

A STUDY OF *FACTION*
IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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August 2007

*Dedicated to my beloved husband
(Late) T. E. Mathew (Moti),
who was the driving force of happiness
and consolation during all my creativity.*

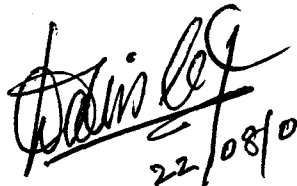
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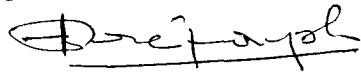
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "A Study of *Faction* in the Works of Shashi Tharoor," submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of *bona fide* research carried out by M.A. Lalitha Kumari, under my supervision and guidance. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

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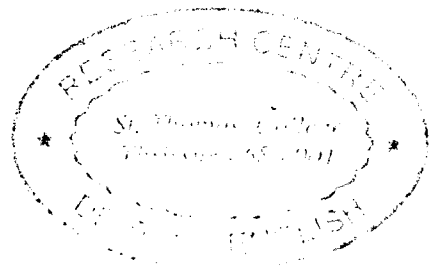
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work has been originally carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. C. J. Davees, Department of English, St. Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala. This work has not been submitted either in full or in part for any degree at any university.

Aluva

August 2007

M. A. Lalitha Kumari
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I place on record my gratitude to the faculty of the Department of English and the Librarians of St. Thomas' College for all the co-operation and encouragement I received during the tenure of my research.

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I give my devoted thanks to the Management and Director Board of the

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Lastly because I feel it appropriate to do so, I thank Sri. Shashi Tharoor for having created works not only for the century but for the millennium humanity, works of such high-brow quality, touching the heart as well as the head equally, that made me possible not only to admire him as a writer, but also to absorb his views in like blotting paper, thus elevating my thinking process to a great extent. With hopeful retentiveness and recapitulation, I shall be able to pass on in the coming years, his ideas, and transmit his charisma to the youth of our country. But for his personal interest shown in my attempt and the rich compliments he gave me on my perseverance, this work would have been poorer. The faults if any are entirely my own responsibility.

Before you start leafing through my work, please allow me to once again give all glory to the Lord Almighty, the Absolute, who has been my best Friend, Nurse, Guide and Guardian, the Divine Companion who walks and works with me, understands my ups and downs, forgives me in my follies and helps me glorify His name always.

M. A. LALITHAKUMARI

Preface

Creativity demands curiosity, receptiveness, acceptance and also humility. The curiosity of a creative mind manifests itself in asking questions and seeking answers out of the desire to understand things – whether or not the answers have practical applications. On the part of the research scholar, receptiveness is a complex process. It involves becoming detached from one's usual concerns and paying attention to the new ideas that come to the mind. One cannot get creative ideas by searching for them. One can only be receptive to them. They shall come as a spontaneous rushing in, filling the spirit and organizing the loose sally of the mind.

This is what happened to me when I chose the topic of this thesis, “A Study of *Faction* in the Works of Shashi Tharoor.” I have often observed in my fellow beings and friends, with myself no exception, the tendency to read between lines, to try to see the invisible, to interpret a page that simply does not exist. We add and subtract freely from words, multiply and divide them, so that all interesting writing is deemed allegorical or exaggerated or hyperbolic upto a certain extent.

Language changes and keeps changing. In a world where change is the only permanence, and the constancy of inconstancy is followed by artists of any genre, new connotations get added to the existing word. It is generally agreed that the conception of a new interpretation of an already existing word is rooted in the belief that the existing horizons have to be expanded, and new areas found. Great minds like those of John Milton could coin new words like

“pandemonium.” The bombastic verbiage of Dr. Samuel Johnson came to be talked about as the “Johnsonese.” Needless to say, that the -isms and double superlatives, like “the unkindest cut of all” in *Julius Caesar*, and also the anachronistic irrelevancies of William Shakespeare have not been derided by men of letters. Shakespeare’s forays into new and hitherto unheard of fields in grammar and syntax have been welcomed by the modern intelligentsia as well as the averagely literate readers, as novel and bold ventures. So, we can say that the taste of the writing lies in the reading.

The blend of fact and fiction enhances not only the beauty of the subject matter but presentation as well. Though some may disparagingly say it is old wine in new casks, one cannot but appreciate the elusive aroma of the blend. If an idea or fantasy occurs in the mind, it can be recombined and the real can be inverted.

Faction has a given meaning in the English language. It can be generally understood as political faction, cultural faction, socio-economic faction, economic faction and so on and so forth. None of these terms are wrong, since faction means a sector, a symbol or a portion. In literature “Faction” is a mid-20th century coinage. It means a blend of “fact” and “fiction” in a literary work. Leading writers in the U.S.A., like Truman Capote, Arthur Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Tennessee Williams, Edgar Allan Poe, John Grisham and others developed a new kind of journalism along these lines, called “Faction.” The present study explores the literary application of Faction in the works of Shashi Tharoor.

When I faced the unavoidable incompleteness of fictional worlds and words by themselves, I could see that the author of the works under study, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, has taken the choice of maximizing a single small event or minimizing a vast canvas into a synthesized nucleus. Intensive or extensive strategies are adopted by Tharoor to effect fusion or Faction. When his fictionality is interlaced with reality, **Faction**, a new form, very much related to the original, emerges in his work, as a very different, yet much more interesting resultant.

I have taken up this new genre because I believe in its veracity, practicality and enjoyability. Faction, I discover, has a vitality that is even more “truthful” and “real” than “reality” and touches the life of people as closely. Writing in fact-fiction-fusion is a very difficult craft and can be done only by an accomplished and seasoned writer. We can definitely find one in Tharoor. Fictionalised fact or factualized fiction becomes truer than reality because it enables one to see the essential humaneness of all mankind, and to believe that anything and everything is possible. There cannot be a word “impossible” in the dictionary of a Factionalist.

One of the most joyous experiences of my life came to me when I read Tharoor’s *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, which made me feel that it was worth wading through tonnes of trash during all my reading life, which included inferior works too, to find such a jewel. But if the young and aspiring academic minds of the present and future generations can find in this thesis, a reference book for Faction, as well as an interesting analysis of the works of a gifted writer, the humble yet tireless effort of this scholar to bring into

prominence, a rare and difficult topic of study, and make a substantial contribution to the academic fraternity and student body, will bear fruit.

Tharoor, in his fiction, states facts in such a way that they attain mythical significance. His is a perception where the factual and the fictional are inseparably tied up in an endless process of signification. He seems to contend that men will behave realistically only when they realize that reality is fabulous. Thus, Fiction is the cornerstone of Tharoor's literary creativity, the fundamental principle of his understanding of reality.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India has a rich mythical and spiritual tradition that has forever been a haven to the dreams and imagination of sensitive minds. This axiom synchronises with the mind of Shashi Tharoor. Though history is understood as the bygone, and good fiction is predominantly aesthetic as well as semantic creation, what is attempted in this thesis is a presentation of how the fusion of fact and fiction warrants an interesting reading of Shashi Tharoor's works. Tharoor's concept of history offers a poignant and unique vision of the contemporary state of India, which necessitates an in-depth study.

The transformation of human history into metahistory, literature, fiction and narrative throws open in Tharoor's works, an immensity of facts and interpretations of current affairs. His adaptation of certain narratives shows how in humanity the intellectual and political monstrosities of a time become out-of-joint and how the historical detective captures essential elements of interest for the reader. The procedure followed in this research project is interpretative, as it reviews the political scenario of India with emphasis on the post-independence era, as imagined in the fictional consciousness of the author. As the twenty-first century has begun with the Indians accounting for a major chunk of the world's population, their chorus will resonate throughout the

world and, therefore, an eminent author's work which will undoubtedly cover international reading, is naturally 'pastures new' for an aspiring scholar. As Leona Toker remarks, "when a novelist undertakes scholarly, biographical research, his awareness of possible incursions of fiction upon fact is no less acute than that of a professional historian" (Toker 64).

Therefore, since a sweeping yet clear and highly personalized examination of contemporary India is seen in the author's works, the scholar here feels that it deserves to be retold to the rest of the world. Shashi Tharoor had a leading position as the first lieutenant to Mr. Kofi Annan, the leader of the largest service organization of the world, the United Nations. This, coupled with his own patriotism uncoloured by jingoism, his clarity of vision, felicity of words, choice of expression, and a combined style of lucidity and embellishment which is highly palatable to the academic as well as the non-academic reader, makes the possibilities of such a research very attractive and alluring. While later chapters seek to illuminate specific novels and works, a connecting line of thought to find out elements of fiction in them is also intended. The researcher has not attempted a strict balance of space and attention within the field, the reason being that some chapters are long because these works raise acutely interesting problems for this study, which can be dealt with at some length. Where a work lends itself to brevity of treatment, no attempt is made to pad this out. Though there is a certain lack of direct

involvement with the politics of the day in the early generation of English educated Indians who attempted to create literature in English, this is not so with Shashi Tharoor. The Rising of 1857 jolted the Indian lethargy into resistance against the British rule and the Indo-Anglian novelists could no longer remain mere spectators. Tharoor's two great works, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) and *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997) are the result of this national consciousness. The first work, due to its multiple perspectives, has been given more importance in this study than the other works of the author. The present work will attempt to bring out a clear picture of how the author has viewed the Indian political, social and cultural situation and given an imaginative rendering of history, through his fiction.

Shashi Tharoor

To give the briefest of résumé, Shashi Tharoor was born in London in 1956 and educated in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and the United States of America. He procured PhD at the age of 22 from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Since 1978, he worked in the United Nations, serving as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, whose Singapore office he headed. Since October 1989, he was a senior official at UN Headquarters in New York, where, until late 1996, he was responsible for Peacekeeping Operations in the former Yugoslavia. From January 1997 to July 1998, he was Executive Assistant to the UN

Secretary General Kofi Annan. In July 1998, he was appointed Director of Communications and Special Projects in the office of the Secretary General. In January 2001, he was appointed by the Secretary General as Interim Head of the Department of Public Information. In June 2002, he was confirmed as the Under Secretary General for Communications and Public Information of the United Nations. He still continues as one of the main makers of peace and understanding among nations.

Tharoor is the author of numerous articles, short stories and commentaries in Indian and Western publications. His books include *Reasons of State* (1982), a scholarly study of Indian foreign policy, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), a political satire, and *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* (1990). His second novel, *Show Business* (1992), received a front-page accolade from *The New York Times Book Review* and was made into a motion picture titled 'Bollywood'. *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997) was published on the 50th anniversary of India's independence, and was selected as the 'New York Times Notable Book of the Year.' On 13 August 2001, Penguin Books (India) published Tharoor's latest novel *Riot* (2001). The U.S. edition was published by Arcade on 28 September 2001. In October 2002, Tharoor painted verbal pictures and descriptions for M. F. Husain's work, *Kerala: God's Own Country*.

Tharoor, the Writer

As a diplomat and writer, Shashi Tharoor has explored the diversity of culture in his native India. Exploring the themes of India's past and its relevance to the future, he has produced works both of fiction and non-fiction. In reaction to his works, *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*, Tharoor has been referred to as one of the first writers of satirical novels currently operating in English. To Tharoor, satire is a potent genre for reaching out to all kinds of people. He says in an interview with Harry Kreisler:

Satire. . . enables you to recast and to reinvent both the epics and the history. . . in a light that is so unfamiliar that it immediately provokes a fresh way of looking at them. . . There is a second element. If I can borrow the wonderful statement of Molière. . . 'If you want to edify, you have to entertain.' So your duty as a writer is to amuse people enough that they want to read the serious points you want to make. They'll get that instruction, and they'll get that education if you like, through the process of having been entertained. (globetrotter.berkeley.edu)

Shashi Tharoor is the winner of numerous journalism and literary awards, including a Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1991. In 1998, he was presented with the Excelsior Award for Excellence in Literature.

Tharoor's gift as a novelist, his powers of social observation, the eye for minute details, and his ability to convey the subjective atmosphere of an experience make his narratives read more like novels than like non-fiction. In the bewildering social change of the late sixties, Tharoor's journalistic approach proved a uniquely appropriate one. It has the combination of the objectivity of journalism and the intimacy of a story both of which satisfy our present need to make sense of a kaleidoscopic world, always more astonishing than the wildest fiction. Thus, Tharoor explores the endless possibilities of history in the disguise of a novel, or 'novel as history,' interrogating the boundaries of both fact and fiction to represent a postmodern world.

Tharoor embodies many of India's defining dualities. A novelist and a diplomat, he infuses a vividly descriptive, sweeping and highly personal examination of contemporary India with unexpected drama; he alternates between compelling autobiographical passages and sections grounded in his expertise in global politics. As he considers the major issues facing India today, Tharoor contrasts the freewheeling Bombay of his childhood with the slowly changing village society in Kerala, and reports on his observations as a regularly visiting expatriate. Each telling anecdote illuminates some aspect of Indian culture, from politics to religion, creating a mosaic that reflects India's endless variations on the theme of life. Senior Editor David Huebner recently spoke with Mr.

Tharoor about the challenges of reconciling his literary and professional lives and managing the image of the United Nations. To the question how he compromised his roots in India and his job in the United Nations, Tharoor replied:

I see myself as a human being with a number of responses to the world I see around me. I manifest some of those responses in my writing and some of them in my work. I try to keep the two firmly apart though. So, in my writing I deal with nothing but India, at least so far, and then in my work I deal with almost everything but India. (Tharoor, www.divainternational.ch 2004)

When questioned how he could handle both without mixing them, Tharoor replies:

. . . I think they are both such essential parts of me that if I were to neglect either aspect of my life, part of my psyche would wither. As a UN official, I am bringing to bear a lifetime of interest in international affairs, a PhD in international affairs, a PhD in international politics, and a concern with the fate of the world that goes back to my childhood; and as a writer, George Bernard Shaw said it better than I could: 'I write for the same reason that a cow gives milk'. It is something that has to come out. Both of

these are choices that are not really choices; they are things I feel I have to do because of who I am. (Tharoor, hir.harvard.edu 2002)

His book *Reasons of State* (1982) is on Indian foreign policymaking. It is highly praised by all the highbrow clan who are directly or indirectly connected with diplomatic affairs. It is a scholarly study and the prodigious scope of knowledge matches his formidable style latent in this book, which is enriched with his longstanding and dedicated involvement with international affairs in the U.N. The unities and diversities of the author's writings make it imperative to attend to the transfusion of History and Literature that is Fact and Fiction which amounts to **Faction**. Tharoor attempts not so much to bring about the fusion of Fact / History, and Fiction / Creative Imagination, as to assert that the boundaries between the two have irreparably broken down, to transform Fact and Fiction, hitherto separate entities, into a new genre called Faction. Faction by now is a coinage familiar to the academic as well as reading fraternity. Shashi Tharoor depicts the problems of the day through his various narrative strategies like diaries, letters, discussions, journalistic articles, short stories, novels, farce and literary criticism on politics, diplomacy, foreign affairs and current political policies. We see an endless slippage of Fact into Fiction in his works. When Fact is clothed in the garb of Fiction, and fabrications of the imagination

presented as authentic Reality, Tharoor creates a replica of the postmodern world where the Real has disappeared into the 'mediated.'

The Great Indian Novel (1989) is a reinvention of India with a dazzling marriage between Hindu mythology and modern Indian history. It is a parodic version of the Mahabharata with the literally translated title *The Great Indian Novel* where the Sanskrit 'Maha' means great, and Bharatham means Narrative of India. By transferring Fact into Fiction, applying imagination to historical facts, this parodic, symbolic and allegorical work becomes a gateway to the author's thinking process. We see a puranic redaction; though all redactions are not parodies, Tharoor is using parody, making fun of many of our systems of governance.

The short stories in the collection *The Five-Dollar Smile* (1990) are fairly representative of the whole of his fictional work. The enjoyment he has derived in writing them seems communicable to the readers. It was once suggested that an acid test should be done to answer the question "could this have been written only by an Indian?" To this the author replies in the "Introduction" to the book: "for most though not all of my stories and certainly my novels, I would answer that this could not only have been written by an Indian, but only by an Indian in English" (12). In that lay their principal vindication. Tharoor moved on to Calcutta with his parents and tried his hand at writing and acting out three one-act plays. In a circumstance, when politics had moved on to the more absorbing

question of “who can get what post how?” and beliefs and principles no longer even received lip-service, it struck him that the only valid way of portraying the Emergency without seeming either tiresome or excessively formalistic was through the medium of low comedy. History, in the old days, repeated itself as tragedy, the second time as farce. And farce is the medium of the playwright, not the historian. Despite this essential Indian inspiration, the plot of *Twenty Two Months in the Life of a Dog* (1990) is based largely on Mikhail Bulgakov’s novella *Dog’s Heart* (1987). Tharoor’s work more particularly derives from an excellent stage adaptation of Bulgakov which he had seen in New York.

The book *Show Business* (1991) is a true picture of Bollywood, the Bombay film world with its tinsel opportunism and shallow relationships. It is realistic to the core and does not believe in sugar-coated camouflages. It leaves a bittersweet taste in the reading palate. The undercurrents of Bombay’s commercial cinema are brought to light from its remarkable beginning.

A historical work like *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997) reviews the past, present and future of independent India at socio-economic, political, linguistic, cultural and even spiritual levels. It is an engaging reflection on the 50th anniversary of Independence. The book blends academic analysis and personal observation on a whole range of topics and problems that India confronts: caste, religion and economics.

Tharoor passionately espouses the vision of a cosmopolitan, tolerant, liberal and modern India that he believes truly defines the identity of his country. It is an eloquent argument for the importance of India to the future of the industrialized world. Here, elements of political scholarship, personal reflection, memoirs and polemic combine with erudition and scholarliness.

Riot (2001), set against the background of the Babri Masjid issue in North India, is a novel critics have been raging about. Here again Tharoor has presented a fusion of history and imagination, taking an actual historical fact and weaving a love story around it.

For M. F. Husain's *Kerala: God's Own Country* (2002) Tharoor has written beautiful captions and descriptions. His colourful write-up for the lifelike beauty and scenic still lives of the great artist are complimentary to both of them. Kerala in all her natural loveliness is verbalized in this Husain-Tharoor combination.

