavan') in return for releasing them from the obligation to grow Indigo. Widespread resistance

rose in the Motihari-Bettiah region during 1905-08. At Champaran, cultivators were taxed. Gandhiji himself made inquiries into the matter and this publicity for his enquiry led to the abolition of tax. Gandhi's enquiry was banned and restricted (rescinded) by higher authorities with the fear of satyagraha threat. At Kheda, the peasants who cultivated crops like foodgrains, cotton and tobacco were worst affected by famine. Added to this was the plague after 1899 which made them too poor to pay their taxes. The poor harvest coincided with the high prices of daily needs. In order to resist the forceful tax collection of the colonizers, Gandhi started a satyagraha at Kheda and succeeded. It was the first real Gandhian peasant satyagraha in India. Gandhi also commenced a campaign against the British at Motihari region where they strictly ordered the native peasants to consecrate three tenths of every man's land for the cultivation of indigo and it had to be sold to the British planters at the rates as they fixed. Ved Vyas explains this campaign to Ganapathi:

Imagine it for yourself, Ganapathi. Frail, bespectacled Gangaji defying the might of the British Empire, going from village to village proclaiming the right of the people to live rather than grow dye. (TGIN 51)

Gandhi's intervention in Ahmedabad in March 1918 was an internal dispute between Gujarat Mill owners and their workers. The confrontation took place when the Mill owners attempted to withdraw the 'plague bonus' of 1917 in a period of rising prices. The workers demanded 50 percent of wage enhancement in lieu of the plague bonus. Gandhi advised 35 percent and owners offered only 20 percent. Gandhi started the hunger strike on 15th March 1918 to meet the demands of the workers. It was the first hunger strike by Gandhi. This hunger strike won 35 percent wage increase for workers. Tharoor's realistic perspective of history is seen in the contrasts of the hunger strike of Gandhi to the present day hunger and relay strikes. He ridicules them as dramatic. He describes the seriousness of Gandhi's fasting:

With each passing day Ganga weakened.... The visitors came in larger numbers, their concerns for his health meriting larger and larger headlines in the papers. The crowds swelling outside his makeshift shelter were increasingly more angry than curious. The nervous jute-mill owners sent for a doctor, who took Gangaji's feeble pulse and declared that his condition was seriously deteriorating. If something was not done soon, he would be beyond recall, and Indian nationalism would have its first non-violent martyr. (TGIN 103)

Tharoor ridicules present day hunger strikes:

What could be more absurd than the widely practised 'relay fast' of today's politicians, where different people take it in turns to miss their meals in public? Since no one starves for long enough to create any problems for himself or others, the entire point of Gangaji's original idea is lost. All we are left with is the drama without the sacrifice. (TGIN 106)

Gandhi's salt satyagraha was one of the most effective movements in the Indian freedom struggle. It was part of the civil disobedience movement. The Congress Working Committee met at Sabarmati (on Feb. 14-16, 1930) and empowered Mahatma Gandhi to launch the 'Civil Disobedience Movement' at any place and time of his choice. He first chose to defy the salt laws. He demanded the abolition of salt tax. Gandhi began a march (on 12th March to 16 April) from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi along with 78 Ashramas participants culled from all parts of India, with an intention not to return the Ashram until he achieved freedom. Gandhi reached Dandi and defied the salt laws. He called the people to manufacture salt. He declared the week from 6th April to 13th April as national week and asked the people to picket liquor shops and boycott foreign cloth. On the call of Gandhi, many people resigned the Government services and students left the government schools and colleges. Many legislators resigned their seats and people violated salt laws, peasants evaded taxes and debts. The country was in an open revolt. During the movement he appealed to the people not to indulge in any violent activity. The Britishers used atrocities on 'satyagrahis' to suppress the movement through lathi charges, cruel tortures and moved the demonstrations to prison.

Civil Disobedience movement, non-cooperation movements and peasant protestations left the British in sleepless situation. The entire country marched after Gangaji. Sir Richard depicts the situation:

We have had a nasty little boycott of British goods, with fine Lancashire cotton being thrown on to bonfires. We have even had bombs being flung by that Bengali terrorist, Aurobindo, and his ilk. But all these were, in the end, limited actions of limited impact. Ganga Datta shows every sign of being different. (TGIN 60)

Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre was the gloomy incident for the Britisher's notoriety in the history of freedom struggle. This incident quivered the nation on the afternoon of April 13, 1919. A public meeting was convened in Amritsar, despite a ban on meetings. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Michael O' Dyer took no steps to prevent it and ordered firing on an unarmed crowd of a few thousands which lasted at least for ten minutes.

The meeting hall was enclosed on all side by high wall, having only a narrow entrance, a virtual massacre followed. It is estimated that about 500 persons were killed and 1200 wounded. The tragic incident had a lasting impact on succeeding generations. It compelled the veteran poet Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel Prize winning writer renounce his Knighthood as a measure of protest. It converted loyalists into nationalist and constitutionalist into revolutionists. Gandhi returned the Kaiser-I-Hind medal given to him during the Boer War and determined to fight for complete freedom. Tharoor depicts the cruelty of the British in Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre thus:

The soldiers fired just 1600 bullets that day, Ganapathi. It was so mechanical, so precise; they used up only the rounds they were allocated, nothing was thrown away, no additional supplies sent for. Just 1600 bullets into the unarmed throng, and when they had finished, oh, perhaps ten minutes later, 379 people lay dead, Ganapathi, and 1,137 lay injured, many grotesquely maimed. When Rudyard was given the figures later he expressed satisfaction with his men. 'Only 84 bullets wasted', he said. 'Not bad'. (TGIN 81)

