Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel: A Parody of The Mahabharta

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Abstract

The Great Indian Novel, which is widely considered to be one of the most significant works that Shashi Tharoor has written, is set in the period of time just before India attained her independence against the backdrop of political activities in India at the time. In addition to his work as a politician in India, Shashi Tharoor has experience working in the diplomatic sphere. He is the author of 16 works, both fiction and non-fiction, that have been very successful since their publication. He is also well-known for his work as a skilled writer. Shashi Tharoor's novel The Great Indian Book is a work of fiction that retells the story of the Mahabharata within the context of the Indian Freedom Movement and the first three decades after India earned its independence. Tharoor's novel is titled "The Great Indian Book." The action of the book takes place in India. Mythological creatures are used to represent the genuine persons who were pivotal figures in Indian history. The mythology of India is repeated here as a history of Indian independence. It follows events up to the 1980s and is presented in the form of a history of Indian freedom. The Great Indian Book, which was Shashi Tharoor's first effort at creating a historical book, is famous for the author's use of sarcasm as the dominant mode of storytelling throughout all of his subsequent works, including this one. This is also true of The Great Indian Book.

Keywords: *Mahabharta, Parody, Satire, Mythical,Great Indian*

Introduction

It has been said that this postcolonial novel is also a brilliant spoof of The Mahabharta and other prominent Indian political leaders. M.H. Abrams defines a parody as "an incongruous imitation," which means it mimics the structure and style or the topic matter of a serious literary work while using a comedic mismatch between the approach and the subject matter. Thus, parody functions as a tool for mocking customs and creating a space in the literary canon for postcolonial and postmodern writers to poke fun at both themselves and their home nations without taking themselves too seriously. In the words of John Gross, who I have paraphrased here: "Parodies exist in many distinct shapes and sizes, and many different degrees of subtlety or it's opposite... Parody has the potential to be the funniest and most astute form of criticism.

The Mahabharata, a Hindu legendary epic, is a major source of inspiration for Shashi Tharoor's work, "The Great Indian Novel." Parodia sacra refers to any satire of a sacred text from any faith. This kind of parody reimagines a religious book in order to probe the ways it has influenced beliefs and practises across religions, cultures, and time periods. According to the definition of Parodia sacra provided by Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Holquist (1982) in their book the dialogic imagination: four essays, "holy parody" is "parody on sacred texts and ceremonies." It has deep historical roots in the ridicule of authority figures and ritual degradation of the past (Bakhtin and Holquist). Parodia sacra, the literary artist's self-referential, postmodernist work, aims to satirise the sacred book in question with a healthy dose of wit and humour.

In many circles, this text is seen as a parody of the Mahabharata. The structure of The Great Indian Novel is reminiscent of that of the great epics, thus the aptness of its name. Each Parva of the Mahabharata is separated by a chapter heading. Various pivotal moments in human history are covered in depth throughout the Parvas. Each of Shashi Tharoor's 18 chapters corresponds to a distinct Parva in the Mahabharta. Shashi Tharoor's use of an irreverent tone while referencing to characters from the epic and comparing them with genuine historical persons of India is typical of the parody genre. Tharoor, in his role as a parodist, challenges norms and customs by performing a mock version of The Mahabharata.

Tharoor mixes together the mythology of The Mahabharata with the modern history of India up till the 1980s. In a way, he has updated the epic for the twenty-first century. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the individuals and events depicted in a nation's great literature impact its character no less potently than the real heroes and events recorded in its history, as stated by C. Rajgopalchari. Tharoor makes an effort to reimagine them from a postmodernist perspective. In any case, it's a humorous parody, so no worries there.

Ved Vyasa was the one who penned the Mahabharata. Tharoor's protagonist in his novel is a former politician who just goes by the initials "V.V." He pokes fun at the state of modern India and its residents by comparing them to characters from the Mahabharata. At the beginning of the Mahabharata, Vyasa recites the epic's text to Lord Ganesha, who is seen jotting it down. Again, Ganapathi is the one who records VV's instructions in The Great Indian Novel. The idea of writing the tale of "Great India," sometimes called "Maha Bharata," eventually occurs to him. This work by Tharoor is a parody on both the art of storytelling and the characters of The Mahabharata.

Tharoor's novel is first-person narrative, with the protagonist, VV, recounting his own birth and early life experiences. After deciding to chronicle the present situation in India, V.V. starts searching for a writer who can offer him with a book written in a mock-heroic manner. Then he tracks down Ganapathi, who agrees to do the writing for him. Tharoor makes a joke about Ganapathi's "large nose and acute, intelligent eyes." Specifically, Tharoor says that Ganapathi comes from the southern part of India.

Tharoor's sarcastic critique covers both the Vedic culture and contemporary society. "I was born a bastard, but a bastard in a great tradition, the kid of a fisherwoman who was seduced by a travelling sage," VV explains, giving some context on his origins. According to folklore, Sage Parashar is stunned by a fisherwoman's stunning beauty and yearns for her company. As they leave, he invites her to join him. He approaches her father and requests for permission to take Satyavati along on his quest for wisdom. Ved Vyas was created as a direct result of the bond that existed between Satyavati and Sage Parashar. After Ved Vyas is born and separated from his mother, Satyavati walks back to the place where his father had resided. Tharoor makes light of the practise in which unwed women followed Brahmin men, stating that the habit led to an overwhelming number of single parenting situations. Second, Tharoor pokes fun at the current political and social climate in India by focusing on an amalgamation of individuals from diverse social groups in the past. Political power in India is still largely distributed along caste and class lines. Tharoor pokes light at Gangaji's decision to stay celibate for the rest of her life as he criticises a society with sexual mores that appear to be more accepting of infidelity (Gandhi).