In *Nehru: The Invention of India* (2003), Jawaharlal Nehru is portrayed from a new angle. Though it is reminiscent of Nehru's *Discovery of India* (1946), Tharoor's book is diametrically opposite in its theme, vision and purpose. The compilation of his articles published in various publications like *The New York Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *The Indian Express*, and *The Hindu*, show

a beautiful blend of imagination interwoven with a profound urgency to tell the truth.

Bookless in Baghdad (2005), a collection of essays on reading, spans a broad range of concerns, as Tharoor says in the Preface, “emerging from my own experience as an Indian writer and reader. But they share a literary province none of my writings on non-literary subjects have been included in” (ix). To him, “books are like the toddy tapper’s hatchet striking through the rough husk that enshrouds our minds to tap into the exhilaration” (x).

Shashi Tharoor as a twentieth century Indian novelist in English is primarily concerned with the changing national scene in respect of the political upsurge, which compelled the British to withdraw from India. The freedom movement in India was not only a political struggle but an all-pervasive national experience for the first few decades. It changed the Indian urban life extensively, and to some extent, the rural life too. Since a novel’s subject is man in society, its subject matter should also be closely related to the upheavals and tribulations of the society. Hence no Indian writer writing in those decades or writing about them, could avoid reflecting this national upsurge in his novels. Some of them made this struggle the direct theme while others used it as a backdrop to their personal narrative. However, it acquired almost always a central place in their novels and whatever their subject, they basically turned towards the

politics of the day, often dealing with the actions, beliefs, and experience of the people involved in the freedom struggle. As such the measure of their success depends on the extent to which they integrate the felt political reality into the fabric of fiction, thus reaching out effectively to a large section of the reading public. Thus, Faction is a device that brings a novel greater accessibility and social acceptance. In *Studying the Novel: An Introduction*, Jeremy Hawthorn aptly defines the functions of **faction**:

The term comes from the American author Truman Capote and is a portmanteau word (fact + fiction) to refer to novels such as his own *In Cold Blood* (1966). In this work primarily novelistic techniques are used to bring actual historical events to life for the reader. The term has thus come to denote a work that is on the borderline between fact and fiction, concerned primarily with a real event or persons, but using imagined details to increase readability and verisimilitude. (22)

Almost by definition, 'Faction' is a revolt of the individual against homogenized forms of experience and monolithic versions of truth. Only through an openness of ideas and form can any true 'new' information be reported; otherwise writers seek not only new facts, but also new ideas and forms through which they can develop a new meaning and, therefore, perhaps approach truth. Faction can also be called a better way to make

communication of reality more effective. Like John Fielding and Truman Capote, the pioneers of the genre of *Faction*, it seems that Tharoor wants to appropriate for himself, the prestige of his era's dominant literary form and, in part, to shape the critical standards for judging his work. Tharoor defines a virgin territory of literature where he may even be the sole inhabitant.

The historical novel is usually concerned with an imaginative re-reading of history, rather than a blind reproduction of historical events. However, in contemporary times, when the very concept of 'history' as 'fact' is problematized, the hitherto rigid boundaries of 'fact' and 'fiction' have opened up, transforming 'history' into what has been called **Faction**. So, the modern authors apply their imagination in the construction of history. While the ancient writers wanted to be as truthful as possible to history, their deviations and imaginative changing of facts were forgiven. A sincere attempt to write a history with the help of ancient, unbiased, unsugared and unedited history has been found nearly impossible. To make history palatable, consciously or unconsciously, modern writers use their imaginative powers liberally. As a result, factuality coupled with creativity gives forth a study of existing facts or truths, a new dimension, a new potential.

History has been traditionally regarded as the silent, imperceptible, natural, organic development of society which is basically stagnant and

incapable of altering anything consciously. The writer of faction makes it mobile and dynamic. There has risen, of late, a concrete historical and philosophic manner, a new humanism, a new concept of progress coupled with imagination; a humanism which wishes to preserve the basis of future human development. This new historical humanism is unable to transcend the limits of that age except in a fantastical form, a fusion of fantasy and truth. While fact is real or truth or history, fiction is imagination. A novel can either be pure fiction or pure fact or an interesting combination of both and hence the new coinage fact + fiction – **Faction**.

The Novel: A Generic Overview

The term **faction** has many connotations in social and political situations. But in the sense that faction denotes a kind of creative writing that inseparably and dialectically combines the historical or factual and the imaginative or fictional, ‘faction’ can be placed significantly in the literary history that takes into account the development of various kinds of novelistic writing. In other words, elements of ‘factional’ writing can be encountered in varying degrees in other kinds of fiction as well. Therefore, it becomes imperative here to present at least a short overview of the major kinds of fiction – an exercise that is expected to throw light

on that particular kind of fictional writing which Shashi Tharoor's works most appropriately demonstrate.

The term **novel** is now applied to a great variety of writings. Novels are extended works of fiction written in prose. "Fiction is thus in-built in fiction and the novel is Janus-faced" (Barat 24). The novel is distinguished clearly from the short story and the novelette. The term for the novel in most European languages is 'roman' which is derived from the medieval term 'romance.' The Italian novella is a short tale in prose. Long narrative romances were written in prose by Greek writers as early as the second and third centuries A. D.

An important predecessor of the latter was the **Picaresque** narrative which emerged in the sixteenth century Spain. "It is a term derived from the Spanish 'pícaro', originally a low-life character who lived dishonestly by his wits but later anyone at odds with, or outside, society" (Ousby 217-8). The picaresque novel, an episodic narrative describing the progress of the pícaro, began with the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1559), translated into English by James Mabbe. In English literature the tradition began with Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) and Richard Head's *The English Rogue* (1665). In the 18th century, it continued in the work of Daniel Defoe notably *Moll Flanders* (1722). Novels such as Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7) and *Nicholas*

Nickleby (1838-90), which are often loosely called 'picaresque,' are picaresque only in the general sense that they tell an episodic story in which the hero goes on a journey. The protagonists are models of amiable innocence or resolute virtue. *Don Quixote* (1605), one of the progenitors of the modern novel, was an early Picaresque narrative; in it, an engaging madman who tries to live by the ideals of chivalry in the everyday world is used to explore the general relations of illusion and reality in human life. In America, writers such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain maintained a more active interest in roguery, and particularly in the confidence trickster. But even there, from Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) onwards, the picaresque novel is increasingly subsumed into the literature of the journey and the open road. That tradition, investigating the ambiguities of freedom as enjoyed by the outsider, has continued in the 20th century. Picaresque fiction is realistic in manner, episodic in structure and often satiric in aim. Twentieth century developments bring modern psychological novels that are picaresque in style.

The realistic novel is characterized as the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters rooted in a social class with mixed motives; they operate in a highly developed social structure, interact with many other characters and undergo plausible and everyday modes of experience. As example, we have eighteenth century

writers like Daniel Defoe and William Fielding. This novelistic mode achieved a high development in the works of the master novelists of the nineteenth century including George Eliot, Jane Austen and William Dean Howells in England and America, Henri Beyle Stendhal in France, Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy in Russia. The prose romance has, as precursors, the chivalrous romance of the Middle Ages and the Gothic Novel of the eighteenth century *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Three Musketeers* (1844-45) by Alexandre Dumas, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1845-46), American fictions of Edgar Allan Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow. Other common subclasses of the novel are based on differences in subject matter, emphasis and artistic purpose.

For instance, **Bildungsroman** and **Erziehungsroman** are German terms signifying 'novel of formation' and 'novel of education.' An important sub-type of the **Bildungsroman** is the **Kunstlerroman**, the artist-novel, which represents the growth of a novelist into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15) is an example for artist-novel.

The **Social Novel** emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on characters and also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform.

Examples of social novels are Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

Since the **Political Novel** is a fairly recent phenomenon, many critics have tried to define it as a literary genre. In order to be a novel at all, the political novel must contain the usual representation of human behaviour and feelings, yet must also absorb into its movement, the hard insoluble pellets of modern ideology, however abstract they may be. Zulfikar Ghose quotes Stendhal here: "Politics as a work of literature, is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar, and yet, a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention" (qtd. in Ghose v). In modern times, the political novel has become a fascinating and popular form of novel, fitting admirably the Aristotelian concept of "Man as a political animal." Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil of Two Nations* (1835), Stendhal's *The Carter House of Prama* (1839), Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Andre Malraux's *Man's Fate* (1934) and Maxim Gorky's *Mother* (1906-07) belong to this genre of novel written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The **Regional Novel** emphasizes the setting, speech, social structure and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local colour, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and interacting. Beginning with the

second half of the nineteenth century, the novel has displaced all other literary forms in popularity. Henry James' prefaces, gathered into one volume as *The Art of the Novel* (1934), exemplify the care and subtlety that have been lavished on this craft. The use of symbolist and expressionist techniques and of devices adopted from the art of the cinema, the dislocation of time sequence, the adaptations of forms and motifs from myths and dreams, and the exploitation of stream-of-consciousness narration in a way that converts the story of outer action and events into a drama of the life of the mind became prevalent in this period.

William James coined the phrase **stream-of-consciousness**. It is one of the delusive terms which writers and critics use. It is delusive because it sounds concrete and yet it is used as variously—and vaguely—as 'romanticism,' 'symbolism,' and 'surrealism.' We never know whether it is being used to designate the bird of technique or the beast of genre—and we are startled to find the creature designated is most often a monstrous combination of the two. Stream-of-consciousness is properly a phrase for psychologists. The phrase is most clearly useful when it is applied to mental processes, for a rhetorical locution it becomes doubly metaphorical; that is, the word 'consciousness' as well as the word 'stream' is figurative. Hence, both are less precise and less stable. If, then, the term stream-of-consciousness is reserved for indicating an approach to

the presentation of psychological aspects of characters in fiction, it can be used with some precision. It is the basis from which contradicting and often meaningless commentary on the stream-of-consciousness novel can be resolved. In the opinion of John O' Hara, the novelist may even be saying “. . . shocking, or provocative, or entertaining, or stimulating, or instructive things” (17), but the stream-of-consciousness novel is identified most quickly by its subject matter, which, rather than its techniques, its purposes, or its themes, distinguishes it. Robert Humphrey says:

Hence, the novels that are said to use the stream-of-consciousness technique to a considerable degree prove, upon analysis, to be novels which have as their essential subject matter, the consciousness of one or more characters; which means, the depicted consciousness of one or more characters; that is, the depicted consciousness serves as a screen on which the material in these novels is presented.

(5)

A **fantasy** is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into ‘fact’ itself. Such violation of dominant assumptions threatens to subvert the norm. This is not in itself a socially subversive activity: it would be naïve to equate

fantasy with either anarchic or revolutionary politics. It does, however, disturb 'rules' of artistic representation and literature's reproduction of the 'real.' Fantasy fulfils and manifests our human power to transcend the human. Fantasy does not always invent supernatural regions, but presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something 'Other'. It becomes domesticated, humanized, turning from transcendental explorations to transcriptions of a human condition. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite. Rosemary Jackson aptly remarks:

Fantasy is that kind of extended narrative which establishes and develops an artifact, that is, plays the game of the impossible . . . a fantasy is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility. . . . The fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality. (21)

The **Involuted Novel** is a work whose subject incorporates an account of its own genesis and development. Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) best illustrates this genre. It employs multilingual puns and jokes, incorporates esoteric data about butterflies and strategies from chess, crossword puzzles and other games, parodies, other novels and sets, elaborated traps for the unwary reader. This is also an era of what is

sometimes called the **antinovel**, i.e., a work which is deliberately constructed in a negative fashion, relying for its effects, on the deletion of standard elements, on violating the traditional norms and on playing against the expectations established in the reader by the novelistic method, and convention of the past.

The Nouveau Roman (The New Novel) for which Allaine Robbet-Grille's *Jealousy* (1972) is an example, leaves out such standard elements as plot, characterization, description of states of mind, normal setting in time and space and a frame of reference to the world in which the work is set. We are simply presented in this novel, with sequence of perceptions, mainly visual, which we may naturalise by postulating that we are occupying the physical space and sharing the hyper acute observation of a jealous husband, from which we may infer also the tortured state of his disintegrating mind.

Besides fabulation and non-fiction novel, which are the more radical forms of postmodernism, there is the novel about itself which is the **problematic novel**. Writers hesitating to take the radical path to fabulation or reportage, sometimes build this very hesitation into the text. Whereas the fabulator is discontented with reality, and the non-fiction novelist is impatient with fiction, the problematic novelist is loyal to both but is diffident of reconciling them and makes the problematic nature of his undertaking his subject-matter. What is more, he makes the reader

participate in the aesthetic and philosophical problems that the writing of fiction presents today. George Louis Borges' *Short Stories* (1935), and Thomas Pynchon's *Lot 49* (1966) are some examples of this class. Introducing the author and the question of authorship into the text and exposing the conventions of art are not themselves a totally new phenomenon. These have become such a recurrent feature in postmodernist literature as to be a constituent of it, with the result that the alliance of writer, character, plot and reader becomes part of the subject of the novel. A lot depends of course on how the novelist goes about his job. Admittedly, this self-consciousness or reflexiveness could become a sterile gimmick at the hands of lesser artists. An instance of this device is B. S. Johnson's *Albert Angelo* (1964).

One twentieth-century variant of the historical novel is known as **Documentary Fiction** which incorporates into a novel not only historical characters and events, but also contemporary journalists' reports: for example, John Dos Passos' *USA* (1938); and E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975). Documentary Realism, according to Lars Ole Sauerberg:

. . . explicitly or implicitly acknowledges borrowing 'directly' from reality, that is, from kinds of discourse intended for non-literary purposes. The principle at work in documentary realism can be illustrated by the well-known gimmick of an event or figure of undisputed

historical origin suddenly introduced into the otherwise fictitious world of the fictional text. . . . (8)

What we usually specify as the **Historical Novel** however, began in the nineteenth century with Sir Walter Scott. The historical novel not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history, but makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central character and narrative. Some of the greatest historical novels also use the protagonists and actions to reveal what the author regards as the deep forces that impel the historical process. Historical novels may often document the life of an earlier society, especially during a socio-political crisis, like the Plantagenet England in Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819); the Southern American aristocracy at the time of the Civil War in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936); or the Russian society during the Napoleonic era in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869).

If a comprehensive study is made of the novels from 1875 till India's independence, a wide spectrum of political novels written by the Indian as well as English authors can be ranged. Some of the senior Indo-Anglian novelists in this period are S.M. Ghosh, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Chaman Nahal, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar and Kamala Das, while Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Salman Rushdie, Arundati Roy and Shashi Tharoor belong to a later generation. E.M. Forster, John Masters, Paul Scott, M. M. Kaya, Edward

Thompson and others are the prominent Anglo-Indian authors. Among the later Indo-Anglian ones, it may be said of Shashi Tharoor that he paints a much wider literary and aesthetically superior canvas. The impact of recent political events on contemporary Indians is his favourite theme.

The novel as a genre is directly associated with society. It exists at a point where we can recognize the intersection of the streams of social history. The novel, therefore, has a generic habit of reaching out to history on the one side and society on the other. Mulk Raj Anand himself, an eminent Indo-Anglian novelist feels that an artist cannot evade contact with the people and their problems in society. Novel as a literary form has an important role to play in a changing society where it helps in solving the problems arising out of social and political turmoil. It is undeniable that we can fruitfully draw aesthetic and literary conclusions from the correct evaluation of those social and historical foundations.

The historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The characters of the historical novel are generally influenced by the historical peculiarities of their age. The question of historical truth in the artistic reflection of reality has been a topic of much debate. Goethe influenced the rise of the historical drama, which had a direct and powerful influence on the rise of the historical novel in the works of people like Sir Walter Scott. Leo Tolstoy observed that in historic events the so-called great men are labels giving name to events and like labels

they have but the smallest connection with the events themselves (Horsley 232). Their action, in a historical sense, is involuntary and is related to the whole course of history.

Another recent offshoot of the novel is the form that one of its innovators, Truman Capote, named the **non-fiction novel**. This uses a variety of novelistic techniques to give a graphic rendering of recent characters and happenings, and is based not only on historical records but often on personal interviews with the chief agents. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* (1979) are instances of this mode; both these books offer a detailed rendering of the life, personality, and actions of murderers, based on sustained series on prison interviews with the protagonists themselves. A third variant is the **fabulative historical novel** that interweaves history with fantasized, even fantastic events. All these are, when teamed together, nothing but Faction. Paul Dukes, while writing about historical fiction, welcomes "the current boom in historical fiction", but says, "Novelists need to ground their stories in a soil of solid fact" (107). The words of MacKinlay Kantor echo a similar sentiment. He says, "The term 'historical novel' has a dignity of its own and should be applied only to those works wherein a deliberate attempt has been made to recreate the past" (30). He implies that 'Faction' is not an entirely new phenomenon, for ". . . the prophet, the novelist, and the playwright command sublimer realms than

those of technical history because they reconstitute life in its wholeness (30).

Metafiction has been defined as fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making. A novelist's vision, or the message he wants to convey, is closely related to the form of his work. When metafictionists write as they do, calling attention to the writing process itself, this is no mere exhibition of craftsmanship. Admittedly, this possibility does exist, but Laurence Sterne, Vladimir Nabokov, John Barth, and many others do not limit themselves to the technical aspect of writing fiction. What they have in common is a deep concern for verbal creation and communication. However, their opinions differ as to the possibilities of communication and the making of fiction. Their different conceptions are revealed in their attitudes to the narrator, narrative and narration in their works.

Patricia Waugh notes that metafiction "suggests not only that writing history is a fictional act, ranging events conceptually through language to form a world model, but that history itself is invested like fiction, with interrelating plots which appear to interest independent of human design" (48). **Historiographic metafiction** is like postmodernist architecture. It is overtly and resolutely historical—though admittedly, in an ironic and problematic way that acknowledges that history is not the transparent record of any sure truth.

The intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the world and literature. Today there is a return to the idea of a common discursive property in the embedding of both literary and historical texts in fiction, but it is a return made problematic by metafictional assertions of both history and literature. Historiographic metafiction points to this fact by using the para-textual conventions of historiography to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations. How can a historian (or a novelist) check any historical account against past empirical reality in order to test its validity? Factors are not given but constructed by the kinds of questions we ask of events. The past is a thing which cannot be eradicated, which accumulates and impinges. What postmodern discourses both fictive and historiographic ask is, how we come to terms with such complexity.