In January 1922, Congress began a mass civil disobedience movement that included non-payment of taxes, defying British laws under the guidance of Vallabhbhai Patel and Gandhi. During the movement, 22 policemen were burnt alive by an angry mob at Chauri Chaura. Gandhi immediately brings the movement to an abrupt end. Tharoor angrily questions the British taxing and exploiting Indians:

Why the pink blackguards bothered to tax Indians I will never understand, for they had successfully stolen everything they needed for centuries, from the jewelled inlays of the Taj Mahal to the Kohinoor on their queen's crown, and one would have thought they could have done without the laborious extraction of the Indian working-man's pittance. (TGIN 116)

The freedom struggle reached its pinnacle with its call to the British to quit India. In between 1942-45 the Quit India Movement was assumed to be the last phase of war with the British. It is a landmark in the history of India's struggle for freedom. It was the serious rebellion since 1857. The Congress Party met under Gandhiji's chairmanship and proclaimed a new campaign of civil disobedience. The message to the British was simple and direct and it was to quit India. The British instigated communal feelings among the Muslims and Hindus to weaken the freedom struggle. They successfully divided them and were able to rule India for a few more years. At the same time of the Britishers departure, they split the country into two. Though Gandhi and some other

were not ready to tear the country into two, the Muslim League would not move from its demand for partition. Tharoor describes the terrified communal riots and anarchy during the partition:

The killing, the violence, the carnage, the sheer mindlessness of the destruction, burned out something within me.... Where is it written that only he who bears an Arabic name may live in peace on this part of the soil in India, or that raising one's hand to God five times a day disqualifies one from tilling another part of the same soil? (TGIN 226-27)

This religious bigotry led to the assassination of the father of the Nation by a Hindu fanatic. Tharoor tries to make it clear that there was a period when people of different religions cooperated with one another to maintain peace before the advent of the British. Ved Vyas says that the British civil serpents contaminated it and explains to Ganapathi that religion has nothing to do with our national politics. He explains the secular society of India of the past:

We had never taken our social differences into the political arena..... No, Ganapathi, religion had never had much to do with our national politics. It was the British civil serpent who made our people collectively bite the apple of discord. (TGIN 134)

The British cleverly took communal different as an advantage to rule India for some more time. They used the strategy of divide and rule.

Tharoor's narrative draws attention to serious implications of Gandhi's thinking. Because of his deep-rooted grounding in the Hindu tradition, Gandhi consistently exploited Hindu symbols for galvanizing people against the British. This made the leaders of other communities conscious of the dangers of the rising tide of Hindu influence to their identity. It is true that the narrative does not suggest that Gandhi caused disaffection among the minorities. But the narrative makes it clear that it led to the alienation of political leader like Jinnah. This eventually sharpened the sources of conflict between the Hindus and Muslims which led to the division of the country. Tharoor exposes the disapproval of Jinnah for Gandhi. Jinnah's dislike for Gandhi's ways and thinking is quite well-known and has been widely documented. It is somewhat ironical that a person who fought all his life for Hindu-Muslim unity has to be made responsible for encouraging Muslim separatism, but this is implicit in Tharoor's understanding of Gandhi. Tharoor's narrative criticizes Gandhi for slackening his grip over the Congress party around the time of India's independence, when it was needed most. He thinks that Gandhi was wrong in letting the question of partition be decided by his lieutenants.

Other Freedom fighters like Jawaharal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and extremist activities are also portrayed in detail in the novel. Tharoor exposes the power hungry nature of Nehru and Jinnah. Nehru does not comply with Gandhiji when he suggests offering the premiership to Jinnah in order to keep India united. Subhash Chandra Bose was one of the most fearless leaders of the Nationalist Movement in India. He resigned his presidentship of the Congress Party for a second time as Gandhi and others opposed him, and formed a new party known as Forward Block. He decided to cross the Indian border and reached Germany where he formed Indian National Army.

After Nehru, Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister and ruled India unilaterally. She gained popularity among the poor by proclaiming her commitment to 'democratic pedigree and socialist convictions' (TGIN 357). People had great veneration for her and saw in her the strength of the nation. Tharoor attempts to expose the hypocrisy of the politicians. In the general elections people voted Indira Gandhi to power but ironically enough they were not benefitted much by her regime. This is a clear proof of the political deception and shattered illusion. Tharoor describes the pathetic condition of the poor during the reign of Indira Gandhi. In the fifth general elections held in 1971, Allahabad High court found Indira Gandhi's election invalid. She was accused of misusing the government personnel for her political campaign. L.C. Jain quotes from the P.M.O. Diary I - Prelude to the Emergency, a record of daily events in the Prime Minister's office maintained by Bishan Tandon, who was Joint Secretary in Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's office:

Justice J.M. Sinha had set aside the P.M.'s election and upholding the charges of corruption ... barred her from contesting any election for six years... (Hindu Magazine)