King Shantanu, a character in the epic poem "The Mahabharata," declares his love for Satyavati, a fisherwoman, and says he wants to marry her. However, her father does not approve of their engagement because he is fearful that prince Ganga may one day rise to the kingdom of Hastinapur and that his daughter's children would suffer as a consequence of this. The old fisherman is demanding a promise from Shantanu that he would prevent Ganga from becoming king and will instead have his own future grandson installed as monarch. Because of his deep feelings for his wife, King Shantanu refuses to fulfil this horrible decree. Prince Ganga, who loves his own father very much, yet chooses to keep his virginity pledge. He swears on his life that he will never date a woman, much less fall in love with or marry one. As a consequence, Tharoor exploits parody as a weapon in his narrative in order to look at the sacrifice of Ganga as a mockery of family love and respect. In his piece, he pokes fun at the royal family's dilemma by saying:

> "That was a fine thing to do, my son", Shantanu said, unable to conceal his pleasure. "…I'll tell you something my son: I've simply no doubt at all that it (celibacy) will give you longevity. You will not die unless and until you really want to die."

Ganga is the name given to Bhishma in The Mahabharata. His actual name is Dev Vrata. But due to the terrible vow he has taken, he is known as Bhisma, means "something terrible."

Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, "of a distant king," are kidnapped by Ganga (Bhisham) one day and handed to Vichitravirya (also known as Ganga's brother). Celibate Vichitravirya is caught aback when Princess Amba walks into his room the night before he plans to wed all three princesses. But in Tharoor's version of events, the prince's libido becomes the antagonist. Amba makes light of the situation by remarking in a befuddled tone, "I haven't come for that," before adding, "but for other things." Ganga's constant preoccupation with violating his virginity vow makes this a hilarious spoof.

In the ancient Vedic civilisation, Brahmins were held in the utmost regard, which propelled them to the top of the social hierarchy. There was a longstanding tradition back then of Brahmins helping childless Kshatriya women have children. No children could be born to these ladies. When a Kshatriya king or queen died suddenly without a male successor, the Brahmins would step in and have children with the widows to ensure the survival of the country. Tharoor pokes fun at this custom in his writings. The son of King Shantanu and Satyavati, Vichitravirya dies at a young age, leaving behind two childless young wives, Ambika and Ambalika, as told in the epic. To that end, Satyavati is now pleading with her other son, Bhisham (Ganga), to "take Ambika and Ambalika to bed," since this was another common practise during that era. Prince Ganga (also known as Bhisma) politely refuses his mother's request since he is too engaged with his vow of chastity. Having given birth to Ved Vyas before they were married, Satyavati now urges Ved Vyas to carry out this enormous responsibility, which he gladly accepts. Finally, she convinces Ganga to invite Ved Vyasa to the Hastinapur palace, where he sleeps with the recently widowed queens Ambika and Ambalika in an attempt to sire a son for the throne. However, Ambika cannot stand to even look at Ved Vyas since he is so revolting to her. A blind boy called Dhritrashtra is born as a consequence of this union. In addition, the sight of him causes Ambalika's skin to become entirely white with fear. Because of this, she has a baby boy named Pandu who is born pale and sickly. Tharoor uses sarcasm to turn the heroic epic into a witty and humorous parody in this section.

Prince Pandu, son of Ambalika and nephew of Ganga, rules the kingdom of Hastinapur in The Mahabharata. He has wed the stunning Kunti and Madri, two princesses. However, while making love to his wife, he accidentally kills the sage Kindama. Just before he passes away, he curses Pandu, saying that he'll perish the next time he has sexual relations with a lady. Tharoor updates this fabled event in his work. Pandu has cardiac problems throughout the book. According to the doctor, his heart is no longer healthy enough to handle the physical demands of sexual activity. You have to stay away from this if you value your life. Pandu goes to the jungle as an ascetic. The five Pandava boys are born at this time. Kunti gives birth to Yudhishtra, Bhim, and Arjun; Madri has Nakul and Sahdev.

Tharoor uses satire to characterise Ekalavya's personality and turns the narrative on its head. He even sacrifices his right thumb in The Mahabharata as a Guru Dakshina. In contrast, Ekalavya stubbornly holds on to his thumb in Tharoor's novel. Ekalavya is a modern student representative of the trend away from students' idealised dedication to their instructors. I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot ruin my life and my mother's to pay your price," Tharoor says in the book, as he hurriedly exits the room.

Conclusion

Making fun of old Indian customs and traditions, Tharoor's mock-epic Mahabharta is an enormous project. Poking fun at the epic against the backdrop of the contemporary political climate in India, Tharoor deftly combines the legendary characters from The Mahabharata with the present day politicians. His current work is a biting critique of the main characters and events of the Mahabharta. The Great Indian Novel focuses on the idea of dharma. India has progressed from dharma to Adharma, from grandeur to brutality, as shown by Shashi Tharoor. Tharoor uses The Mahabharata to demonstrate the erosion of Dharma in contemporary society. But the author provides no suggestions for restoring it to its previous glory.

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