Parody is a genre closely associated with metafiction. Both are central to postmodernist perception, and parody developed as a reaction to the failure of the 18th century convention of satire. In the words of Rose Margaret:

In the 19th century, satires served no moral purpose. . . .
Some writers revived the use of the word 'parodic' and emphasized the ambivalence of parody as a form of literary criticism containing elements of respect for its target and

spoke of it as being both dependent on and independent from its object. (33)

To parody is not to destroy the past. In fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. Although accompanied by a comic effect it has been seen that parody need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target.

The term 'Parody,' in contemporary usage, designates a form of literary satire, distinguishable from other forms of satire, by its imitative mode, its internal dependence on the devices and conventions of its satiric target. Linda Hutcheon says, "Parody is perfect postmodern form in some sense, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (1985: 227). Barbara Johnson sees parody in a different way: "Treating discourses as performance, parody enacts its critique of literature from within literature, foregrounding the artifice or factitiousness of its model's representation of reality, reversing the formal self-effacement on which the parodied discourse depends for its claims to mimesis or truth" (1985: 38). Michele Hannoosh interprets:

Parody fulfills the function attributed to it in Formalistic theory. It destroys categorically the old charge levelled against Parody, namely, its destructive effect on both individual works and in general. In rebounding upon itself, leaving room for other versions, or even suggesting the

forms these might take, parody ensures that the tradition it revises will continue even beyond itself. (116)

Faction

Many of those currently interested in exploring the affinities between history and literature have argued that historical narratives do not derive their authority from a reality imitated but merely from the cultural conventions or subjective preferences which determine the nature of the paradigms constructed. The conception of the act of 'imaging' history does not entail any such radical separation of the 'composed' world from the real one. When the novel can effectively embody the imaginative understanding of the historical world, this implies an encounter with what Joseph Conrad calls the "external and objective reality in which men are fated to live" (235-6). Let us further assume that one can reasonably try to determine whether a patterning of experience fits this external reality well or badly. Within the world constituted as real by the novelist, the various literary modes help to clarify the obstacles confronting us as we try to make sense of our own history.

In complex narratives, this pattern is subverted in a variety of ways, and confidence in the inquirer's ability to apprehend the meaning of empirically observed fact is qualified. With the exception of D. H. Lawrence, whose romanticism leads him to reject all the main elements in an objective model of inquiry, the novelists included, take seriously the

task of accumulating fact and moving from evidence to construction. In the narratives in which an ironic tone is powerfully present, the scepticism towards which irony can tend, is checked by our sense, as the narrative unfolds, that there are both 'facts' and 'truths' to be discovered. Each narrative tests common assumptions about the way in which we arrive at our conclusions. Fiction can illuminate the nature of the historical imagination. Lee Horsley's study gives new insights into the complex process of 'imagining history' and strongly argues the case for a humanistic approach. Her analysis shows how writers have brought alive in their work an individual struggle to comprehend some of the most important political phenomena of the twentieth century.

Novelists are able to use empirical narratives as contexts within which they judge the robustness of competing constructions of historical reality. But there is also a wide-ranging discussion of issues in the discourse of historical narrative which will engage the attention of anyone interested in twentieth century political literature and historical interpretation. "Most of our modern day critics have chosen to study the history-novel connection within the theoretical frames of postmodernism and post-colonialism," says T. N. Dhar, "to explain and evaluate the history-fiction connection with reality in very specific terms" (205). Lee Horsley in *Political Fiction and the Historical Imagination* clearly states

how writers, while writing in what has truly taken place, can contribute ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ in a renewed way:

This insistence on seeing reality as it is, not as we might wish it to be, and on the constancy of human inconstancy, implies that men best bear responsibility for their history by continually renewing their understanding of the individual perception and experience of political action. By giving form to the intellectual activity of comprehending political life, both novelists and writers of factual narratives can contribute to such a renewal. Whether or not they do so effectively depend on the ways in which, and the extent to which, they put their political imaginations ‘at the bar of judgement’ as they take readers through the process of historical construction. (12)

As **Faction** and **historiographic metafiction** are almost comfortably interchangeable terms, they may be dealt in greater detail in this chapter. Some works like those of Daniel Defoe claim veracity and actually convince readers that they are factual, but most readers today have a double awareness of both its imaginative constructedness as well as its basis in the ‘real,’ as do readers of contemporary **historiographic metafiction**. In such narratives, there is a strong relation between story and history. Every history is a story of some stature which was

propagated for a reasonable period of time, and which the historian wishes to reinstate. What is literally true of it is in a sense what distinguishes the historian from a teller of fictitious or mendacious stories. Storytellers can certainly silence, exclude, and absent certain past events and people, but historians have also done the same.

Faction is, therefore, engaged in the examination of what the New Historicist critic Louis Montrose has characterized as the preoccupation with “the textuality of history” and “the historicity of texts”:

The post-structuralist orientation to history now emerging in literary studies may be characterized as a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history. By *the historicity of texts*, I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing—not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them. By *the textuality of history*, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question—traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are

themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the 'documents' upon which historians ground their own texts, called 'histories.' (781)

Faction is thus the legitimate voice of a world where reality has irrecoverably been lost, where history is created out of the fragments of textual mediations.

Harold Nye is of the opinion that “. . . literature and history were considered branches of the same tree of learning, a tree which sought to interpret experience for the purpose of guiding and elevating man” (68). It is this very separation of the literary and the historical that is now being challenged in postmodern theory and art, and recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They are both identified as linguistic constructs highly conventionalized in their narrative form and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. But these are also the implied teachings of historiographic metafiction. Like those recent theories of both history and fiction, this kind of novel asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definition and interrelation are historically determined and vary with time. In the writing of both fiction

and history, our confidence in empiricist / positivist epistemologies has been shaken, but perhaps not yet destroyed.

Michael J. Arlen observed in *The Atlantic* that the Factionist is less of a reporter than an impresario: “. . . it is not that the New Journalist does not present the totality of someone’s life, because nobody can do that, but that with his ego, he rules such thick lines down the edges of his own column of print” (94). By the end of the decade, a variety of critics concluded that Faction was dangerous for a variety of reasons. It risked turning the reporting of news into mere entertainment; with the Factionist’s use of scenes and dialogue, distorted facts, the new reporting style would replace the hard-won tradition of objectivity with a cult of mere egotism.

There has been a long tradition dating from Aristotle that makes fiction not only separate from but also superior to history which is the mode of writing limited to the representation of the contingent, and the particular. To Aristotle, the historian could speak only of what had happened, of the particulars of the past; the poet, on the other hand, spoke of what could or might happen and so could deal more with universals. This was not to say that historical events and personages could not appear in tragedy, nothing prevents some of the things that have actually happened from falling into the category of what might probably happen. Nevertheless, many historians have since used the techniques of fictional

representation to create imaginative versions of their historical, real worlds. It is part of the postmodernist's stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive historical representation, the particular, the general, the present and the past. But Linda Hutcheon, in her work *Intertextuality, Parody and the Discourses of History*, posits:

History and fiction have always been notoriously porous genres, of course. At various times, both have included in their elastic boundaries, such forms as the travel tale and various versions of what we now call sociology. It is not surprising that there would be overlapping of concern and even mutual influences between the two genres. (1988: 106)

She continues to elaborate on the challenge historiographic metafiction offers to realism:

It is a contemporary critical truism that realism is really a set of conventions, that representation of the real is not the same as the real itself. What historiographic metafiction challenges is both any naive realist concept of representation and any equally naïve textually or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world. (1988a: 3)

The metanarratives and falsehoods propagated in the Enlightenment period have nourished the postmodern concern with the

multiplicity of dispersed truths relative to the specificity of place and culture. Following the Enlightenment, both the realist novel and the tradition of narrative history can be said to have been born in the nineteenth century. These genres looked upon a narrative work—representational, yet separated from human experience and historical processes—as self-sufficient and closed, the autonomous product of an individual subject, the author.

Historiographic metafiction keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context. In deliberate contrast to modernist radical metafiction, it attempts to demarginalize the literary, through confrontation with the historical. On the thematic level, life and art meet trying to break the walls between literary fantasies and the actualities of the world. The metafictional and the historiographic also meet in the intertexts of the novel.

Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames—frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses, positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history. Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological. Some instances of historiographic metafiction point to other implications of the rewriting of history. Rewriting past events effectively alters them. The real gets

rewritten in its representation. In Nietzschean terms, there are no facts ('the real'), only interpretations. Thus, postmodernism posits that the representation has totally replaced the real. In other words, under the purview of the postmodern practice of re-writing, history is representation, and therefore textual / fictional. The problematizing of the nature of historical knowledge points both to the need to separate and to the danger of separating fiction and history as narrative genres. One cannot say that history and fiction are part of the "same order of discourse." They are different though they share social, cultural and ideological contexts as well as formal techniques. Novels incorporate social and political history to varying degrees; historiography in turn is structured, coherent and teleological as any narrative fiction. Both historians and novelists constitute their subjects as possible objects of narrative representation.

Ian Ousby strongly feels that postmodernism is an international movement, affecting all the contemporary arts, which has succeeded modernism: "In literature, and particularly the novel, it rejects realism in favour of a heightened sense of artifice, a delight in games and verbal pyrotechnics, a suspicion of absolute truth and a resulting inclination to stress the fictionality of fiction" (221). All these traits were already present in modernist works. Its distrust of traditional mimetic genres, allied to the philosophical climate of structuralism and deconstruction,

has also encouraged postmodernism to embrace popular forms, such as Detective Fiction as exemplified by Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983). Equally postmodernist is the blurring of boundaries between the genres—novel and journalism in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe and others, and Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974). The fiction of Salman Rushdie would seem to confirm the link between postmodernism and postcoloniality, already suggested by the Magic Realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Postmodernism deliberately confuses the notions that history's problem is verification while fiction's is veracity. Both narrative history and fiction are signifying systems in our culture. It is the constructed, textual nature of discourses that historiographic metafiction reveals. Both factual history and fiction are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearances of being autonomous and self-contained. History is a kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive, and fiction is a kind of speculative history by which the available data for the composition is seen to be greater and more various in its sources than the historian supposes. As old fashioned narrative or 'realistic' historiography becomes problematic, the historian should reformulate his vocation not any longer to produce some vivid representation of history as it really happened, but rather to produce the concept of history.

The binary opposition between fiction and fact is no longer relevant in any differential system; it is the assertion of the space between these entities that perhaps matters. But historiographic metafiction suggests the continuing relevance of such an opposition, even if it be a problematic one. Some novels establish and then blur the line between fiction and history. This kind of generic blurring has been a feature of literature since the classical Epic and the Bible, but the simultaneous and overt assertion and crossing of boundaries is more postmodern. Umberto Eco has claimed that there are three ways to narrate the past: the romance, the swashbuckling tale and the historical novel. Historical novels he feels, “not only identify in the past the causes of what came later but also trace the process through which these causes began slowly to produce their effects. The device points to a way of narrating this past historiographic metafiction and non historical fiction” (97).

What is the difference between postmodern fiction and what is usually regarded as nineteenth century historical fiction? It is difficult to generalize. Historical fiction is

. . . set in a period of the past, whether recent or distant, realized with some degree of attention to the atmosphere and details which differentiate it from the present. Customarily, though not invariably, historical novels mingle real events (such as a war or revolution) and real public

figures (a king or queen, a political or military leader) with fictional characters and events. (Ousby 138)

The history of the historical novel begins in the early 19th century with Sir Walter Scott. It is true that, before him, novelists who did not choose to aim at fidelity to contemporary life had already begun to abandon the deliberately unspecific settings – unspecific in place as well as time – which the romance and the fable had preferred. Victorian novelists were usually at their most creative when writing what could be called quasi-historical fiction, “novels set not in a remote past which had to be researched, but in a more recent past which could be captured largely through recollection, since it lay somewhere in the writer’s childhood or only just beyond” (Ousby 138-9). Historical fiction had shrunk into the ‘historical romance,’ fiction of popular appeal which critics regarded as lying outside mainstream serious literature. Ousby strongly feels that from the twentieth century onwards, this confident dismissal has been challenged by novelists themselves. On the face of it, this revival is particularly surprising, “. . . since it occurred at just the time when academic historians had finally turned their backs on the storytelling confidence which had supported predecessors from Gibbon to Macaulay” (Ousby 140)

History plays a number of distinctly different roles and different levels of generality in its various manifestations. Historical fiction is that

which is modelled on historiographics to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force. Historiographic metafiction plays upon the truths and lies of the historical record. In certain novels, some known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible minimum failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error. Another difference lies in the way in which postmodern fiction uses detail or historical data. Historiographic metafiction incorporates, but rarely assimilates such data. The impact of the new mixing of fiction and fact is clear on popular if not academic history in the recent years.

The 'non-fictional novel,' in its 'factional' variety, influenced writers like Thomas Keneally who wrote historical novels, often of the recent past. The non-fictional novel of the 1960s and 1970s did not just record the contemporary hysteria of history. It did not merely try to embrace the fictional element inevitable in any reporting and then try to imagine its way towards the truth. There are non-fictional novels however which come close to historiographic metafiction in their form and control. Many postmodern novels define the new seriousness that acknowledges the limits and powers of 'reporting' or writing of the past, recent or remote. Since history is three dimensional, it partakes of the nature of science, and philosophy. Postmodern novels raise a number of

specific issues regarding the interaction of historiography and fiction that deserve more detailed study to bring about the characteristics of Faction.

In the opinion of David Bennett, one of the postmodern ways of literally incorporating the textualized past into the text of the present is that of parody. As he observes, "The term 'Parody' in contemporary usage designates a form of literary satire distinguishable from other kinds of satire by its initial mode, its internal dependence on the devices and conventions of its satiric target" (29). Parodic inter-texts are both literary and historical. The mixing of fact and fiction as in the writing of Daniel Defoe has been borrowed by many writers. Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between the past and the present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. The resulting style is Faction. It is not a modernist's desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look spare in contrast to the richness of the past. It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. To what does the very language of historiographic metafiction refer? To a world of history or one of fiction? History's referents are presumed to be real, fiction's are not. But what postmodern novels teach is that in both cases, they actually refer at the first level, to other texts. We know the past only through its textualized remains. Historiographic metafiction problematizes the activity of reference by refusing to bracket the referent or to revel in it. History is natural selection. Mutant versions

of the past struggle for dominance, new species of fact arise, and old saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks. History loves only those who dominate her. It is a relationship of mutual enslavement. All issues like subjectivity, reference ideology, underlie the problematized relations between history and fiction in postmodernism. But many theorists today have pointed to narrative as the one concern that envelops all of these, for the process of narrativization has come to be seen as a central form of human comprehend and formal coherence on the chaos of events. Narrative is what translates knowing into telling. It is this translation that obsesses postmodern fiction. The conventions of narrative in both historiography and novels are not constraints but enabling conditions.

Historiographic metafiction, like both historical fiction and narrative history, cannot avoid dealing with the problem of the states of their 'facts' and of the nature of their evidence, their documents. We are epistemologically limited in our ability to know the past since we are both spectators of and actors in the historical process. Historiographic metafiction suggests a distinction between events and facts that is shared by many historians.

From the time of Plato and Aristotle onwards, western aesthetics has centred on **mimetic** principles. It can be said that mimesis, or the

depiction of reality, and Fantasy, or the departure from reality, form the twin impulses behind literary creation. Kathryn Hume, in an analysis which ranges from the Icelandic sagas to science fiction, from Malory to Pulp Romance, and from the *Odyssey* to the *Nouveau Roman*, systematically examines the various ways in which fantasy and mimesis contribute to literary representations of reality offering forms of escape in adventure stories, pastoral, farce and pornography; complementing each other in expressive presentations of 'new' realities; pressurizing readers to accept a didactic author's interpretation of reality; or battering the reader into agreeing that his or her interpretation cannot be proved. She asserts:

Only by acknowledging fantasy i.e. imagined fiction as a legitimate response to reality, and to our demand that reality be meaningful, can we appreciate its role in literature's power to give readers a sense of meaning and its centrality to the creative imagination. As long as we assume more knowledge to be a great thing readers will naturally feel a sense of satisfaction. (Hume 98)

The **fabulative historical novel** interweaves history with fantastic events. An examination of some of the roots of literary fantasy reveals it to be characterized by this subversive function. Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal study, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929, 1963), places modern fantasists such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Edgar

Allan Poe and Jean-Paul Sartre, as the direct descendants of a traditional literary genre: the Menippea.

Menippean satire was present in ancient Christian and Byzantine literature, in medieval Renaissance, and Reformation writings. Its most representative works were fictions such as Petronius' *Satyricon*, Varro's *Bimarcus* i.e. *The Double Marcus*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* known as *The Golden Ass*, and Lucian's *Strange Story*. It was a genre which broke the demands of historical realism or probability. The menippea moved easily in space between this world, an underworld and an upper world. It conflated the past, present and future, and allowed dialogues with the dead states of hallucination, dream, insanity, eccentric behaviour and speech, personal transformation, and extraordinary situations, were the norm.

While writing on Magic Realism, Liam Connell says, "The similarity of the formal properties of Modernism and Magic Realism has been amply recognised" (98). The term **Magic Realism** is used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Louis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, Gunter Grass in Germany and John Fowls in England. These writers interweave in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy

tales. Robert Scholes popularized metafiction as an overall term for the large and growing class of novels which depart drastically from the traditional categories either of realism or romance and also fabulation for the current mode of free wheeling narrative invention. These novels violate in various ways standard novelistic expectations by drastic and sometimes, highly effective experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday; the fantastic, the mythical and the nightmarish renderings blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic. Magic realism is a term for one manifestation of postmodernism, first applied to the large body of spectacular, fantastic fiction produced in South American countries since World War II, notably the work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970) is generally regarded as its paradigm. It juxtaposes apparently reliable, realistic reportage with extravagant fantasy, not just in a spirit of inscrutable playfulness but also in response to the manipulation of fact and information in South American politics. In this regard, Ian Ousby attests to the political functions of magic realism in the context of South American literature:

Indeed, magic realism assumes that truth is best viewed as a communal, collaborative construct. . . . Such emphasis makes it an essentially comic genre. Magic realism has

since been identified in other literatures, including the work of the Czech novelist Milan Kundera and the Italian Italo Calvino. The chief examples in English are the novels of Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, Graham Swift and Peter Carey. In the European tradition, it is possible to see Rabelais and Kafka as precursors of the magic realist idiom, while Rushdie's work points back through the English novel to Dickens and *Tristram Shandy*. (180)

A different approach concentrates on significant details, insisting on the process of native perception and leaving the elaboration of more abstract moral conclusion to the reader. Tolstoy's technique of defamiliarisation requires a patient regard for appearances. Through a similar technique, short stories maximize the fragmentation effect by concentrating upon a piece of the work, which is placed under a strong unusual light. A last category includes redundant texts from the journal prose of Rabelais to contemporary writers who play with the signifier. The information density of such texts slides towards zero. "Most journalists experience a professional tug of war between the desire to tell a good story, and the desire to report, thoroughly analyse, and explain" (Hanson 36). Recent tabulators include Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald Bartholomew, William Gass, Robert Coover, and Ishmael Reed. Robert Scholes' *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979, an expansion of his

The Fabulators 1967); James M. Mellard's *The Exploded Form: The Modernist Novel in America* (1980); and Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction* (1984) are excellent studies on works of fabulation and metafiction.