India witnessed widespread protest to mount pressure on Indira Gandhi to quit the chair, but in vain. Jayaprakash Narayan appealed to the police and military officials to disobey the illegal orders at the biggest rally held in Delhi. The opposition mounted pressure on the P.M. to resign as she stuck to the seat even after she was unseated. Mrs. Gandhi took the appeal of Jayaprakash Narayan as a pretext for her plan to impose emergency in the country. She accused them of trying to stir up trouble among the armed force which was treason. Jain also says that "the diary provides clinching evidence that, in fact, preparation for the Emergency were well in hand prior to J.P.'s public

meeting on the evening of June 25". Political crisis prevailed all over the country. The common man's life was affected by rising prices, brewing corruption, police brutality, bureaucratic inefficiency, black marketing, unemployment, caste discrimination and so on. Before elections, Mrs. Gandhi promised the people to eradicate the poverty. But in practice, it did not improve the people's living conditions. The price-rise increase in her regime averaged fifteen percent which was never experienced ever before. Jayaprakash Narayan castigates Indira Gandhi's failures:

Drona preached not only against Duryodhani but against all the evils she had failed to eradicate and therefore, in his eyes; had herself come to represent: venality and corruption, police brutality and bureaucratic inefficiency, rising prices and falling stocks in the shops, adulteration and black-marketing, shortages of everything from cereals to jobs, caste discrimination and communal hatred, neglected births and dowry debts. (TGIN 363)

At such a critical juncture, Indira Gandhi received a suggestion from Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the then West Bengal Chief Minister as well as legal advisor to her to impose 'Emergency' under the article 352 of the constitution. Tharoor gives an account of the consequences of the Emergency. Detention of opposition leaders started in the wee hours of 26th July in New Delhi. They were woken up and shown orders of apprehension and driven to police station. The government imposed the press-censorship. All news collections had to be submitted to the government for scrutiny.

The very fact that they could no longer write what they wanted became a burning issue to those for whom conversation was now the only outlet. (TGIN 373)

During the Emergency, Mrs. Gandhi's totalitarianism and collectivism was evident. She expanded her authority over the nation. Ved Vyas explains to Ganapathi:

Ganapathi, while the poor remained as poor as they had ever been, while striking trade unionists were beaten and arrested, while peasant demonstrations were assaulted and broken, all this while more and more laws went on the statute books empowering Priya Duryodhani to prohibit, proscribe, profane, prolate, prosecute or prostitute all the freedoms the national movement had fought to attain during all those years of my Kaurava life. (TGIN 357)

The Emergency period can be considered the blackest period in the history of Indian democracy. It strangled the freedom of the press and the civil liberties of the people. Kuldip Nayar, in his book *The Judgement*, quotes Mohan Dharia, Member of Parliament, criticizing it severely:

The 26th day of June 1975, the day when the emergency was declared, when my colleagues, several political

workers and leaders were barbarously put behind bars, when the freedom of the press and civil liberties were surrendered to the bureaucrats, that day will be treated as the blackest day in Indian Democracy and in the history of our country. (Nayar, Kuldip, 68)

Tharoor exposes the false notion of Indira Gandhi as she felt the primacy of parliament over the people which she could control. Tharoor upholds the supremacy of the people. The parliament is only an institution so long as it represents the popular will of the people. He says, a parliament placed above its people who elected it –

... is no more democratic than an army that turns its guns upon the very citizens it is supposed to protect. (TGIN 384)

On 18th January, 1977 emergency was over and general elections were declared. He depicts the common scene of election in any corner of the country thus:

... at every election someone discovers a new chemical that will remove the indelible stain on your fingernail and permit you to vote twice... some distinguished voter claims his name is missing from the rolls, or that someone has already cast his vote.... Some ingenious accountant produces a set of figures to show that only a tenth of what was actually spent was spent; somebody makes a speech urging that the legal limit for expenditure be raised. (TGIN 390)

In the novel, Tharoor holds the view that the press played vital role for Indira Gandhi to regain country's self-respect and freedom. Tharoor ironically compares the election with the game of Dice played in the Mahabharata. Defeat of the tyrannical regime and restoration of democracy is described by Tharoor in superb style.

During the Emergency Indira Gandhi transgressed her power as Prime Minister. She violated the democratic principles of the constitutional rights of the people. Tharoor deals with the issue of Indo-China war (1964). Jawaharlal Nehru developed an inclination towards communist rule of China and he coined a slogan 'Hindi Chini bhai bhai'. But soon it turned to be an illusion as Chinese invaded India on the issue of Tibet. He also deals with the issues of India's involvement in the affairs of East and West Pakistan and the immigration of Bangladesh refugees into India. East Pakistan revolts against the domination of the West Pakistan. India gets involved in the war and fights for the creation of a separate state of West Pakistan (Bangladesh) during the period of Indira Gandhi's rule. Tharoor also deals with the importance of the press in handling the problem of untouchability. Many veteran leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi fought against the evil practice

of Brahmanical society. He depicts the domination of priestly class over the marginalized:

... the local priest, defying the new constitution, was refusing to allow the Untouchables, Gangaji's Children of God, to enter the temple; or another where a landlord had evicted a pathetic family of tenants because they had been less than fully cooperative with his exactions; or a third in which a corrupt village official, a policeman or a patwari, was exploiting the poor and the illiterate for his personal profit. (TGIN 292)

In Bengal, the Naxalbari movement reminds us how the frustrated unemployed middle class youth turned to extremism. The exploitation of the poor village woman by the timber contractors in Kashmir, the worst savagery of selling and buying of woman in the district bazaars in the deserts of Rajasthan, the worst condition of the poor people in Bihar due to famine etc. are dealt with superb skill. Through the mythological character of Arjuna, we get a glimpse of India in the mid-twentieth century.