The term **postmodernism** is sometimes applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45), when the effects of the first war on Western morale were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of over population. Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the counter traditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional.

'Postmodernist' is the term used in literary parlance to refer to a corpus of literature that has been written in the mid-1950s, '60s and after, largely in America, and to a lesser extent in Latin America, Europe and Britain. Postmodernism is thus an international literary genre in the first place, a phenomenon including as it does in its canon, the pioneers—the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges; the Russian expatriate, Vladimir Nabokov; the chief French practitioner, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and such latter-day British instances as Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, B. S. Johnson and John Fowles; and the by now well-known American figures like

Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Ken Kesey, Norman Mailer and John Hawkes, to mention a select few. Most of the post-war literature is truly 'postmodern' in the sense that it evinces a new sensibility and thus effects a clear departure from modernism that preceded it.

Another important genre is the **myth**. According to Michael McKeon: "Myth is defined by its capacity to disentangle itself—to provide an 'escape' from history. . . the original formula of a myth degenerates or evolves as you will, beyond the stage where the distinctive characteristics of the myth are still recognizable. (6) Myth is often the form adopted by many postmodern writers. In classical Greek aesthetics, 'mythos' signified any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology—a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. Most myths are related to social rituals—set forms and procedures in sacred ceremonies—but anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals. When the postmodernist uses myth, it

assumes the nature of a tool for subversion, a comfortable medium for dissolving the boundaries that traditionally exist between genres and identities.

Postmodernist art challenges the distinctions between the highbrow and the popular. It endorses **pop art**, which in an earlier era has been relegated as crass and trivial. The postmodernist penchant for the pop is due to a number of reasons. One is the artist's sense of dissatisfaction with the dominant art form of his time, and another the inaccessibility of the art form to the common man. This inaccessibility is in most cases due to the cleavage that will have arisen between art and entertainment. The new art strives to bridge this gap by large scale assimilation of elements of popular culture. New art forms are often, as the Russian Formalists believed, simply the canonization of inferior sub-literary genres. To state the same conversely, art needs constantly to revitalize itself by rebarbarization or revulgarization, 'barbarus' and 'vulgus' being Latin terms meaning the savage and the common man respectively. Modern literature, like literature in every age, did strive to incorporate elements of popular culture into its body. The proportion of the elements of popular culture in modern literature was minimal or peripheral; it was the preponderance or centrality of symbols and classical myths that in the main characterized it. Modern literature as seen in Shashi Tharoor has had recourse to myth in order to control, order and give shape and

significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.

Myth in the modernist perspective was a mode of perception which alone can expand consciousness enabling the inclusion of the other within the self. The moderns strove to relate myths to the contemporary situation, to find equivalences for mythos, which resulted in the myths being parodied or satirized. In *The Family Reunion*, Eliot seeks to find a contemporary analogue for a classical Orestes myth. *The Great Indian Novel*, a parodic version of the Indian epic Mahabharata, relates the mythical or puranic characters to Indian politics and democracy. Thus the moderns endeavour to preserve a certain degree of continuity with the past. The emphasis however, is on 'impersonality' in its many forms, whether it is distance through myth, hardness through image or lucidity through point of view.

Since the nineteenth century, the borders between literary genres have become blurred and fluid. The limits between the novel and the short story, the long poem, autobiography, biography and history have been interrogated and made permeable. But in any case, the conventions of the genres are played off against each other, and there is no simple, unproblematic merging.

This merging of genres was discernible in many discourses, including journalism, in the mid-twentieth century. In *Fact and Fiction*

(1977), John Hollowell elaborates on the postmodernist trend in New Journalism, which narrowed the gap between fact and fiction, in what they termed Faction. Proponents like Mailer, Capote and Thompson described a character's subconscious from an assumptive role which is slightly 'mischievous,' inventing the psychosis of a character and the formative chain of events that brings them to a literal climax. These writers in effect challenged the boundaries of fact and fiction, which in the beginning of the twenty-first century, demands more attention than it did fifty years ago. Dan Wakefield argued in his 1966 article that the Faction of Capote and Wolfe created a new fusion of the journalist's eye for detail and the personal vision of the novelist:

Such reporting is 'imaginative' not because the author has distorted the facts, but because he has presented them in a full instead of in a naked manner, brought out the sights, sounds and feel, surrounding those facts and connected them by comparison with other facts of history, society and literature in an artistic manner that does not diminish but gives greater depth and dimension to the facts. (88)

While critics disagreed as to the merit and even a definition of Faction, by the end of the sixties there was little doubt that the varieties of reporting called, **New journalism**, 'the non-fiction novel' and 'the literature of fact' had stimulated a widespread re-evaluation of

traditionally journalistic practice and commonly came to be known as 'Faction.' Yet, "there *is* the possibility of an awakening in the individual. . . a questioning where our society, our culture leads to, and the madness of it all, may act as a catalyst" (Powell 162).

Faction cannot be dismissed on the basis of traditional approaches to journalism. Since Friedrich Nietzsche, human civilization seems to have lost its moorings on facts and reality once and forever. All forms of contemporary writing can be seen to interrogate reality in some form or the other. Facts have been replaced by their representations and interpretations. Today it is hard to read a good text without finding in several articles the 'art leads,' the detailed characterization and the scenic reconstruction that characterize the form. Faction has played a role in changing even the most conservative of newspapers. It is not uncommon to find in leading dailies even one page that does not reflect greater probing and interpretation of facts than in previous years. Here Tom Wolfe writes about the restrictions put on the writer: "If a writer were a freeman and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his feeling and not upon conventions, life is a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding from the beginning of consciousness" (31). The individual American in the 60s found himself daily confronted by realities that were as actual as they were fictive. Both novelists and reporters found

themselves faced with situations demanding responses, situations to narrate which they found their tools inadequate. A significant number turned to Fiction, working separately, and novelists and reporters were engaged in revising their narrative forms in order to better confront a new set of realities. While evaluating new journalism as new fiction, John Hellman asserts:

Living and writing in the 1960s, reporters such as Wolfe, Thompson and Herr found themselves saddled with rules and formulas that made it impossible for them to deal with their subjects. A who-what-where-when-why style of reporting too did not suffice. They revolted against the rigid forms in which isolated facts are presented in declining order of importance and ‘on the one hand. . . . on the other hand’ news analysis which was common. They sought new forms and frankly aerated their personal perspectives. (ii-iii)

Writers as Wolfe, Breslin, Talese, Didion and Tharoor used fictional techniques in more complex and sophisticated ways than did their predecessors. The works of Stephen Crane and Mark Twain, for example, were often sketches written as preliminary exercises to fiction. In some articles, for example, there are long passages of straight historical narration, indicative of the older journalistic tradition. The techniques of interior monologue and stream of consciousness as employed by Wolfe or

Talese have seldom been used before in the sustained ways that these writers employ them. Contemporary journalists use novelistic techniques in order to provide greater psychological depth and to portray dramatically important social issues.

Consequently the traditional mimetic novels of earlier years have been partly replaced by 'the non-fiction novel' or reportage. Taking the cue from Alain Robbe-Grillet who writes a type of fiction like *La Jalousie* in which obviousness and transparency precluded the existence of any transcendence, the non-fiction novel seeks to purge the text of all traces of fiction as far as possible. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968) may be cited as non-fiction novels. *In Cold Blood* is a 'true' report, buoyed up by the author's hard research, of a multiple murder committed in Kansas in 1959. Mailer's is an account, which slides from history to fiction and vice-versa, of the author's participation in the anti-Vietnam War March on the Pentagon in 1967. Lars Ole Sauerberg points out:

Mailer has chosen to counter point one version, which is not quite fiction in the sense of a made-up story, but an autobiography-as-fiction. . . which is not quite history, but the historian's eye-witness source. . . . The conventional frames they impose on reality are intended to exert a multi-appeal or full saturation effect. (69)

In the 1950s, there were promises of a new journalism and early in the sixties newspaper men experimented with fictional techniques. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* lent a new seriousness to the talk about a higher journalism. In his novel *In Cold Blood*, although Capote insisted upon the factual accuracy of all the situations and dialogue that he depicted, his narrative read more like a novel than like a historical account. Pegi Taylor elaborates: "He read about the murder of four members of the Clutter family in a small town in Kansas. . . he devoted the next six years, to researching the crime, compiling 6000 pages of interviews and then wrote his stunning non-fiction novel" (30). Perhaps more than the political reportage or more than Tom Wolfe's *New Journalism*, *In Cold Blood* stimulated a critical debate about a new form of literature that continues throughout the decade and is now accepted as **Faction**. No writer before Capote had so thoroughly blended journalistic techniques with the sophisticated narrative skills of the novelist. Paul Levine feels that he had single-handedly "created a new literary genre that is the envy of both the novelists and reporters" (607). They could equal neither impeccable factuality nor the narrative skill with which he told his story. Norman Mailer followed Capote's lead by concocting his own aesthetic for *The Armies of the Night*. The subtitle of this book, "History as a Novel, The Novel as History," reflects his desire to promote the validity of his impressionistic journalism. Capote's *In Cold Blood*, for

instance, shares many of the concerns of Faction and is of obvious importance in the development and recognition of the genre; still, it is a transitional work which is close to conventional journalism in the illusion of objectivity. Capote seeks an impersonal, omniscient point of view close to realistic fiction in the limitations of its rather conservative techniques.

Numerous pieces written by Truman Capote or about him by others are filled with references to his childhood. Although the events and characters in his stories and novels more often than not have a link to actual experiences in Capote's life, it is almost impossible for anyone to state flatly, "This happened to Capote," or "He witnessed these events," or "He knew the person who is this character," or "This is what Capote believed" (Capote 1985: 83) Sauerberg thinks that clearly Capote was claiming a generic status for his narrative "which is closer to what we expect from fiction proper than from history or reportage" (20). Sauerberg also attests:

Capote after interviewing witnesses and murderers and the affected family members had to decide upon the best possible presentation of their material for ends not primarily concerned with any 'objectivity' or 'factuality', but with something rather more complex that may provisionally be called literary truth. . . . (22)

Capote was not particularly concerned with what everyone thought of as truth. On a talk show in the eighties, Capote discussed “the non-falsehood lie.” He liked such oxymorons. Earlier, in the sixties, he had coined the term non-fiction novel. “The non-falsehood lie” is ‘true’,” he claimed, “because it amuses me more that way” (1985: 72).

Everything a writer experiences, sees, and hears is filtered and then undergoes radical changes as it is processed and refined in the imagination before it is recast and presented in fictional form. In “Self-Portrait,” Capote asks himself whether he was truthful and responds: “As a writer—yes, I think so, privately—well, that is a matter of opinion; some of my friends think that when relating an event or piece of news, I am inclined to alter or over-elaborate. Myself, I just call it making something ‘come alive’ ” (1985: 81). In other words, a form of art; art and truth are not necessarily compatible bedfellows. In interviews, in confessional essays, and in fictionalized autobiography, Capote suggests that because he was a lonely and fearful child, he had a rich fantasy life. John Malcolm Brinnin—a close friend of Capote’s for years—even though Capote later denied their intimacy—has written of Capote’s ways of escaping from the unpleasantness of everyday life. When he was a boy and supposed to be in school, he would play truant and spend much of his time in Central Park, near the Plaza Hotel. He would sit in the park dreaming of paperweight cities and towns where everything happened the

way he wanted it to. This is where his Faction began. But Harold Nye who knew Capote personally remembers the berserk way in which the latter behaved during the time of the prisoner's execution. He recalls, "When Smith came in Truman ran out of the building; he would not witness it" (70).

The Muses Are Heard (1956), the author's memorably ironic work of non-fiction written during this time, did not sell well in spite of its many good reviews. This led him to develop another prose work based on an actual occurrence, the 'non-fiction novel' and his best known book, *In Cold Blood* which combines the methods of journalism and fiction.

How do we distinguish fiction from non-fiction? What are the basic differences between literature and journalism? What is the 'non-fiction novel'? *In Cold Blood* (Capote), *The Armies of the Night* (Mailer) and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Wolfe, 1968) have each formulated a tactical definition of the genre. But the non fictional novel should not be confused with documentary novels, a popular and interesting genre which allows all the latitude of the fictional writer, but usually contains neither the persuasiveness of fact nor the poetic altitude fiction is capable of reaching. The author lets his imagination run riot over the facts. The dramatic effect of actual events is imaginatively heightened to make a good story. Mailer felt:

When the book is a novel as well as history, the author is freed from the obligation to create the ostensible mood of objectivity sought by most factual reporting. The non-fiction novel strives for a wider metaphorical and symbolic context than does conventional journalism. By applying the imaginative resources of fiction to contemporary history, the author of faction transcends the clichés and formulas of conventional reportage. (25)

The non-fiction novel is a synthesis of diverse tendencies in society. The writing of history in the form of a novel will transform an isolated event or a group of isolated events into a significant reflection of the social climate of the sixties. Faction writers affirm that reality is mysterious and finally unknowable; to state the facts, is to have created a fiction. A new synthesis of reportage and fiction is created. A personal form of reportage combines the empirical virtues of journalism with the imaginative insights of the novel. The resulting style is Factional. The non-fiction novel recreates the milieu in which events occur and reflect the attitudes and behaviour of the characters rather than mere facts. The historian is the narrator on the basis of such evidence as he has been able to accumulate. He is not only the author, he is a person, a projection of the author's empirical virtues, since Herodotus and Thucydides, the historian has been concerned to establish himself with the reader as a

repository of fact, a tireless investigator and sorter, a sober and impartial judge, a man; in short, an authority who is entitled not only to present the facts as he has established them, but to comment on them, to draw parallels, to moralize, to generalize and the end product is Faction.

Sometimes some reporter employs various 'fictive' elements that distinguish the script from conventional reportage. While the author is a typical reporter on the scene, getting the 'story,' meeting the deadlines and trying to remain objective, he will also let us in on what a typical news story cannot tell; his own reactions, omissions and errors that underscore the impossibility of ever really knowing what happened.

Several writers of fiction have previously created non-fiction works that closely resemble the non-fiction works of Capote, Mailer and Wolfe. Perhaps the most notable example is George Orwell. His *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) rely heavily upon the 'close-to-the-skin' writing that characterises new journalism or Faction. A few of Hemingway's war reports and especially such non-fiction works as *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) develop from intentions similar to those of Capote and Mailer.

Many talented freelance writers successfully used fictional techniques thirty years earlier. Reportage was made more literary. Careful research, fictionalized scenes and extensive dialogue were combined to

bring a new level of sophistication. Although Wolfe dates the beginnings of Faction in the sixties, fictional techniques were apparent in the magazine articles of the forties and fifties. Wolfe thinks that the new style began early in the decade when some of his friends, writing for the Sunday supplement of the *New York Herald Tribune*, began to experiment with fictional techniques in new feature stories and columns.

There was a widespread experimentation in non-fiction. A greater freedom in the form and style was encouraged. In a 1972 article, Harold Hayes emphasized the economic factors in the rise of the new journalism:

If there has been any great change to accelerate the possibility of writers dealing non-flexibly with language and with form, it is not only because of the birth of the new journalism form but because now there is a commercial disposition among literary work to see that imaginative writing now is more appealing to readers even when they read facts. (12)

Norman Mailer's long article on his 1967 march on the Pentagon, later becoming the Pulitzer Prize winner *The Armies of the Night* is a typical example of how a great multitude wanted fact and fiction to be combined or mixed for interesting readability. That work of Faction was a roaring success.

Beyond the economic necessities and the enterprising editors of the sixties, the rapidly developing underground press contributed to the general atmosphere of freedom from which Fiction grew. Increasingly, even the more established media are resenting the restrictions on the use of language, and there was a distrust of purely official factual versions and people yearned for alternative writing experiences. The pervasive tradition of 'objective' reporting was to be counteracted. The insatiable interest of the people, especially the Americans, in celebrities and personalities in the limelight dominated the view of history to an unusual degree in the sixties. The best and the worst new journalism exploded private lives hidden from the camera, with an intensity barely short of libel.

The works of reporters like Tom Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin, Joan Didion, Gay Talese, and Hunter Thompson have experimented with fictional techniques by rebelling against the conventional standards of objective reporting. Their works have been collectively called New Journalism which incorporates the characteristics of Fiction. These writers have generated a new kind of non-fiction that defies our usual clarifications of 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' since they combine elements of both genres in a variety of ways. More than the novels of the sixties the new journalism and non-fiction novels have served the function of fiction, showing that fiction is not dead.

The term 'New Journalism' has been associated with Tom Wolfe's work and the term 'non-fiction novel' has been used by Truman Capote, and together they have been a new united force in the history of representation in contemporary American society. This marks a new era which has re-defined the relationship between the representer and the represented. As Pegi Taylor says, one cannot deny that "it takes tremendous craft for a non-fiction writer to dominate his subjects" (28). The author of the non-fiction novel is not an all-knowing omniscient narrator, he is a character feeling, knowing, discovering and evolving through the narrative. Such an author presents a fresh perspective of reality, which was denied by conventional methods of narratology. Wolfe and Capote developed the forms simultaneously as the most visible experiments in a genre responding to a unique shift in American culture.

Capote's 'non-fiction novel' went far beyond mere journalism. He proved that Fiction could be raised to the level of art. This goal could be accomplished by blending carefully recorded dialogue, psychological depth, and novelistic form with what he called the realities of journalism. Several admirable reporters since then have shown the possibility of narrative reportage. According to Capote, the techniques of the non-fiction novel can be applied to any contemporary event. Separating the spurious from the authentic has been a preoccupation of Western metaphysics, right from the time of Plato. Capote and Wolfe literally turn

Western artistic tradition on its head by questioning the very validity of the concept of authenticity. In literature this new trend has been shown by many writers. Shashi Tharoor, the author under study, becomes relevant in his innovative combination of fact and fiction to represent the crisis and bizarre disorder of a postcolonial, postmodern ethos.

The fusion of novelistic techniques and factual reporting, which is a form of Faction, raises complex questions beyond the scope of a strictly literary study. The traditional distinction between 'art' and 'non-art' seems to be continually evaporating. Besides *In Cold Blood* and *The Armies of the Night*, a number of recent books have undertaken to blur the distinctions between fact and fiction. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis' documentaries read more like novels and the subjects telling their own stories have been fictionalized. Lewis has worked out of a whole new literary domain. Hence fiction competes with sensitively written social science. Alfred Kazin observes that despite the many novels published during the decade, the dominant trend is the increasing power and significance of non-fiction writing in a form that he calls "the imagination of fact" (247).

A fact-fiction theory provides a critical framework to the genre. A narrow conception should not be imposed on it. Mailer with his prophetic and epic tone, Thompson with his fierce caricatures, Wolfe with his stylistic and analytic distance from the events he reports and Herr's

intense exploration of his participation in them, Tharoor's timely fusion and separation of fact and fiction, have all acquired for Faction the highest stature in literary expression, though the input of each author has characteristic variations. Each of them combines a journalistic approach with a frank acknowledgement and exploration of the crucially central role of the imaginative human subject in transforming consciousness into contemporary prose narrative. Capote's *In Cold Blood* shares many of the fundamental concerns of Faction and is of unmistakable significance in the development and recognition of the genre; still, it is a transitional work which is close to conventional journalism in the illusion of objectivity. Capote narrates from an impersonal omniscient point of view and his narration is close to realistic fiction in the limitations of its rather conservative techniques. The postmodern Faction writers have effectively broadened the realm of fictive nobilities in their attempt to defy the belief in a postmodern 'reality.'

This new phase of literary representation has also witnessed a period of intense experimentation and critical confusion in fiction. The rise of Faction however has closely paralleled explosive changes in society generally and by the end of the sixties, and some of the best writing of the decade was clearly non-fiction. The use of fictive techniques has occasionally led to abuses and in the hands of careless reporters, the results have sometimes been disastrous. New Journalism

has not replaced conventional objective reporting nor was this ever the intention of its exponents. Yet in the relatively staid, formula-ridden world of traditional journalism, a new voice was heard. More importantly, established novelists turned temporarily from fiction to write about contemporary issues. Those critics who praised the vitality of the combination saw in it a fusion of the journalist's passion for detail and the novelist's personal vision. And more so, the once demarcated differences between journalism and literature, between elite art and the popular arts, became increasingly difficult to distinguish.

“The successful reporter is one who can find a story even if there is no earthquake, tsunami, assassination or civil war,” says American historian Daniel Boorstin (17). If he cannot find a story, he must make one by the surprising interest he unfolds from some common place event. This change in our attitude toward news is not merely a basic fact about the history of American newspapers. It is a symptom of a revolutionary change in our attitude toward what happens in the world, how much of it is new, surprising and important. Demanding more than the world can give, contemporary readers require that something fabricated to make up for the world's deficiency. New Journalism prioritizes the subjective perceptions of the writer over the representation of an ‘objective’ reality. The usual vision of the journalist as a dispassionate observer who gathers facts but stays out of the action himself has yielded to that of the

participant observer. The best reporters of the sixties actually sought out ‘the story’ and often made news themselves in the process. As emphasized earlier, this breakdown of the ‘real’ was symptomatic of social change. Gore Vidal attests to this: “. . . True Revolution can only take place when things fall apart in the wake of some catastrophe – a last war, a collapsed economy” (285).

The interest of novelists in reportage in the wake of New Journalism was making it a more legitimate literary activity. For the novelists who turned to the imagination of fact, the genre represented an attempt to appropriate the prestige of the novel to reporting. The association between novel and reportage was at once realistic and symbolic (Leech and Short 157). Ronald Sukenick says: “Fiction as a form of invention, a way of bringing into being that which did not previously exist, is a term that can be applied to the arts in general, and perhaps to other intellectual disciplines” (8). The most radical boundaries crossed, however, have been those between fiction and non-fiction and – by extension – between art and life.

In the March 1986 issue of *Esquire Magazine*, Jerzy Kosinski published a piece in the ‘Documentary’ section, called “Death in Cannes,” a narrative of the last days and subsequent death of French biologist, Jacques Monod (13-9). Typically postmodern, the text refuses the omniscience and omnipresence of the third person and

engages instead, in a dialogue between a narrative voice (which both is and is not Kosinski's) and a projected reader. Its viewpoint is avowedly limited, provisional and personal. However, it also works and plays with the conventions of both literary realism and journalistic facticity: the text is accompanied by photographs of the author and the subject. The commentary uses these photos to make us, as readers, aware of our expectations of both narrative and pictorial interpretation, including our native but common trust in the representational veracity of photography. There is a fusion of the real and unreal.

In addition to being 'borderline' inquiries, most of these postmodernist contradictory texts are also specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved. When T.S. Eliot recalled Dante or Virgil in *The Waste Land* (1922), one sensed a kind of wishful call to continuity beneath the fragmented echoing. In the words of Linda Hutcheon, "it is precisely this that is contested in postmodern parody where it is often ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of continuity, difference at the heart of similarity" (1985: 185). Parody as seen in Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a perfect postmodern form in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. It also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist

assumptions. During the 1960s, there were pervasive social changes in America affecting the response of novelists and journalists. A most interesting response has been a form of non-fiction that relies upon narrative techniques and intuitive insights of the novelist to chronicle contemporary events. Critics who have praised the works of Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe and others have seen in their works, a new fusion of reporting or narrating and fiction, and have called them 'non-fiction novels' and 'New Journalism.' Some detractors have labelled them 'Para Journalism.' Others call it 'Faction,' a fusion of 'fact' and 'fiction.' During the decade, major changes in journalistic conventions and a new involvement of novelists in current history coalesced in a unique way. The forms and styles of all arts are shifting rapidly, perhaps more rapidly than ever before. Such hybrid forms as the non-fiction novel demand examination not only for the vivid portrayal of contemporary life they provide, but also for what they tell us about a new genre in literature.

While novel is considered pure fiction, the term 'non-fiction novel' may appear paradoxical. But it is significant in writing for certain important reasons. They reflect changes in the style and form of traditional journalism. The non-fiction novel demonstrates a changing relationship between the writer's conception of his role and the production of an artistic work in society. The writer's choice of

documentary forms rather than imaginative fiction raises a new form in modern writing.

The transformation of a standard **magazine formula** to an artistic portrait is typical of the Faction writer. His work must be held together by a narrative line. Critics have placed it astraddle the literary no-man's-land between fact and fiction showing technical virtuosity. Such works have a tremendous power to involve the reader. The narrative reads like a novel largely because of the use of re-constructions instead of scene by scene historical narration, the ironic heightening of the dialogue and the skilful manipulation of point of view. Stacks of documents, public records and interviews are needed for the writing of Faction. Factual accuracy as well as the imaginative manipulation of it is given importance. The author would want his work to be processed in both ways, with the impeccable accuracy of fact and the emotional impact found only in fiction. To reconstruct conversation, he elicits and tirelessly double-checks the recollection of the neighbours who were present when something happened. He gains access to their confessions, diaries, letters and special narrative accounts. All these materials permit and enable the writer to reconstruct as closely as possible, the scenes and situations. This is how Faction takes shape.

Like a biographer working from documentary materials, he constructs a final narrative that includes events and incidents at which he

has not been present. Unlike a typical historical account, dramatic events are fore-shadowed and dialogues take on a hidden meaning not apparent in its original context. Since the writer must inevitably select materials from the real flow of life that is fact, he has to impose a form, a narrative structure upon the experience he has so carefully documented. Though there can be documentary ambitions for the non-fiction novel, the writer clearly recognizes the need to select and arrange his materials for maximum emotional impact. It is the writer's ability to capitalize on the hidden meanings of the selected significant moments that contributes to the narrative impact of the book. But throughout, a silent alliance is maintained between the narrator and the reader.

A choice of the third person and omniscient narration in Fiction promotes a semblance of **objectivity**. Each major section of the narrative is told from the successive windows of other people's interest and information. Factional works are organized by the **scenic** construction of the novel rather than by the historical or chronological summary common to history and journalism. 'Facts' never speak for them since the writer's selection and arrangement inevitably impose a design of fiction in it. Fiction is not just a presentation of facts but a manipulation of the arranger. This is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's words: "I find something just a shade suspicious in the maintained illusion of objective factual presentation. Facts do not sing themselves as Emerson maintains, facts

are silent and any singing they do depends on their orchestration by a human arranger” (235).

Beyond the techniques of characterization, some of the Factional writings are closer to **fiction** than to **journalism** on a symbolic level. The books achieve a suggestive power and become universal in a way that most reportage is not. David Lodge has pointed out that what is seen in Factional works is not so much a matter of invented characters and actions, as a philosophic fiction or fallacy which the traditional novel encourages (1966: 98).

New Journalism or Faction overcomes the limitations of conventional journalism and realistic fiction by exploiting fully and frankly, the power of shaping consciousness found in fabulist fiction. Both fiction and journalism are forced by an implausible reality into radical breaks with the traditional author-reader contract. The demanding new duties of fiction to somehow shape a meaningful world and define a vital relationship with it also lead inexorably to a third similarity between the two forms, their similar function being artificial myths / fables. Paul Dukes in his article “Fictionary or Faction?” clearly states: “Before the rise of academic history, there was no clear distinction between what was said to have happened and what had actually happened in presentation often made to justify the policies and enhance the reputations of Kings and Queens and other outstanding individuals” (106). Thus Faction reveals

and problematizes the power politics and ideological hegemony that underlie all discourses.

Local colouring and screen writing have steadily paralleled novel writing. A biographical sketch of actor Amitabh Bachchan, without Tharoor saying so even once, figures prominently in the development of the techniques of the non-fiction novel *Show Business*. Movies like *Gandhi* and *Mugal-E-Asam* are other examples of the merger of fiction and non-fiction. Journalistic assignments become something more in the artistic hand of the author. Fictional techniques as scenic reconstruction, flash backs, foreshadowing and the heightening of dialogue for dramatic effect are seen. They are complementary in bringing out a work of Fiction. Attentiveness to facts, and an ear for ironic details can produce artistic results. While striving for objectivity, reports are given a narrative sense that makes the works read like short stories. Working from overheard conversation, diaries and letters of the characters or celebrities, and his own observations, the writer of Fiction carefully chooses scenes and conversations to create a coherent narrative. Fictional ingredients like dialogues, appearing to be realistic, are included. Truly revealing personality sketches that often rely upon the characterization techniques of the short story are drawn. Emotional detachment may be shown as well as scenic reconstruction and an ironic heightening to emphasize it.

Faction as a genre, it seems, has a bright and enduring future in the postmodern world. In sociological and investigative practices Faction has opened up new possibilities, marking the demise of traditional fiction. The worship of the novel as a sacred form had reached a peak in the sixties, then suddenly began to tail off as it became apparent that there is to be no golden post-war period in the novel. By the early 1960s, a more spectacular form of new journalism or Faction had begun. The new journalism was victorious on status, and a financial success.

Detractors of Faction often assume that it is a hybrid form that mixes the content of fiction (falsehood) with that of fact (truth). By the mid sixties such critics as Dwight MacDonal in *The New York Review of Books* attacked the Faction writers for “turning facts into more and mere entertainment” (qtd. in Cumming 23). The new product, though it reads like fiction, is not fiction. It is or should be as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a larger truth. This possibility of attaining a higher truth was what made the new writers abandon the limitations of conventional writing. The Factionists communicated the experience and meaning of their subjects in their entire ambiguity and complexity, through the use of such fictional devices as construction of scenes, dialogue, interior point of view and the recording of significant details of dress and milieu.

A starting point for any good journalist should be the truth which he tempers with moral judgment and aesthetic control derived from experience. The writer moves past press releases and press agents to penetrate the mysteries behind the appearance. This openness enables the writer to break through the press packaged insights and perspectives which permeate the corporate fiction produced by conventional writing. The writer of Faction exploited the transformational resources of human perception and imagination to seek out a fresher and more complete experience of an event and then to recreate that experience into a personally shaped fiction which communicated everything approaching the wholeness and resonance it had left for him. The conventions and techniques of realistic fictions most fully developed during the later 19th century did not seem to satisfactorily convey contemporary experience.

The Factionist's motive is to achieve a literary style comparable to fiction and to portray characters with psychological depth. In Faction, the writer attempts to reconstruct experience as it might have taken place. He uses the techniques of fiction to convey information and to provide background to his reportage, not usually possible in earlier forms of writings. Tom Wolfe argues in "The New Journalism" that an aggressive and ambitious group of feature writers in the early sixties began to experiment with fictional techniques to create a livelier reporting that might save a dying reporter. Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*

(1722) heaps realistic detail on detail to create an illusion of an eyewitness report of the Great Plague of 1665. While it was fiction masquerading as fact, Defoe's account was long regarded as an accurate historical record. Nineteenth century literature and periodical journalism too reveal examples of personal reporting and colourful sketches that rely on fictional techniques, but usually as warm-up for short stories and novels. Factual narration and fictionalized story-telling blend thoroughly in the works of some authors making them purely Factional.

The genre 'Faction' gained new sophistication. Lillian Ross's sketch of Hemingway and Capote's treatment of Marlon Brando and Shashi Tharoor's treatment of Amitabh Bachchan are well-known. The reporter's or narrator's method involves staying with the subject long enough for revealing scenes described convincingly. Many gifted writers produced 'sketches' or 'lives' of personalities in the early sixties by acting on the theory that if a reporter followed a famous celebrity closely, he could write very interesting details about his 'inner life.'

As a major category of Faction, attention may be focused upon the 'new' patterns of social organization or trends that reflect important changes in national manners and mores. Tom Wolfe thinks that when major histories of this era are written, these changes will be seen as major developments in literary writing. John Hersey's *Algiers Motel Incident* (1968) explored the racial tensions between blacks and the police during

the Detroit Riots of 1967. Hersey depended upon official records, court transcripts and extensive interviews to provide a documentary history of the case. Although the book was carefully researched, Hersey presents the evidence and allows the reader to draw his own conclusions. Though he wanted to avoid the artifice of a “fictionalized reconstruction,” he could make it a beautiful piece of Fiction.

Another category of Fiction includes **political and social reporting** in subjects ranging from the Civil Rights Movement to Political Conventions. Garry Wills wrote a series of excellent articles on the Southern Christian leadership council culminating with “Martin Luther King is Still on the Case.” Wills’ moving account describes the Nashville garbage workers who travelled to the humble church where the slain leader’s casket lay after his assassination. More than that, Wills reflects upon Dr. King’s rhetorical power and the political strategies he employed in urging new rights for American minority groups. His work on facts around the subject and their details were fictionalized and they seem justified.

Although the social ferment of the sixties revived old dilemmas and imposed special demands on writers of fiction, it also generated new possibilities. Brooding about the sweeping changes in social values, mores and lifestyles, some of the best novelists complained about the difficulty of writing fiction at all in a period in which daily events seemed

to pre-empt the possibilities of the novelist's imagination. Many novelists, in fact, temporarily turned away from the creation of fiction toward forms of social commentary, documentary, parody and a vigorous kind of reportage. The novelist's pre-occupation with the rush and frenzy of events in the sixties diverted the impulse for fiction into the special kind of journalism, Faction.

In a literary work, there are numerous factors that contribute to the process of meaning construction. The layering of these factors contributes to complex inter-lacing of assorted strands of meaning in the rich fabric of the text. The use of **myth**, for instance, intensifies the text's capacity for meaning and gives it multi-dimensionality. This can be clearly seen in *The Great Indian Novel*. Certain novelists and journalists in the twentieth century reflect an unusual degree of self-consciousness about the writer's role in society. In this age of sick hurry and divided aims, the gravest problem faced by the author was to define reality and represent it. Everyday events continually blurred the comfortable distinctions between reality and unreality, between fantasy and fact. Fictionality is, in most cases, a historically variable property. Fictional real sometimes arises through the extinction of the belief in a mythology. In other cases, fictionalization originates in the loss of the referential link between the characters and events described in a literary text. Fictional domains are

not necessarily consecrated as much from the beginning of the existence.

According to Thomas G. Pavel:

The frontiers of fiction separate it on one side from myth, on another from actuality. Fiction is surrounded by sacred borders, by actuality borders and by representational borders. Discourse oriented analysis of fiction claims that fictional terms only mean but do not denote the actual work. Exemplary and ideological fictions often start with a non fictional basis, from which the construction derives a form of legitimacy. It would not take much sense to examine the structure of fictional worlds nor the interplay between these and actual worlds. Reality in fiction is just a textual convention, not so different from the compositional conventions of the rhyme pattern in sonnets etc. (81)

Any new situation, new kind of character, new social class or group portrayed, new extreme of personal interior detail, or new depth into low, unsavoury, or repressed matter—all these, at least theoretically, affirm the worth of the fiction and offer the reader something that can be viewed as a personal gain. As long as we assume more knowledge to be a good thing, readers will naturally feel a sense of satisfaction, and the experience gained by assimilating the story will be meaningful if only because it is new, an augmentation of the state the reader enjoyed prior to

the reading. The act of noticing something never before seen makes the observer feel that his own existence has been validated, and reinforces his sense of purpose. For all these, the author writes the existing theories in a new way.