Tharoor also deals with the land reforms. The Congress Party, influenced by socialist principles, attempted to distribute land among the poor, but it was not implemented successfully. Jayaprakash Narayan castigates the Congress Party for its failure:

... while the bureaucrats and ministers stand on their 'commanding heights', the common peasant of India is trodden into the demanding depths – of starvation and ruin! They do not care about ruthless exploitation by the landlords in the villages because they are too busy in the cities. (TGIN 274)

Thus, The Great Indian Novel is really a fiction of history. Tharoor's dealing with the history is realistic. The incidents described in the novel are in chronological order just as history reveals itself. Tharoor has touched the Mahabharata, sacred epic of Hindu in the Vedic past. The mythological background of the epic is used as a framework to reassess the political history of modern India. He juxtaposes the literary epic with history without privileging the former text. It also provides the history of the Vedic period to some extent.

While assessing the political perspectives of The Great Indian Novel, it becomes clear that Tharoor portrays the leaders subtly bringing out the political strategy used by them. Sudhendu Shekhar says about the novel:

Chaos is the conspicuous theme of The Great Indian Novel. The political history of modern India, bearing resemblance to the events and the characters of a bygone period underlines the evolution of chaos as a result of the foibles and follies of the political personalities with responsibility. They fail to live up their expectations and equate that responsibility

community-wise, instead indulge in self-aggrandizement. (Shekhar, Sudhendu, 97)

The novel starts with the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scene. Gandhiji became gradually known as a formidable opponent of the British foreign rule. He spoke openly about 'swaraj' or self-rule. He considered untouchability a blot on Hinduism and declared it illegal in India. Ronny Heaslop tells about him to Sir Richard thus: *He seems to believe in the force of moral authority, sir. He cleans his own toilet to show that there is nothing inherently shameful about the task, which as you know, is normally performed by Untouchables. (TGIN 37)*

Tharoor thinks that although Gandhi left behind a well-documented life, his countrymen have 'consigned him to mists and myths of historical legend' so much so that he 'might as well have been a character from the Mahabharata' (TGIN 47). The author believes that Indians have failed to relate the father of the nation to their lives not only because of the 'bastard educational institutions the British sired on us' (TGIN 47) but also because of the prevailing political culture of the country after Independence in which the ruling elite promoted their own favourite politicians by pinning the ones they disliked to currency notes and concrete slabs. In this way Gandhi was made to appear unimportant in the sphere of moral and cultural influence.

Tharoor has perfectly delineated Gandhiji's role in awakening the masses against colonizers by perfecting a system of non-violent struggle against their unjust exercise of power. His first real experiment with truth was Champaran Satyagraha (1916-17). The cause of this satyagraha was the ineffable plight of Indigo cultivators due to colonial exploitation. This campaign brought, for the first time, ordinary men and women into the main stream of freedom struggle. Gandhiji's concept of non-violent protest, which emerged from his conviction of justice, equality and liberty also proved a timely and potent weapon in the fight against the British Raj:

Where sporadic terrorism and moderate constitutionalism had both proved ineffective, Ganga took the issue of freedom to the people as one of the simple right or wrong- law versus conscience- and gave them a method to which the British had no response. (TGIN 55)

This movement established Gandhiji as the undisputed leader of Indian National freedom. The political fallout of Champaran Satyagraha was the hasty annexation of Hastinapur to British India. During this period also, we could see the political strategy used by the politicians to make their position clear for the future. While Gandhiji

moved on relentlessly with a broader mission of fighting for the rights of the underprivileged and the exploited, Pandit Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose did not accompany him. They are shown busy to ensure their succession in future politics. The official announcement of India's annexation was met with a sense of outrage and a vociferous protest on the part of its citizens. The people of all class, caste, age rushed towards Jallianwalla Bagh to attend a mass rally where Gandhiji would address the people to denounce the imperialist design. On the order of Colonel Dyer, soldiers opened fire killing hundreds of men, women and children. The massacre reveals the brutality of the colonizers and their total lack of human feeling. Pandit Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose joined the nationalist cause whole-heartedly. Tharoor focuses light how Nehru gained importance in the party and succeeded in controlling the reign of power after independence. It was the result of reality. He was busy in organizing people for India's liberation. Bose's role as chief organizer brought into sharp focus his political difference with Nehru:

The process of building up a party structure and a cadre committed to run it in the teeth of colonial hostility convinced him that discipline and organizations were far greater virtues than ideals and doctrines. It was classic distortions, Ganapathi to which our late Leader would herself one day fall prey, the elevation of means over ends, of methods over aspirations. (TGIN 86)

Gandhiji was the leader of national struggle against the colonial rule. He was also the leader of Indian National Congress. But his grip on the leaders began to slack down. Due to his preference for Pt. Nehru, the rift between Bose and Nehru began to grow. And this policy of political favour was seen after Indian independence. The greed and avarice on the part of political leaders is better seen after India's independence. But Gandhiji devoted himself for the cause of Indian people against the British colonial rule. He handled the cause of Jute factory workers in Bengal in 1929. Through this protest campaign, he learnt a lesson that 'the best way to bring his principles to life was, paradoxically, by being prepared to die for them' (TGIN 105). In this way, he promulgated a new strategy in Indian politics to assert one's right. But Tharoor presents his views exactly opposite to the many post-independence hagiographers. According to him, 'the most of the crucial event in Gandhiji's life and career were those in which he acted alone, resolving the dictates of his

hyperactive conscience within, and, by himself' (TGIN 109).

Tharoor exposes the political conflict between Bose and Pandit Nehru over the issue of sending National Congress delegation to the Round Table Conference convened by the British in London to discuss the future of India. Bose was against sending a delegation as he thought it as a sinister imperialistic play to divide the Indians and weaken the nationalist movement. But his opinion was disregarded and, on Nehru's decision, Gandhiji was sent to attend the Round Table Conference. The Round Table Conference talks were a complete failure. The decision to send Gandhiji for Round Table Conference was the mistake on the part of Nehru. In the same manner, the success of Salt March revealed the mistake on the part of Bose. But Tharoor portrays Gandhi as a great political strategist. In spite of a lot of theatricality in his social and political campaigns, he gave the freedom movement a much needed publicity both in India and abroad. Unfortunately, the peaceful agitation, which exposed the colonialists and held them up to ridicule, turned violent in a place called Chauri Chaura. It led to the death of some policemen and the abrupt suspension by Mahatma Gandhi of the most successful movement of mass civil disobedience in British India. Many politicians including Bose termed the move as an act of betrayal. In a meeting of the leading members of the Congress Party, he gave vent to his annoyance with Gandhiji. The narrator of the novel, Ved Vyas, tries to explain that to Gandhiji the principle of non-violence was more important than the success of any single agitation and that this new weapon would be blunted if the people resorted to the old weapon of violence. But these words failed to convince Bose. This provides for the political rift between Gandhiji and Subhash Chandra Bose.

As the struggle for freedom gathered momentum under the dynamic leadership of Gandhiji, the cause of the Muslim League led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah began to weaken this nationalist resurgence at the instigation of the imperialists. According to Tharoor, the Muslim Group was a creation of the sinister colonial policy of 'divide and rule'. The British plan was to weaken the National movement by dividing the Hindus and Muslims. As a policy, the British created separate Muslim electorate and encouraged an assorted group of puppets to start a political association of the Muslims- the Muslim Group. Though it is not possible to forget that Jinnah emerged on the

national political scene and became, a before long, a leading light of the Congress organization.

According to Tharoor, Jinnah's reservations about Hinduism were also responsible for his gradual disaffection with Gandhiji's party. Tharoor holds Gandhiji responsible for Jinnah's separation from the national cause. Jinnah had never a communal mindset. He was secular, rational and modern. He hated Islamic fundamentalism and even developed an un-Islamic taste for scotch and cocktail sausages. According to Tharoor, the cause of separation of Jinnah from the Congress was Gandhi's fetish about Hinduism. Ved Vyas narrates Jinnah's dislike for Gandhi.

"Karna was not much of a Muslim but he found Gangaji too much of a Hindu. The Mahaguru's traditional attire, his spiritualism, his spouting of the ancient texts, his ashram, his constant harking back to an idealized pre-British past that Karna did not believe in (and was impatient with) – all this made the young man mistrustful of the Great teacher." (TGIN 142)

Jinnah's separation from the Congress came in the wake of the failure of the Round Table conference (1931), after his meeting with the head of the Muslim group, Ganga Shah, in London. Though he viewed Gandhiji and Congress party as 'the only actors of any consequence'; he believed them to be standing for all that is retrogressive and populist in Indian politics. He became the President of Muslim League. Within years, his able leadership and the favour of the colonial rulers turned the Group into a serious contender for power. 'Independence without Hindu domination' was Jinnah's new slogan. This indicates that Tharoor's interpretation of Gandhiji's politics is implicit.

Shashi Tharoor praises Gandhiji who widened the Party's support. But Gandhiji's inclination towards Nehru is criticized at a larger scale. The politics of Congress, as delineated by historians, had remained reserved for the educated, articulate and wealthy sections of Indian society under the leadership of Gandhiji. Tharoor praises Subhash Bose's efforts in the cause of the country's freedom. He also explains how he perished because of impractical, unrealistic dream and lack of judgement. In the first Democratic election, Subhash Bose defeated Gandhiji's handpicked candidate and became the first president of Plebeians (common people). Gandhiji forced him to resign thinking it to be a threat to his own position as the supreme leader of the party. In this way, Subhash Bose was kept out of the race of power due to the biased attitude of politics. The portrayal of real politics by Tharoor is highly

critical of Gandhiji's role in the expulsion of Subhash Bose from the Congress party.

After repulsion from Indian National movement, Subhash Bose escaped from the country during the World War II to Russia and then to Germany, via Afghanistan, to seek the help of axis power—comprising Germany, Italy and Japan for the country's cause. He was virtually betrayed by the foreign power whose assistance he actively sought. He asked Germany for weapons to fight against the British. But they gave Bose only to make speeches for his countrymen in Germany. His formation of Indian National Army (I.N.A) proved to be futile. The Japanese did not allow the INA to fight against the British since they could not rely on the ex-POWs whom they regarded as traitors. At last, the beleaguered Japanese gave Bose's army the chance to fight. The Japanese ordered Bose to leave Singapore in a plane which crashed and killed the defeated and dejected hero of India. In the World War II, British power was defeated by the axis power and the British had no option but to give India independence.