Another value which may enhance a work's ability to convey meaning is its **aesthetic** perfection. Fine craftsmanship gives the discerning observer a sense of satisfaction. Insofar as fiction attempts to solve a problem in the narrative structure, success is assured. The intricacy of detail is exciting. The delicacy and precision of implication can win admiration. This feeling has nothing to do with moral content. One may applaud a subtle portrayal of evil or ineptitude. As a rule, therefore, enjoying a work aesthetically can give us a sense of meaningful intellectual activity. For this, the author intermingles fact and fiction.

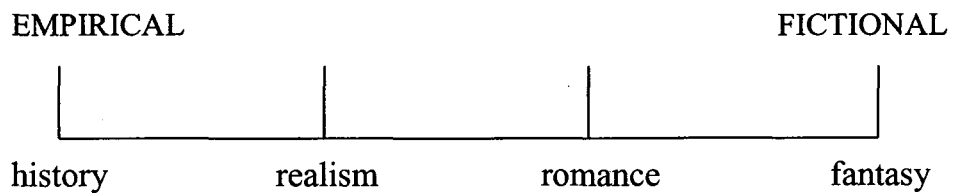
All these experiences of meaning are limited and personal. They help readers feel that they can relate to some local portion of the cosmos – to social patterns, to a love affair, to the interactions of Americans and Europeans. The experience given by reading fiction lets readers feel in control of anxiety-laden situations, some of which, in some guise, might arise within their own lives. As long as readers are satisfied with this limited kind of control, realistic literature is effective at conveying a sense of meaning in a Fictional way.

The celebration of the rise of **non-fiction** in recent years has led quite naturally to a fierce critical backlash. The preference for non-fiction over fiction constitutes the subversion of the public taste. Though the novel did not die in the mid-sixties, the growing popularity of non-fiction in recent decades is apparent even from the most cursory review of magazine trends. Until about the forties, magazines had printed about one third non-fiction and two thirds fiction. By the mid-sixties this proportion nearly reversed itself. A perusal of bestseller lists for the last decade reveals a concomitant rise in memoirs, confessions, autobiographies and a host of 'how-to' books by psychologists, doctors and others.

The writers of 'The Literature of Fact,' 'The Non-fiction Novel,' 'New Journalism,' 'Documentary Fiction' or 'Historical Novel' do not in any real sense constitute a school or movement. But they prompt critical questions like "What is a novel?" "What is the difference between fiction and non-fiction?," "What distinguishes literature from journalism?" etc. Although their viewpoints greatly reduce the complexity and variety of recent fiction, it can be rightly concluded that the new writers who have come to prominence in the sixties appear to be doing things differently from their predecessors. For although no clear pattern for the new kind of novel has emerged, the works of people like Hawks, Barth and Pynchon reflect the revival of older narrative forms in new combinations in preference to the conventions of realism.

There is an empirical relationship as well as a fictional mode in the nature of the narrative of Faction. The empirical novel, according to Scholes and Kellogg, includes history and biography, documentary and journalism. Its commitment is to mimesis, or the realistic representation of experience. The fictional mode, in contrast, includes such forms as romance, fable, allegory and myth. Its allegiance is to an imagined world distanced from the world of experience and less bound to the contingencies of everyday life (Scholes and Kellogg 23-5). On the two part scheme that Kellogg and Scholes propose in *The Nature of the Narrative* (1966), non-fiction novels are examples of the empirical mode. In *The Novelist at the Cross Roads* (1971), however, British critic David Lodge observes that Scholes' prediction that fabulation will dominate the future of fiction tells only one side of the story (1971: 198).

The disintegration of the novel into empirical and fictional modes is a reversal of the historical synthesis of history, biography and chronicle on the one hand, and allegory, fable and myth on the other, from which the novel originally evolved. The modes of narrative can be roughly represented as points along a continuer. The empirical representation of history metamorphoses into the fictional representation of fantasy through the media of realism and romance. This has been depicted by John Hollowell in the following manner:



(Hollowell 20)

Moving from left to right along with continuum, the direct representation of experience would be history or a purely empirical narrative. The extreme at the right would be fantasy or a purely imaginary world. Between the extremes lie realism and romance. Realism strives to present the world “as it is,” i.e., closely allied to history, “as it might be” or, “as it should be.” The pure types are suggested by the chart, however, since most narratives are combinations of the various elements. Yet it is possible to say that the central tradition of the novel is somewhere in the centre, in the area encamping realism and romance, thus making it Fiction.

The worlds we speak about, actual or fictional, nearly hide their deep fractures, and our language, our texts, appear for a while to be a transparent media unproblematically leading to truth. Various neo-Kantian approaches assume that there are no worlds strictly speaking, but only world versions occasioned by theories, texts, works of art, with no autonomous existence outside these. To the referential paradigm that unduly perhaps generalizes realistic schemata to fictional activity, we find

here a counterpart, wherein intimacy between a text and an idiosyncratic world is generalized to all types of knowledge. Strong realism often dismisses fiction as false or spurious discourse. Various types of regionalism answer the demarcational question by positing clear-cut limits between the actual world and the world of fiction. Most contemporary readers and writers are aware of the difference between fact and fiction, but there is by no means a universal pattern. The transferring of an event across the border of legend can be labelled mythification. The Factionist develops a relationship between mythification and de-familiarisation. He projects an event into a mythical territory if not to put it into a certain kind of perspectivity, to set it at a comparative distance, to elevate it onto a higher plane so that it may easily be contemplated and understood.

Tom Wolfe has claimed that Faction depends on the use of **realistic techniques** (22). However he and other New Journalists and Non-Fiction novelists have moved beyond the conventions not only of journalism but of traditional fiction as well. The novelist attempting to set down his world in the early 1960s found that the conventions of realistic writing shared many of the limitations of conventional media writing since the two were based on similar assumptions about reality. As a result, he became an experimentalist, not only of a theatrical love of the

avant garde, but out of a simple need to find a way to better know and communicate reality.

For the fiction writer of the mid-twentieth century, change and fragmentation were the felt realities that literally replaced the sum of beliefs, habits, expectations, and other cultural norms that generally characterize a society. American reality of this era was undergoing such vast transformations under the influx of new technologies, neo-economic processes and media explosion that the realistic methods of conventional fiction were rapidly becoming obsolete and insufficient in representation. This problem was compounded by the fact that realism was but a fictional mode – a set of literary conventions and techniques developed in the late nineteenth century to enable the writer to describe the typical experience of members of large classes in society. So, Fiction became a necessity.

The major difference between New Journalism and contemporary **fabulist fiction** is one of contract in both forms. The writer contracts an agreement with the reader which frees the former from the need to establish the illusion of reality. In his desire to break through the crisis of credibility in an incredible world, the fiction writer has escaped the problems of plausibility and fragmentation by the radically simple device of assuring the reader that he is dealing with pure fantasy. The new writer has escaped promising the reader that he is dealing in pure fact. The ‘true fact’ has indubitably taken advantage over the invented tale, to begin with

that of being true. It allows us to access unknown regions into which no writer would have dared venture, and brings us with one leap, to the edge of the abyss. This is what Acharya Mahapragya means, when he says, “Generally our inclination is towards illusion and not towards the truth. . . we are inclined to hold the reflection instead of the reality” (208).

The realistic novelist convinces the reader by saying all this did not really happen, but it could have credibility. The fabulist convinces on the basis of the internal cohesion of his purely imaginary works. The Factionist on the other hand needs only convince on the basis of verifiable sources and his personal integrity. According to Zulfiker Ghose, “All this actually did happen, so do not blame me if it does not seem real. Every form produces its own idea, its own vision of the world. Form has meaning and what is more, in the realm of art only form possesses meaning. . . .” (13). The fiction writer and the New Journalist have both leapt over the contemporary breakdown of the classic contractual agreement between author and reader based on notions of plausibility and suspension of disbelief. Moreover they have both, by this same leap, solved the problem of a lack of a stable body of manners and morals. By giving up all claims to the actual works, the fabulator frees himself from its vagaries and can deal instead in the more universal elements of idea and pattern. Likewise, by claiming the actual world as the content of his works, the Factionist justifies writing directly about the phenomena as

self-evident signals of meaning; he can deal with them directly, attempting to decipher their literal and larger significance. Their ephemerality and strangeness are themselves often major subjects of his works. Ghose adds, “. . . since written sentences can work in a succession of horizontal lines while what is seen or experienced or contained by a consciousness at any given movement is a multiplicity of thoughts, images and sensations, therefore, a narrative is obliged to produce a highly edited version of reality” (13).

While the fiction writer insists on fantasy, the Factionist claims **fact in fiction**. But both assert the necessity of an imaginative pattern-making consciousness. Faced with a breakdown in the actual world, the writer of fabulist fiction frees himself as far as possible, from all relationship with it, turning inward, to create a world with a meaningful design. The fabulator and the New Journalist become one in the writer of Faction. Confronted with the same problem, the New Journalist ties himself exorably to the actual world but turns his imagination outward to create a meaningful design from his experience of it. Both the fiction writer and the New Journalist have abandoned the relative luxurious concerns and methods of the realistic novelist in a stable society; instead, focusing on the more basic powers of fiction – the ordering of a meaningful world and the defining of a relationship with it.

The American Dialect Society defines ‘truthiness’ as “the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true” (“Truthiness,” www.americandialect.org). The controversy is not expected to affect the book’s sales, rather than to increase them. As the old show-business adage goes, any publicity is good publicity, especially in the book business, which is looking more like show business with each passing year.

A similar reaction has protected Alex Haley’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Roots* (1976), an admittedly fact-based-but-fictionalized account of his family’s history. *Roots* became a runaway success as a book and one of the most-watched made-for-TV movies of all time. Its popularity has survived for thirty years, despite Haley being sued for plagiarism and accused of simply making up large passages. When challenged, Haley called his work ‘Faction’, a blend of fact and fiction in an effort to give his people some ‘myths’ to live by. That effort worked. After years of having our national memory of slavery shaped by the mythologizing of *Gone with the Wind* (1936), or *Mandingo* (1959), Haley’s ‘fiction’ fed a national curiosity about a black family’s side of the story. The ‘truthiness’ of *Roots* seems more real than fiction, even though it was essentially fiction based on fact. If the Faction is of high principles and is morally good, it is considered positive. If it is controversial like *The Da Vinci Code* (2004), it is considered negative.

In fact, the age of ‘truthiness’ began long ago in the movie world with the all-purpose disclaimer, based on actual events. If publishers can get away with marketing fiction as non-fiction simply because fudged facts sell better than reliable ones, what is to become of history? What becomes of serious journalism? Audiences are confused enough about whether they should trust major media without book publishers adding to the confusion. Still, Ronald Hilton in his essay, “Literature: Faction not Fiction-Correction” says such writing may becloud the search for the real, “even though the device has been used as a narrative device in many historical novels” (wais.stanford.edu).

The established print and television media daily create press packaged fictions of events which become the national reality. The networks claim to ‘mirror’ reality delineating carefully illustrated and documented detail. The media fictionalises its facts to create more interest in the viewer’s minds. In the early 1960s, the press was even accused of unconsciously fuelling riots. Modern quantum physics has shown that even the most delicate instrument of observation necessarily alters the phenomenon observed. The need to break through the media-created corporate fiction is one of the major motivations and themes of new journalistic works. The Faction writers had found their voice, breaking free from outmoded academic preconceptions and from rigid journalistic forms. The tendency of the media not only to fail to reckon with the new

realities but actually to further distort them is a major problem for one who is trying to understand 'a global village'. The journalists had found their voice, breaking free from the outmoded academic preconceptions and from rigid journalistic form.

Faction is new for the same basic reasons that contemporary fiction is new. Both were forced by an implausible reality into radical breaks with the traditional author-reader contract. The demanding new duties of fiction to somehow shape a meaningful world and define a vital relationship with it also led inexorably to a third similarity between the two forms, their similar function as artificial myths/fables. The new writer approaches his subject matter from the vantage point of a relentless witness and detective, as an involved participant or from the inside of the subjects themselves. Above all, the new writer of the form wishes to use his imaginative powers and fictional craft to seek out and construct meaning. The contemporary fiction writer and the New Journalist have cut themselves loose from these problems by making new contracts with the reader, thus freeing themselves to acknowledge and exploit the formative and metaphoric powers of their imaginations. The fabulist / Faction writer would say, "I have abandoned the real, so I have only my imaginative creations to give you." The new journalist would say, "I have tied myself completely to the actual, but I can give it to you only as I have humanly and thus imaginatively, experienced and recollected it." They

both together re-invent the world. The two major innovations of contemporary 'fabulist fiction' or Faction and new journalism, the separate contracts and the similar emphasis upon imagination have enabled these writers to overcome the contemporary crisis in realistic fiction in order to better deal with a new experience of reality. Working from opposite agreements with the reader concerning the nature of their relationships to reality, the two forms nevertheless both work toward fabulist forms and concerns.

Reporting an event immediately after it takes place guarantees its recognition in the popular imagination. As the gap between real time and narrative time widens, recollection of the event becomes more and more scanty. However, instead of mere reporting and description, if the writer indulges in an imaginative recreation of the event, the incident becomes round and whole and alive.

There are some dangers in this. The writer finds a tension between the requirements of a true account of his subjects and those of a strong narrative; he may sacrifice truth for effect by overly dramatizing. When this occurs, New Journalism becomes simply a version of 'yellow journalism.' Some journalists have sacrificed the accuracy of individual facts for atmosphere and effect. Finally, the use of such fictional techniques as composite characters and compressed narratives, while actually having a long tradition in journalism, certainly violate the

journalists' contract. If they are revealed to the reader, they turn the work into realistic fiction with strong demands of reportage. But "A true social reading of a work of literature is not a hunt for scraps of historical fact or information, but an engagement with issues that belong entirely within the fictional world" (Smith 90).

The search for the authentic within the spurious and vice versa has been a predominant task of the latter half of the twentieth century, and is still continuing into the future. And it is with that task in mind that we turn to the exploration of the non-fiction works of Capote, Mailer, Wolfe and Tharoor. According to Capote, the techniques of the non-fiction novel can be applied to any contemporary event. Like a biographer working from documents, the Factionist constructs a final narrative that includes events and incidents at which he has not been present. Unlike a typical historical account, dramatic events are fore-shadowed and dialogues take on a hidden meaning not apparent in its original context. Since the writer must inevitably select materials from the real flow of life, that is, fact, he has to impose a form, a narrative structure upon the experience he has so carefully documented. Faction is often based on three crucial ingredients: (1) the timelessness of the theme, (2) the unfamiliarity of the setting, and (3) the large cast of characters that would allow the writer to tell the story from a variety of points of view. In this light Tharoor's works have employed Faction to epic dimensions and parodic ends.

Though there can be documentary ambitions for the non-fiction novel, the writer clearly recognizes the need to select and arrange his materials for maximum emotional impact. No writer can record all the events or dwell on each minute detail. So, scenes and conversations with the most powerful dramatic appeal are chosen. He selects only these scenes or incidents that contribute to his Fictional purposes. The writer's ability to capitalize on the hidden meanings of the selected significant moments contributes to the narrative impact of the book. But throughout, a silent alliance is maintained between the narrator and the reader.

When Picasso said that all art was false, he was drawing attention to the exaggerated manner of seers and prophets to a simple fact, namely, that art cannot be a carbon copy of life, and thus, in that specific sense cannot be free. Fiction should not be taken in its narrow technical sense. Truth is found in all imaginative literature as much in novels and short stories as in poetry and plays, in written as well as oral creations. In his brilliant treatise *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Frank Kermode defines fiction simply as "something we know does not exist but which helps to make sense of and move in the world" (96). Just as the rational / political animal that man is, he has transformed this natural world into the human landscape, so does this fiction-making animal endow the glow-worm of consciousness with his psychological and creative energies and refashion 'reality' with his imaginative power.

There are fictions that help and fictions that hinder. They can be called beneficent and malignant fictions. What is it then about fiction's good or bad that makes it so appealing? Why does man have to take leave of reality in order to ease his passage through the world? What lies behind this apparent paradox? Why is the imagination so powerful that it keeps us so constantly away from the animal existence that our physical senses will impose on us? If art must dispense with telling the literal truth, it does acquire in return incalculable powers of permeation in the imagination. Something has to be added to truth to make it more palatable, artistic and therefore enjoyable.

False testimony or fiction is intolerable to anyone obsessed with the need for responsibility and fair justice. History, supposedly truthful and objective can in fact, not be so. It is always hoped that a professional historian would write a fair book. But often he knowingly or unknowingly distorts the truth. The non-fictional novel of the 60s and 70s influenced writers like Thomas Kelly who wrote historical novels of the recent past. The ideas of the sixties had licensed a revolt in the minds of new writers against homogenized forms of experience. Variety was the need of the hour. In some of the works of this time, there was a very serious kind of direct confrontation with social reality in the present.

John Hollowell in *Fact and Fiction* (1977) discusses this aspect of new journalistic writing, which is relevant for an understanding of

Faction as well. Literary observers have generally been much slower to perceive the close relation between the experimental techniques of these two forms. It is claimed that the New Journalist is the ultimate realist and the actual nature of his own work may be understood as a calculated response to literary and journalistic attacks on the validity of the work. The New Journalists share with contemporary fiction writers an emphasis upon the perceiving consciousness as a transforming power and a desire to avoid the distortion caused by an attempt to disguise that power. As a result, the two forms – New Journalism and Faction – have many technical and thematic similarities:

- a) Both often organize their materials framed into narrative by Forewords, Afterwords or other devices.
- b) Both use a self-conscious and highly obtrusive narrator and alter the usual conventions of punctuation or graphic composition.
- c) They are either episodic or obviously contrived.
- d) Both use allegorical and mythical patterns drawn from classical and popular culture sources.
- e) Both have heavily mannered styles.
- f) Both adopt a stance of parody or satire.
- g) Both are characterized by a concern with large philosophical and social issues.

- h) In both fabulist fiction (Faction) and New Journalism, the traits relating to the author's assertion of his controlling presence are found.

Yet the effect of the New Journalist's Foreword or Afterword is really rather ambiguous. However much it may serve as fact, its position outside the work also reinforces the reader's perception of the fictional form and thus the structuring of an experience by the author, which the work embodies. The New Journalist's frame of his work emphasizes the factual nature of the content. Contemporary experimental fiction and New Journalistic works share many more similarities in the central role of the author as transforming agent, similarities that contrast sharply to the conventions of realistic fiction. In both forms, the author is often visibly present as either narrator or character or both. The devices emphasizing the work as a product of the external world and internal mind enable the authors of contemporary fiction to draw alternative to the all-important role of imagination in dealing with either the imaginary or the factual. For, while the fiction writer and the New Journalist have established exactly opposed contracts with their readers, they both intend to obtain a basis for their highly imaginative approaches to the problematic nature of contemporary reality, a basis stronger than that the realist has enjoyed. The central assumption of the experimental strategies by which both the fiction writer and the New Journalist deal with contemporary reality is the

power of an individual consciousness to perceive pattern in experience. While realistic fiction is a product of the author's creative imagination, it has, as a rule played down the role of being a transforming power in order to accentuate the illusion of reality for its fabrications. Fiction to be sure, is a social product and narrative fiction has always been not a falsification of reality but a necessary ordering of it.

Preliminary to an exploration into the implications and scope of Faction, different forms of the genre novel and their characteristics have been discussed. Various apparatuses of the Factional narrative, namely, parody, historiographic metafiction, fantasy, magic realism, paradox, myth, stream of consciousness and metafiction, have been brought under focus in this chapter.

The following chapters will see elaborate analyses of the works of Shashi Tharoor and the modalities he has incorporated to establish a Factional design in those works. The second chapter entitled "The Mythopoetics of History in *The Great Indian Novel*" will examine the representation of Indian history as well as mythology, and attempt to bring out the satire laced with wit and humour in the work. The battle for power and the hollowness of the Indian political scenario in pre- and post-independence India can be discerned here. The puranic redaction will be analysed in detail to bring out the Faction interspersed throughout the narrative.

Chapter III, "Between Oblivion and Memory: Bricolage in *Riot*," will examine how the problem of the Babri Masjid in Northern India and the already existing fire of communalism were fanned into a fire of hatred between the Hindus and Muslims, as shown in the novel through a love-story, intricately and delicately woven by the author using letters, diaries, etc. as means to establish Faction.

Chapter IV entitled "On the Threshold of Light and Darkness: A Reading of *Show Business*" examines how the novel *Show Business* reveals the ephemerality of the filmdom, especially in Mumbai. Steeped in external satire, jibe, humour, and sarcasm, it will open up the internal sufferings of a tortured soul, the rise, fall and resurrection of an average Indian film actor whose fusion of heart and head contributes to the framework of Faction in the novel. NB 5600



Chapter V, "*India: From Midnight to the Millennium—The Action of a Nation*," deals with the perspective that Tharoor offers in the book, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* – that of an Indian with a profound empathy for his native culture combined with a study of India's progress as well as degeneration. India's past, present and future will be analysed and the fusion of ideas, ideals, phobias and paranoia in the Indian psyche will be shown in the analysis of the book.

Chapter VI, "Prismatic Perceptions: An Analysis of Tharoor's Minor Works," provides a picture of the wide variety of ways in which

Faction has been lavishly and thickly buttered on the story-bread. Each of the stories, and the farce that will follow, will elucidate the Factional aspect in each of them. Though the characters and context, the topographies and environments are different, the collection *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* will show us many facets of Faction. The entire thesis will end in the concluding analysis of the major findings of the thesis and attempt to provide a pattern of how Tharoor's narratives blur the distinctions between the real and the fictional.

**A STUDY OF *FACTION*
IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR**

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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CHAPTER II
THE MYTHOPOETICS OF HISTORY
IN *THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL*

Every strong culture has a vital epic tradition. Epics account for the ‘beginnings’ of a civilization, and are enduring tales of reality, myth and history. They offer a commentary on the ancient heroic codes, associations of class, gender, sexuality, justice, war and other processes of a predominantly oral culture. While many great civilizations of the world—Mesopotamian, Sumerian, Egyptian, Aztec, to name a few—have disappeared without leaving behind a substantial literary record of the past, India has maintained a rich and enduring literary tradition of *puranas* and *itihisas*, *jatakas* and *anyapadeshas*, *natakas*, *mahakavyas*, *champus* and folktales, which even to the present day marks the foundation of Indian popular imagination. In contemporary postmodern times, it has been the redaction of epic narratives that is a favourite technique with storytellers.

Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) bases itself on the plot of the Mahabharata. The author resorts to two translations of the epic, viz. that of P. Lal (Poetry) and C. Rajagopalachari (Prose). Though the history of the twentieth century in India is an archetypal pattern between the epic and history, it is not a complete parallel. Though there is satire, it is not very serious or agitating and the unmistakable typifying of

characters gives us a lot of new versions of our contemporary political position. This parodic redaction of the Mahabharata teems with parallelisms in individuals, places and events. Where one character has no exact counterpart, he can be assumed as a symbol or an event or a situation. According to Robert Goldman, “. . . two somewhat disparaging subjects, the Mahabharata and the History of Modern India are cleverly and pointedly intertwined in this remarkable book” (www.indiastar.com). Twentieth century political history with its archetypal pattern between the epic and history is discernible in the novel, but it is not a complete parallelism. History and epic are treated not very seriously or solemnly but with satire and humour. Tharoor has managed to drive the point home and keeps up the tempo effectively from the game of dice to the end of the novel. It may be surprising that while the original Mahabharata centres around the battle of Kurukshetra, the battle as such is totally absent in Tharoor’s version. The battle of Mahabharata or “the Great India” is being constantly fought. The battle for power, ego clashes and personality problems of megalomaniacs are a day-to-day battle fought among the power-crazy in the country.

Shashi Tharoor’s greatest work as well as the most complete work of Fiction is *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), which documents his postmodern impressions of contemporary history. When a narrative of such vastness and magnitude comes under serious study, it is impossible

for any research scholar to cover everything in a single project. Hence, the method adopted here is to list select parallelisms, allusions and provide an appraisal of the situation, a critical review and a more elaborate reading from postmodernist and allegorical Factional aspects. *The Great Indian Novel* is in first person narration. According to Kanshika Chowdhury, “An analysis of the historical legacy of colonialism, however, does display a certain degree of uniformity in the postcolonial condition” (43). An attempt has been made to bring out the yoking of myth and history, as Ved Vyas in the novel says, “History. . . is full of savage ironics” (74). He also says “Facts—that is all I intend to record, facts and names. This is History” (86). Parody, satire, comedy, pun, wordplay, light verse, irony, sarcasm, jokes, witty digressions, self-reflexivity, biography, dramatization, literal and emblematic modes and semaphoring are interwoven to highlight the Factional fabric in the novel. The narrator is Ved Vyas. On his request, Brahma gives him a scribe, Ganapathi. This is the story told by Ved Vyas, shortened to V.V. in the text, 88 years old, and therefore “full of irrelevancies” (18). Tharoor weaves the real and colourful history of twentieth century politics against the backdrop of the epic and blends poetry and prose in an experimental style that helps him shift from serious and sublime moods to the highly ridiculous.

The table given below provides an overview of the close parallelisms in the novel between the characters and their epic counterparts:

<u>The Parody</u>	<u>The Original</u>
Ved Vyas (V.V.)	- Shashi Tharoor
Bhishma (Gangaji/Gangadatta)	- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
Dritharashtra	- Jawaharlal Nehru
Duryodhana (Priya Duryodhani)	- Indira Priyadarshini
Pandu	- Subhash Chandra Bose
Karna (Mohammed Ali Karna)	- Mohammed Ali Jinnah
Kauravas	- The Congress Party
Jaya Prakash Drona	- Jayaprakash Narayan
Shishu Pal	- Lal Bahadur Shastri
Yudhishtir	- Morarji Desai
Ekalavya	- Jagjivan Ram
Krishna Parthasarathy	- Lord Krishna / A.K Gopalan / E.M.S. Namboodiripad / Kamaraj
Amba / Shikhand	- Nathuram Vinayak Godse
Pandava I	- Judiciary
Pandava II	- Defence
Pandava III	- Communication (Press/ Media)
Pandava IV	- Home Ministry

to other agents like Indra, Vayu and others to be the namesake father of the Panchapandavas, through Kunthi and Madri. As the characters begin to reveal their identities, it is clear that Dritharashtra, who studied in England and became a debater, Bachelor of Arts and a Fabian socialist, can be none other than Jawaharlal Nehru who, had he had eyesight, which is mental vision, would have made India's future different. Pandu the Pale with his Bengali look can be none other than Subhash Chandra Bose. Gangaji seeing the misery of lower class India under the British rule cannot tolerate the slogan of communal difference 'Hindu Pani' and 'Muslim Pani' (49).

The British generals try to teach Gangaji a lesson, in vain. His spirit is too indomitable. In the rally in Bibigarh Garden, ten thousand people are squeezed against each other. This event is termed by Tharoor as the Hastinapur Massacre which in actuality is the Jallianwalla Bagh mass killing. Dritharashtra has the blind man's gift of seeing the world not as it is but as he wants it to be. Pandu believed in taking stock of reality, Gangaji harnessed the divergent spirits of V.V.'s two sons for the common cause.

Ganga fasts and wins some petty concessions from the British. "Pandur takes the lathi blow on his head" (112) during the struggle; "Ganga's toothless smile of benevolence is given to Dritharashtra" (113). Dritharashtra, i.e., Nehru is the acknowledged next-in-command in the Congress. The Dhandi March is parodied as Mango March—mango has replaced salt. This is where Gangaji's famous sentence occurs ". . . would

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Yudhishtir	- Morarji Desai
Ekalavya	- Jagjivan Ram
Krishna Parthasarathy	- Lord Krishna / A.K Gopalan / E.M.S. Namboodiripad / Kamaraj
Amba / Shikhand	- Nathuram Vinayak Godse
Pandava I	- Judiciary
Pandava II	- Defence
Pandava III	- Communication (Press/ Media)
Pandava IV	- Home Ministry

Pandava V	- External Affairs
Draupadi Demokrasi	- Democracy
Karnistan	- Pakistan
Kanika Menon	- Krishna Menon
Manimir	- Kashmir
Lord Drewpad	- Lord Mountbatten
Lady Georgina	- Lady Edwina Mountbatten
Col. Heaslop	- British General R.E Dyer
Sir Richard	- Sir Winston Churchill
Rafi	- Rafi Ahmed Kidwai
The Great Mango March	- The Dandy March
Bibigarh Massacre	- Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre

The Great Indian Novel is a puranic redaction, at times prophetic and at other times apocalyptic. It is mimetic to a great extent and mythology is used to bring out current affairs. The main characters are V.V.'s progenies—King Santhanu's heir apparent Bhishma is the backbone of the entire saga. Conformed bachelor that he is, as per his own vow of perpetual celibacy, he leaves the compounding of population to his brother Vichitra Veerya and incurs the vengeful wrath of Amba in the process of rejecting her. Gangadatta, the archetype of Gandhiji, starts the parodic redaction seen throughout Tharoor's version. While Dritharashtra sires the Kauravas through the voluntarily blindfolded Gandhari, Pandu has to resort

to other agents like Indra, Vayu and others to be the namesake father of the Panchapandavas, through Kunthi and Madri. As the characters begin to reveal their identities, it is clear that Dritharashtra, who studied in England and became a debater, Bachelor of Arts and a Fabian socialist, can be none other than Jawaharlal Nehru who, had he had eyesight, which is mental vision, would have made India's future different. Pandu the Pale with his Bengali look can be none other than Subhash Chandra Bose. Gangaji seeing the misery of lower class India under the British rule cannot tolerate the slogan of communal difference 'Hindu Pani' and 'Muslim Pani' (49).

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they tax the sunshine next?" (119). Karna, son of the Sun, rises in the form of Mohammed Ali Jinnah. He emerges in the Kaurava political scenario literally out of nowhere; here, like Subash, Jinnah respects Gandhiji, but cannot agree with many of his policies.

After the Independence was fought for and won, Tharoor's pen moves to the rising to power of Priya Duryodhani, a caricature of Indira Priyadarsini. Squashing every human obstacle that comes her way, Duryodhani reaches and wins the Prime Minister's chair. In the wish to stay on, she declares Emergency. Jayaprakash Drona, the Kaurava guru, is Jayaprakash Narayan, the sincere and unpolluted politician India saw at that time. In spite of Duryodhani's attempt to poison Bhima, he survives. Arjun, Nakul, Sahadev and even the just Yudishtir are kept under control. As a result, the Judiciary, Press / Media and the Service Departments, which the Pandavas stand for, suffer.

Independence is not won easily. Power politics and fight for the Congress party leadership runs rampant. Pandu disappears forever somewhere in Japan where Madri joins him in the permanent erasure. Karna rises to great dramatic national importance through his dominance in the Muslim territory. The Mahaguru, finding that persuading Pandu and trying to move him before he leaves is ineffectual, asks Dritharashtra, his pet, to step down. To step aside to the presidential fray to aim higher will be a

new strategy. Karna declares war, a war for a separate Muslim nation in which he can be No. 1.

With the Second World War in full swing, the Quit India Movement does not get much prominence. Side by side with this, Amba, no longer “the lissom beauty” (208) who has taken a vow of vendetta on Gangaji in the beginning of the narration has become Shikhand, the male-female mixture. This implies that Nathuram Vinayak Godse is fine-tuning his antenna to kill Gandhi. Lord Drewpad and Lady Georgina, Lord Mountbatten and Lady Edwina in real selves, decide to execute the passing over of India to the Indians as smoothly as possible. This comes after a plea from Gangaji: “leave us to God or anarchy” (222). Partition takes place. India and Pakistan are two free nations now. The Mahaguru’s era is over. With his elevated thoughts and bombastic words, Dritharashtra as the first premier tries to improve the upper strata with industrialisation, dam building and Five Year Plans. The last words of Gandhi, as three bullets pierce him, from the pistol of a man who felt that the Mahaguru loved the Muslims more than the Hindus: “Hey, Ram!” is interpreted by Tharoor beautifully as a reflection of what would have been Gandhiji’s last thought. In Tharoor’s version, Gangaji’s last words are “I . . . have. . . failed” (234). The birth of Draupadi, personifying democracy, follows. Draupadi is being shared by the five Pandavas, i.e. democracy is encrypted fully by the five power agencies it stands for.

People like Kanika (V. K. Krishna Menon) are mentioned. It is a touch-and-go entry and exit for many characters. Even Krishna is given only a local MLA's role, who, however does not fail to give Bhagavad-Gita-like advice. Anyway he is not the indomitable manifestation of Vishnu. Dritharashtra rules with the help of his daughter Duryodhani only to commit blunder after blunder, "The India China Bai Bai" attitude is one of them. Factories and industries rise up, while eighty percent of India's people continue to get no electricity and water. Dritharashtra cannot condone his own mistakes and dies because of them. The army taking over the ill-defended Portuguese colony of Comia (Goa), and the Mandarins from The Peoples' Republic of Chakra (China), and later they themselves biting the hand that fed them by waging war on India was too much for Dritharashtra. He belongs to this age but "The instruments of his failure did not" (305). By means of the radiant charm of the growing Draupadi, one can easily infer that democracy is flowering in the Indian Republic. A series of Prime Ministers since Nehru are mentioned, especially Shishupal with his childlike smallness, representing Lal Bahadur Shastri. Krishna is not given a strategic or dramatic importance except that he is a close friend and advisor to Arjun who stands for the press. Tharoor says, "In Priya Duryodhani India has a Frankenstein monster who is growing out of control" (347). Later, he says, "India had a new Queen Empress (Indira) anointed a hundred years after the last one" (352). Sidhartha Sankar Ray is

Shakuni Sankar Dey, Indira's best friend. He curtails the press and media totally. Akashvani, Doordarshan are all curtailed. Only censored news is given out. Sanjay Gandhi's time is mentioned as the peak time of regression, sterilization and unwanted and enforced reforms. Under Priya Duryodhani, India might even face extermination. Arjun getting Pashupata, the Ultimate, the Absolute, is mentioned to establish that after the Emergency was taken off, democracy started to grow again.

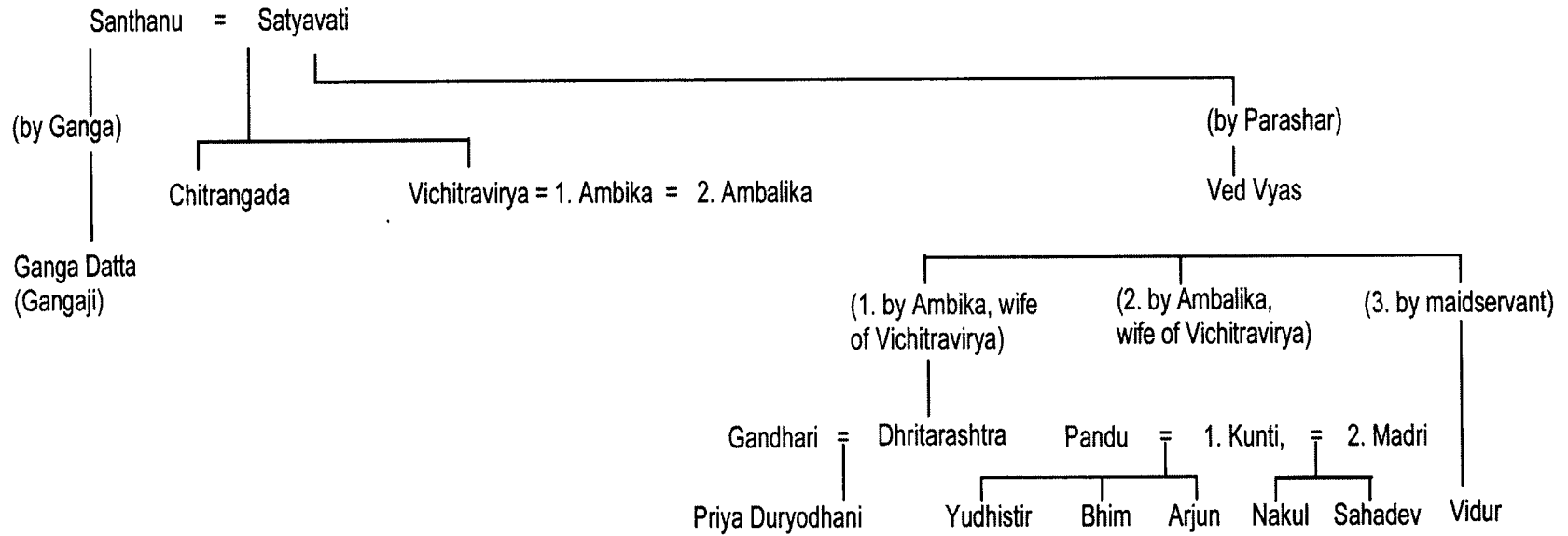
The Great Indian Novel, spreading out in eighteen chapters is out and out a work of Faction. "The book has 18 chapters. Incidentally, the Bhagavad Gita has 18 chapters; the war lasts for 18 days. But the 18 days here are revisited as episodes from the larger narrative of colonialism. . . ." (Hariharan 59). Taking Puranic characters and giving them different names is a difficult task done with great felicity. To make the incidents of Hastinapur correlate with pre- and post-Independence India is really ingenious, because the existing Purana is retold in relation to contemporary politics. The Kurukshetra battle is not described but we feel that the war is still raging. Only one Kaurava is mentioned but the other ninety-nine Kauravas are lurking somewhere in the background. It is this make-belief that makes this parody of the famous Itihasa or epic, a work of Faction. The name-change, place-shift and incident manipulation are inevitable.