Under the Government of India Act, the first elections to the provincial government were held in Feb.1937. Gandhiji's Congress Party swept the polls and his Muslim followers won most of the reserved constituencies defeating Muslim League candidates. Jinnah swallowed the defeat and, as a political strategy, proposed to join the Congress in coalition governments. But the Congress Party refused, under pressure from Muslim leaders of the Congress Party like Maulana Kalam Azad, to enter into any coalition with Jinnah's group. This led to the direct confrontation with the Muslim Group. Jinnah declared a war against his political opponents:

"As far as the Kauravas are concerned, gentleman, it is war." (TGIN 201)

Meanwhile the British had declared war against Germany in the wake of Hitler's aggression in Poland. They involved India in their war efforts without consulting the elected representatives of the people. Insulted and humiliated, Gandhiji's followers resigned all together, ignoring the advice of Vidur (Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel) against such precipitate action. The decision proved counter-productive. It weakened the Congress support base because they were no longer in a position to share patronage. With the help of the British, the Muslim Group formed minority governments in the provinces and set about increasing their following systematically. Thus, reduced to a position of irrelevance, the Congress leaders under the chairmanship of Gandhiji, declared a new

campaign of civil disobedience, Quit India. Tharoor describes this political strategy:

Thwarted, frustrated, excluded, the Kaurava Party chafed in its self-imposed irrelevance. Then, in a desperate and not entirely well-thought-out bid to regain the political limelight, the party met under Gangaji's chairmanship and proclaimed a new campaign of civil disobedience. The message to the British was simple and direct: 'Quit India'. (TGIN 206)

But this rebellion was crushed in an early stage. The British police arrested the prominent leaders within hours of the "Quit India" call. With the consolidation of the Muslim Group its hold on Indian politics grew and the demand for Pakistan became more strident. The politics shows Jinnah's political intent to divide the country on the basis of religion. In Tharoor's view:

This Islamic Utopia would be called Karnistan – the Hacked-off Land: simultaneously a tribute to its eponymous founder and an advertisement for its proponents' physical political intent. (TGIN 207)

After the war it became clear that independence of India was only a matter of time because the war-ravaged British were no longer in a state to face the political conflict. The Congress party leaders were released from the prison to confront a completely changed scenario:

They discovered a nation whose nationalism had been left directionless too long, and a rival organization unrecognizably stronger than it had never been, newly wise in the ways of power, tested by office and already flexing muscles developed while the Kauravas' were atrophying in jail. Suddenly, the Independence stakes were a two-horse race, with the two horses aiming for different finishing-posts. (TGIN 210)

In the election to the provincial government, the Congress party captured most of the Muslim seats and the Muslim Group demanded the partition of the country. The trial of the INA soldiers for treason at the Red Fort which generated upsurge of patriotism in the country temporarily brought the rival parties closer. This was the last issue on which the two parties took the same stand. After the trial, it was obvious to everyone that the Labour Government in Britain was determined to dismantle their largest empire. Jinnah put immense pressure on the British to achieve his party's political aim – a separate land for Muslims. When the British showed a hesitation to break the dominion they had assiduously built over the century, the Muslim Group President urged his followers to resort to 'Direct Action' which led to an unprecedented communal flare up in the sub-continent. It showed that Gandhiji's hold on the affairs of the state before independence had vanished. He tried to calm down the people,

moving from riot-spot to riot-spot. But it was all in vain. His old magic had vanished. His appeal for non-violence, peace and amity was disregarded by both the Congress leaders and Muslim Group. Amidst the communal frenzy that swept across the country, the British Government appointed a new representative, Lord Mountbatten, and sent him to India with the sole mandate to expedite and negotiate the transfer of power.

When Lord Mountbatten confirmed the British Government's determination to transfer power, Gandhiji suggested that Mohammad Ali Jinnah should be made the Prime Minister of united India as a political strategy to keep India united. But Pandit Nehru did not accept the suggestion. When 15 August 1947 was announced as the date for the transfer of power, Gandhiji urged his congressmen not to give in to the demand for partition. But Nehru ignored his plea. This shows the hunger of power on the part of Jawaharlal Nehru. Today also it is seen in Indian politics that the politicians tread the same path as followed by Nehru. The hunger for power on the part of politicians is exposed through Pandit Nehru talking to Mahatma Gandhi:

'Gangaji, we understand how you feel', Dhritarashtra said. 'We have fought by your side for our freedom all these years. We have imbibed your principles and convictions. You have led us to the brink of victory. But now, the time has come for us to apply our principles in the face of the acid test of reality.' (TGIN 223)

The Congress Working Committee resolved unanimously to accept in the principle the partition of the country against the wishes of Gandhiji. It is evident that Gandhi's hold on Congress Party had loosened at a time when it was needed most. Tharoor's version of India's freedom struggle for freedom is critical of Gandhi. He sums up Gandhi's life as a waste, a total failure. Pandit Nehru became the first Prime Minister of India. In the early years of freedom, everything was reshaped and reformed– its domestic and foreign policies, its internal organizations and international borders. The Indian government adopted democracy to rule the country. The first major problem which confronted the new government was the future of the states. Most of the states had decided to accede to either India or Pakistan. But Kashmir, which was strategically located between the two nations, refused to do so and declared itself to be an independent state.

In the wake of a Karnistani invasion into the state, Vidur (Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel), the Principal Secretary for Integration, air-dashed to the capital of Kashmir (Manimir) – Srinagar (Devpur) and persuaded the frolicking Maharaja Hari Singh to

sign the Instrument of Accession. The Indian army entered into the valley and pushed back the invaders with flamboyant fight. But at this moment, Prime Minister Nehru ordered a ceasefire and made the issue more critical taking it to the United Nations. Thus, the issue of Kashmir was made more critical due to the lack of foresight on the part of Nehru. The hollow idealism of Nehru on this decision was openly criticized by both his government and party colleagues. But he silenced all protests by issuing threats of resignation. This incident focuses on one of the aspects of Indian politics which is adopted by politicians in today's democracy.

Jayaprakash Narayan resigned from Nehru's cabinet because of his idiosyncrasies and personal predilections. He launched a crusade against the corruption and mal-administration of the government. He criticized Nehru's policy of rapid industrialization and urbanization at the cost of the landless poor and village people. Jayaprakash Narayan proved to be an obstacle in the unchallenged authority of Nehru. Tharoor's keen insight into Indian diplomacy can be revealed through witty and humorous exchanges between Nehru and Konika Menon, Indian High Commissioner to the Great Britain. Manipulation of power and suppression of dissent became the hallmarks of India's political culture after Independence. Jinnah died after realizing his dream of establishing Pakistan. After hearing the news of his death, Pt. Nehru expressed his dislike for Jinnah. Tharoor expressed the political hypocrisy of politicians through the words of Nehru:

...I wonder sometimes: if we had given him (Karna) his due in the Kaurava Party, might he not today be remembered as one of the finest Indians of us all? (TGIN 278)

Tharoor criticizes the major Nehruvian policies. Nehru and Krishna Menon, the Minister of Defence, started implementing their unrealistic plans.

Nehru's excessive emphasis on heavy industries, which he called the 'new temples' of modern India was ill-advised. Because it overlooked the unsavoury reality that nearly eighty percent of the country's population and ignored the illiteracy of our own people. (Ghosh, Tapan k., 94)

Nehru's tenure also proved inefficacious because Parliament passed laws that a few implemented and many ignored. Tharoor has focused on Nehru that he neglected the needs of the people at home and devoted his energies to gain international acclaim. The concept of non-alignment during the Cold War was greatly criticized. Nehru's lack of

vision and Krishna Menon's inaccuracy to handle the country's system resulted into military conquest and annexation of Goa. Since independence, Nehru won three consecutive polls and that generated a sense of complacency on the part of visionary Nehru. But the disastrous consequences of this complacent and smug attitude of the rulers were borne out by the country's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962. The failure of his much flaunted foreign policy broke his heart. After Nehru's death, it became clear that he had left no legacy for the democratic system of the country. During his tenure as Prime Minister, Nehru had not allowed any leader to grow. In the absence of a better alternative, Lal Bahadur Shastri was made the Prime Minister. He proved himself to be a good Prime Minister. When Pakistan made the second attempt to capture Kashmir (1965), he taught the deceitful neighbours a lesson by inflicting on them a stunning defeat. Unlike Nehru, Shastri preferred peace to winning war and the preservation of life to taking revenge. He meticulously gave away every inch of the Pakistan territory which the Indian soldiers had won. But he died while signing the peace treaty at a conference table in Tashkent. After the death of Shastri, Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India. Indira Gandhi's reputation began to flounder because of her failure to deliver the goods to the people. Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai lead an uprising to remove her from power. But she became more adamant. Her close confidant Siddhartha Shankar Ray advised her to hit back vehemently by declaring Emergency. The period of Emergency was one of the most satanic rules in the political history of India. She arrested all the opponents and postponed the general elections. The press suffered censorship. She launched 'the 20 points programme' for the common man. But it remained largely unimplemented. At the same time Tharoor finds some improvements during this period like steady prices, decline in the number of strikes, demonstrations, presence of bureaucracy.

After a year of Indira Gandhi's undistinguished and diffident rule, the country went to polls in the fourth general election after independence. The Congress party retained power at the centre but it lost seats all over India to a 'motley array of opposition groups' which cobbled together coalition governments in at least half-a-dozen states. The electoral set back widened the split in the Congress Party. Morarji Desai expressed serious doubt about the efficacy of India Gandhi's leadership to run the country. At this juncture, the

Congress High Command arrived at a compromise. Indira Gandhi was made the Prime Minister and Morarji Desai was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister. But she became cold and distant in her behaviour with senior leaders of the party and began to ignore the Deputy Prime Minister. And Morarji Desai resigned from the cabinet. Indira Gandhi got the opportunity to promote her own cause within the Party and the Government. She began to speak loudly about her father's socialist ideals which had been betrayed by what she termed 'the reactionary elements within the party'. She appealed to all left, liberal and progressive forces outside the Congress organization to rally behind her effort to fulfill her father's socialist dream. Along with Chandrashekhar, Indira Gandhi set up to push her populist agenda like the abolition of privy purses and the nationalization of banks ignoring the country's economy. On the issue of privy purses, she could get the support of the majority of the Congress Working Committee. But she failed to carry a majority of the party with her on the question of bank nationalization. Tharoor describes the issue of bank nationalization:

Today we all realize what some of us realized even then, that nationalization only means transferring functioning and successful institutions from the hands of competent capitalists to those of bumbling bureaucrats. (TGIN 346)

Determined to foster her socialist credentials, Indira Gandhi called for a free vote in the Parliament and was able to pass the bill with the support of the leftist opposition parties. The legislative victory evinced Indira Gandhi's immense political clout at the cost of democratic process. But before the controversial bill was made into an Act with the Presidential signature, the decent and dignified figurehead of the nation, Dr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, passed away on 11 Feb, 1967. The presidential election gave the beleaguered and scattered Congress old leaders an opportunity to regroup and teach Indira Gandhi, who had gone out of their control, a lesson. With a view to reigning in the recalcitrant Prime Minister and imposing a no-nonsense President on her, they chose Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy (Ved Vyas) as candidate of party. But Indira Gandhi challenged the party's decision by proposing the name of V.V. Giri (Eklavya) as an independent candidate. The election of the president in the country's postcolonial history resulted in a narrow victory for Indira Gandhi's candidate. The election led to the split of 'the world's oldest anti-colonial political structure'. The majority went with Indira

Gandhi. For the first time since Independence, the Prime Minister did not enjoy the support of majority in the parliament. But her government survived with the support of left parties who were deceived by her pseudo-egalitarianism and insincere socialist rhetoric. After a year, during which the self-serving Prime Minister attacked 'big business' and 'monopoly capital' to win the public support, Indira Gandhi called a snap poll (1971). With a slogan of 'Remove Poverty', she returned to power. Indira Gandhi, thus, emerged victorious and 'stood alone amongst the ruins of her old party, having smashed to pieces all the pillars and foundations that had supported in the past' (TGIN 351). The glorious moment in Indira Gandhi's political career was the Bangladesh War. The Great Indian Novel analyses the political as well as cultural and linguistic reasons behind the revolt of the East Pakistan against the West and its declaration of independence. India intervened in the civil war because "the repression of the Gelabians (Bangladeshi) following the importance of martial law sent a panic-stricken flood of brutalized humanity flooding across our borders to create, on Indian soil, the biggest refugee problem the world has ever known" (TGIN 354). Indian army liberated Bangladesh from Pakistani repression. The decision to make entry into Bangladesh War rewarded her with administrative excellence. But the country was plagued by illiteracy, poverty and unemployment due to the heartless ineptness of Indira Gandhi in whom they had placed their trust. The ugly symptoms of autocracy manifested themselves in her attempts to blackmail the press and create a 'committed' judiciary on the pretext of their being out of touch with the masses. Those whimsical policies adopted by Indira Gandhi weakened the institutions in the country. In June 1975, Indira Gandhi declared the Emergency and suspension of civil rights. The politics of Indira Gandhi proved to be worst as compared to the colonial British rule in India.

Jayaprakash Narayan set a revolt against Indira Gandhi's autocratic rule. The uprising fired the people's imagination. And was transformed into a mass movement in which the opposition parties were also joined. Jayaprakash Narayan held her responsible for the betrayal of the people's hope and expectations.

Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi) thus paid the price for her complete identification with her party and the nation through a sycophantic and fascist slogan ('Indira is India'). (Ghosh, Tapan K., 103)

The movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan rocked the central government and made it unstable.

Congress (I) ruled state governments, run by Indira Gandhi's handpicked ministers who became notorious for their ineptitude and servility, were also paralyzed. The political tide seemed to turn away from the country's Prime Minister to the hands of her opponent. Tharoor is critical of Indira Gandhi for the worst political situation in the country prior to the declaration of Emergency. At the same time, he holds Jayaprakash Narayan and the assorted opposition for the political chaos in the country.

I was no admirer of Priya Duryodhani or what she stood for, but I was equally distraught about Drona's Popular Uprising and where it was leading the government. (TGIN 364)

He thinks that the opposition could have waited for the next election, which was not far away, and voted Indira out of power. But instead of it, they chose a political short cut and clamoured for her removal in the street instead of in the parliament, where they had been reduced to a ridiculous minority. According to Tharoor, the opposition parties cornered Indira Gandhi and forced her to fight back. This shows the dual policy of politicians to safeguard their place in politics. This is obviously seen in today's party politics in India. Thus, the real political perspective is captured by Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel*.

The political crisis was intensified by a verdict of the Allahabad High Court which found Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractice of sharing a platform with the President, a non-political figurehead, during her election campaign and deprived her of her parliamentary privileges pending appeal. Emboldened by the court verdict, the Popular Uprising demanded her resignation. But the beleaguered Prime Minister fought back by declaring an internal siege on the advice of Party President Siddhartha Shankar Ray. The decision to impose siege on the ground of 'a grave threat to the stability and security of the nation from internal disruption' was endorsed by the President V.V.Giri. This proved to be the most disastrous part of Indira Gandhi's political career. In the name of securing the country's stability, a state of anarchy was let loose. Midnight arrests of opposition and Trade Union leaders were followed by press censorship, suspension of fundamental rights and adopting measures to put the judiciary in their place. But these draconian measures to suppress opposition only served to unite the diverse constituents of the people's uprising in a loose and purely expedient coalition called Janata Morcha or People's Front. In Tharoor's view:

The Emergency was not uniformly evil. The implementation of a twenty-point socio-economic programme for the common people and the banning of political demonstrations and strikes gave the nation a sense of purpose and direction which replaced the earlier drift and uncertainty.⁷

In 1977, Indira Gandhi surprised the world by withdrawing the Siege and announcing a general election. Numerous theories were advanced by political analysts to explain her sudden decision. This election gave the Indian voters to choose between democracy and dictatorship. The People's Front was joined by the leaders who were deserted by Indira Gandhi. The main supporter of Indira Gandhi, Chandrashekhar, who had been ill-treated and imprisoned during the Seige, also joined the People's Front. The election showed the wrath against Indira Gandhi's dictatorship and the People's Front came to power. The constituents of the coalition government designated Morarji Desai as Prime Minister. But the magic of the Front's victory and the hopes raised by the new government did not last long. Morarji Desai failed to keep his coalition together and embarrassed the nation by openly advertising his personal fad. In the election that followed, Indira Gandhi returned to power riding a wave of disenchantment with the Janata Front misrule.

On the whole, *The Great Indian Novel* provides a detailed analysis of party politics in the Indian Democracy. It revealed the political hypocrisy on the part of the political leaders to achieve their ends. Tharoor's treatment in dealing with the politics of pre- and post-Independence India is realistic and not biased.

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