Such a work with many chapters, plots and subplots with hundreds if not thousands of characters, needs an innovative storytelling technique

because the entire reading world knows the Mahabharata as the Novel of Great India. The original story with its innumerable plots and its shifts in tenses has all the characteristics of Fiction that have been stylishly used in this parodic version. In spite of his lengthy redaction V.V. tells Ganapathi: “. . . we have left too many of our dramatis personae inconveniently frozen in various parts of our tableau” (199).

Even in the concentrated quintessential summarization, original sentences from the text have been used. While “He died of oversex” (86) may seem blatant, after giving birth to Bhishma, Satyavati returned to her village and was examined by the senior midwife. “Her hymen was pronounced intact” (21), can be a satire on the commercialization of the medical profession. When Gandhiji asks whether “sunshine would be taxed next” (119), he is filled not only with wonderment but also a helplessness against the British. “Kunti was faithfully infidelious” (81) is an oxymoron. So is “the unseeing visionary” (111), and “It was like Caesar’s hand pushing a knife into Brutus” (174). The words “Leave us to God or to Anarchy” (222) from Gangaji, heart-rending and soulful, measure the depth of despondency to which the Indian mind had fallen. “His era was over” (223) evokes the callousness shown to Gandhiji by every Indian who supported the partition. According to Kanshika Chowdhury, “An analysis of the historical legacy of colonialism, however, does display a certain degree of uniformity in the postcolonial condition” (43).

The Great Indian Family



Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is principally in the **allegorical** mould. The novel's title, he tells us, is linked to the great epic Mahabharata, his primary source of inspiration. In the 'Afterword' to the novel, he expands on this: "Many of the characters, incidents and issues in this novel are based on people and events described in the great epic The Mahabharata, a work which remains a perennial source of delight and inspiration to millions in India" (419). That the shape and sequential drift of the novel are dictated by a text already known to the readers is a confirmation that it is a rational construct predetermined by another work, amounting to Faction. In the opinion of Graham Smith, "Two qualities seem necessary to the successful achievement of the kind of novelistic interest: breadth of scope, the ability to deploy a great range of variety and detail, and coherence, the power to fuse disparate elements into a unified perspective" (106).

Though allegorical representations can be trying and exasperating for writers, because they have to strive consistently to work out varying levels of similitude with the chosen model, which puts arbitrary checks on their inventive faculty, they also provide them numerous advantages in the bargain. In Tharoor's case, the advantages are more than usual, because of the special features of his master-text. One does not need to overemphasize that the Mahabharata is both a grand, founding text of Indian literature and a part of its living tradition. Any work based on it

would be assured of general **acceptability** among its readers. The epic provided Tharoor with two additional gains. Though a part of the ancient Hindu tradition of *asa-puranas*, it scores over other texts of this kind, because of its known historical value. Compared, for example, with the ‘*yana*,’ which is considered more of a ‘*kavya*,’ it is more of ‘*itihasa*’ (epic), with a firm overarching historical core, which embraces virtually all aspects of human living. As Nilufer Bharucha remarks, “The Mahabharata is not merely a great narrative poem; it is our *itihasa*, the fundamental source of knowledge for our literature, dance, painting, sculpture, theology, statecraft, sociology, ecology—in short, our history in all its detail and density” (230). This makes it a suitable model for any fictional reconstruction of history. The Mahabharata is also an appropriate text for writing any account which centres around themes and concerns which are at the heart of Tharoor’s rendition of the history of India: power politics, schisms, personality-clashes, institutional structures, individual and social dharma, etc. According to Edward Hower, “. . . *The Great Indian Novel* is clearly more a hymn to the Indian people than a song of praise for their leaders” (6).

Since the Mahabharata does not have a fixed text, because of having gone through various versions from the time it was first conceived, it provides a great deal of flexibility to a writer who wants to use it as a model. Considering that the epic was rewritten from time to

time, Tharoor had the freedom to write, as it were, his own version of the epic, which he partially does. In spite of this, the novel conforms to its most known, recognized and accepted core. However, because of Tharoor's special requirement of fitting the actual historical personages and events into the narrative design and cast of characters of the epic, he had to make changes and adjustments of various kinds. The work in this regard assumes a **symbolic** relevance.

The yoking of myth and history seems to have restricted some of the novelist's fictional options, and as the novel progresses, characters become merely walking metaphors. Draupadi thus becomes a symbol of democracy, and her disrobing symbolic of the treatment meted out to democracy in contemporary India. Except Yudhishtir, the Pandavas too have been conceived as embodiments of various institutions, meant to keep democracy in good health. Because of changes in the character of *dramatis personae*, Tharoor had to make adjustments in the distribution of narrative space among people and events. Some **deviations from the original** also became inevitable. For example, there are no one hundred Kauravas; Priya Duryodhani has to represent them all with a changed sex. The reader fancies that they are all there, somewhere in the background. The parentage of the Pandavas in the narrative mismatches with the original. Adjustments in time-scheme and the sequential ordering of events also became necessary. Relating the epic to the actualities of

history also produced awkward incongruities. For example, in Tharoor's version, Yudhishtir has to share power for some time with Duryodhani, which is unimaginable in the original. Gangaji has to die before he witnesses the disrobing of Draupadi. In spite of such changes, Tharoor has worked out a reasonable degree of semblance between the mythical and the historical. While yoking the mythical and historical in such a vast canvas, chronology and sequential order have been inevitably sidelined, typical of postmodernism.

By casting actual people in history in the mould of characters from the epic, Tharoor aimed at writing a version of the history of India which would be laden with resonance; he also wanted the actual people and events to gain through the 'mythic experience'. Here too Tharoor stood to gain through his model. The energy of the narrative is not realized merely by Tharoor's contextualizing actual people and events in a suggestive frame, but also by the model on its own, which offers perspective on the present in terms of the past. It has been rightly pointed out by Irawati Karve that apart from its eternally-relevant core, the epic has a "surprising element of perennial contemporaneity" (25), which has accounted for its popularity and relevance in every age, and which has been admitted by Shashi Tharoor himself. When he relates the puranic characters with pre- and post-independence Indian leaders, a lot of intertextuality and intratextuality is discernible.

The variegated nature of the epic, with its loose, episodic structure, due to its multiple levels of accretion, provided Tharoor with another freedom: to use a wide range of stylistic variations in his Factional narrative, which he has exploited cleverly for critiquing historical personages and events. Tharoor seems to suggest that the history of India can be reflected only through satire, to throw certain trends and issues into focus than history makes possible. Thus, he has chosen several forms of irreverent styles, through which he also tries to approximate another feature of the original: the story of India being told by **many tellers**, even if it is ascribed only to one. But underneath the irreverent surface of Tharoor's narrative lies his serious involvement with mythical as well as contemporary history. The past is retold in order to bring the present sharply to the spotlight.

The entire narrative is dictated by the participant-narrator V.V. to Ganapathi. V.V. not only narrates his version of the history of India, he also comments on the nature of the historical discourse, building into it a strong element of self-consciousness. He calls his account a selective recall of the past with the help of his memory. That is why, in spite of its overall tone of playfulness and irreverence, he wants it to be taken seriously and not as a "piddling Western thriller" (18). The style is distinctly narrative. The account is also grounded in V.V.'s awareness of the **historiographic** context, which has been a marked feature of the **re-creations** of India's

past. This is true of history proper as well as of its representations in fiction. V.V.'s account implicitly contests the imperialist-colonial historiography and some forms of nationalist historiography as well. Though it is pretended biography, fact and myth mix to create pretended scenic and character descriptions.

By being more accessible and readable than serious academic histories, novels can influence public opinion and political practice. The connection of Tharoor's novel with the Mahabharata furthers its chances of readability and its impact on popular imagination. For a proper focus on Tharoor's involvement with history in general and the history of India in particular, three things have to be concentrated upon: i) the shape of the novel's coherent and understandable narrative, which is directed by the drift of the master narrative; ii) the bases and assumptions underlying the account, which provide Tharoor the required space for problematizing the discourse itself; iii) and the assessment of people and events who figure in the account, which include his comments on the Indian character and the institutional structure of its polity. So Fiction is born out of the encounter between the personal consciousness of the artist and the historical consciousness of the society.

In conformity with the narrative design of the Mahabharata, Tharoor begins his account from the time of the birth of the narrator, V.V., and then moves on to the loves of King Shantanu, his affair with

Satyavati, the appearance of Bhishma on the scene, and the birth of Dhritarashtra, Pandu, and Vidur. The birth of the five Pandavas is also described according to the original, though Tharoor spices the narration with humour and witty comment. The wives of Pandu, who have to have their children from other beings, speak in modern idioms, and even with a bit of levity. This gives the account an occasional parodic tinge, but Tharoor's engagement is not in **mocking the original**. He is only attempting to visualize his characters in a modern setting; this deviation in itself makes the account diverting. The narrative also makes room for a large number of incidents in the epic, which are not necessary for its historical design. But these diversions of self consciousness render a Factional touch to the entire work. These include the adventures of Pandavas during the course of their exile, their misadventure in the Lakshagraha, Bhima's affair with Hidimba, Arjun's banishment for a year, in which he combines business with pleasure, his love for Subhadra and his humiliation at the hands of Kameshwari.

To overcome the problem of fitting some key events from the epic into the chronological frame of the historical account, Tharoor shifts them into a **dream-world** in which contemporary characters are transported incongruously through time to their oneiric mythological settings. This he chooses for dramatizing the scene of the disrobing of Draupadi and the ascent of Yudhishtir to heaven. At the dexterity of his hand, contemporary

history becomes fused with mythopoetic elements through postmodern **artistic techniques**, giving rise to Faction. The inclusion of all these scenes gives Tharoor's narrative the magnitude, solidity, and digressive quality of the original. In a sense, he provides his version of the present day Mahabharata, without its serious tone and is present in the book mostly through V.V. Tharoor uses the epic as a frame for accommodating another narrative, for which it provides a suggestive cover of inference and detail.

Tharoor's version of the historical account extends roughly from the time when Gandhi entered into Indian **politics** till the time Mrs. Gandhi returned to power after the fall of the Janata government. When Gandhi entered the Indian political scene, colonialism was consolidating into a tyrannical system. In a short comment the narrator lays bare the inhumanity of the colonial ethics and the hollowness of the claims made for it by British historians and writers: "[By] the simple logic of colonialism . . . the rules of humanity applied only to the rulers, for the rulers were people and the people were objects. Objects to be controlled, disciplined, kept in their place and taught lessons like so many animals" (80).

Since, like Bhishma, Gandhi gave up claim to power and governance of the country, it leaves two main contenders from the later progeny: Dhritarashtra and Pandu, who stand for Nehru and Subhash. The

narrative suggests that Nehru gained influence in the party hierarchy and succeeded in controlling the reins 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 realizes the falsity of the Kauravas.

Another contender for power is a member of the same clan, but the circumstances of his birth prevent him from coming to the forefront. He is Karna, who stands for Jinnah. He succeeds in taking away a chunk of territory from the country to set up the state of Karnistan, which stands for Pakistan; this particular detail is a deviation from the original. But the **punning** and **allusions** are very apt. In India, except for a brief period, Nehru is succeeded by Duryodhani, who stands for Mrs. Gandhi. The fact that she equals the whole of the Kaurava clan is meant to suggest what one political commentator once remarked about her cabinet, that she was the only man there. She tries her best to keep the Pandavas away from the seat of power and devises stratagems even to finish them off. In making Pandavas into an assorted group, Tharoor could be held guilty of a confusion of categories: for mixing human beings with institutions, but such a charge would be unfair, because he had to observe similitude with the original.

It would not have been possible for the thousands of characters in the original epic to be given counterparts in the novel. If Yudhishtir is

Morarji Desai, Arjun, Bhim, Nakul, and Sahadev represent institutions of the press, army, bureaucracy, and Foreign Service. They are meant to protect democracy, represented through Draupadi. Since Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi dominated the political scene in post-independence India, they dominate the narrative as well. Most of the time, the Pandavas are away from the corridors of power and very appropriately spend their time with their guru Drona, who stands for Jayaprakash Narayan. Though Tharoor manages to fit the main events and personalities of pre- and post-independence India within the plot-outline of the main narrative, there is no special place for Krishna except as a friend of Arjun; he is just a small town MLA and even performs the ritual of giving a short spiritual discourse to him. It is quite likely that Tharoor took cover under the convenient fact that in earlier versions of the epic, Krishna was not as godly a figure as he became in later versions. Moreover, the Lord Krishna of the later versions could never have found an equivalent in Tharoor's novel.

Through the balancing of the two-way process of adapting historical reality to fit the requirements of the original and by incorporating into the narrative most of its diverting incidents, Tharoor works out a delightful mix of the real and the fantastic. Tharoor also succeeds in providing his narrative a tonality of romance of the original; simultaneously, he prepares the reader for alternating between the literal

and the emblematic modes. Some characters and happenings are to be understood the way they have been represented, others for the things they represent. The work draws conceivable parallels between the historical and the mythical and the reader is able to grasp their implications for understanding the author's Factional version of India's past.

Since V.V. dictates the narrative to his amanuensis Ganapathi in several short and long spells, in which he digresses to address issues relating to historical discourse and the nature of the historical process, this provides Tharoor with space for articulating his own views through him. V.V. distinguishes between past as a flux of events in time and past as an intelligible and readable account produced by the historian. He accepts that the past is a collective entity, the result of the efforts of hundreds and thousands of people—nameless, faceless, unrecognized—but when it is shaped into a written, historical account, several of them get left out. This is a problem inherent in the very process of composing history. V.V. illustrates this with reference to the Independence of India:

Independence was not won by a series of isolated incidents but by the constant, unremitting actions of thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands, of men and women across the land. We tend, Ganapathi, to look back on history as if it were a stage play, with scene building upon scene, our hero moving from one action to the next in his remorseless stride

to the climax. Yet life is never like that. If life were a play, the noises offstage, and for that matter the sounds of the audience, would drown out the lines of the principal actors. That, of course, would make for a rather poor tale; and so the recounting of history is only the order we artificially impose upon life to permit its lessons to be more clearly understood. (109)

The idea of history as an ordered composition hints at two things. One, that we have to pay attention to the role of rhetoric in its creation; two, that the ordering may not necessarily be prompted by the historian's disinterested obligation. By accommodating only some events, happenings, and people into their ordered versions, the historians exercise choice, which also suggests a lurking pattern or design. The happenings and events which get left out in any ordered narrative may not be of lesser significance than the ones which get included. As part of what V.V. describes unrecalled past, the things that get left out provide scope for other narratives, which can be equally interesting and valuable. V.V.'s version is based on his memory—the faltering memory of an old man; other versions could have other sources. All this implies that in historical accounts, the mode and purpose of recording the past are of utmost importance. When V.V. tells Ganapathi that “History marched on, leaving only a few footprints on our pages. Of its deep imprints on other sands,

you do not know because I do not choose to wash in the waters that have swept them away” (110); Tharoor draws attention to the selectivity of his version. It is significant that soon after V.V. finishes his account, he feels dissatisfied with it, because he has told his story from a completely mistaken perspective, and would like to retell it. Elsewhere, V.V. refers more specifically to the role of rhetoric in historical narratives. He tells Ganapathi:

. . . the flux of life is like a continuous, interminable wave; to capture it for posterity; we have to shape it, by visualizing it with a beginning and an end. The necessity for closure, which is an arbitrary invention of the teller, in particular, separates life from art. This arbitrariness is essential if we want the account to yield knowledge, even though that may not always help shape the course of future history. (169)

He knows that knowledge is not wisdom, because it “suffers from the crippling defect of ephemerality. All knowledge is transient, linked to the world around it and subject to change as the world changes. . . . It is the fate of the wise to understand the process of history and yet never to shape it” (163). This partially accounts for the rewriting of history, so that it can become relevant to the times in which one lives. The existing facts are shaped to suit the modern palate. V.V. modestly claims that he is

neither a wise man nor a philosopher; he is only a “chronicler and a participant in the events I describe” (163). But he insists on its truth-value, even though he knows that it is only a selective account, which is also suggested in a series of metaphors, which figure in a short poem about it: “. . . a slender filament / A rubbing from a colossal monument; full of colour and cast / A snip from a canvas impossibly vast; . . . recalled, words plucked from the crush” (164). Uma Parameswaran comments on the work, “Ved Vyas often pontificates but frequently, his statements are discerning encapsulations” (356). V.V. tells Ganapathi:

. . . for every tale I have told you, every perception I have conveyed, there are a hundred equally valid alternatives I have omitted and of which you are unaware. I make no apologies for this. This is my story of the India I know, with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions, all mine . . . Every Indian must forever carry with him, in his head and heart, his own history of India. (373)

This forceful statement captures the essence of **postmodernist** thinking on the nature of historical discourse. It admits that history is provisional and plural, and provides for the validity of different versions of the past. It also points to the limitations of the historians, which come in the way of their producing full and total accounts, and closely resembles Rushdie’s idea of the fragmentary nature of our perceptions. Interestingly, Tharoor,

like Rushdie, also refers to the possibility of historical reconstructions touching the extreme slide into non-history: However, this is only an extremist position; it does not inform the spirit of Tharoor's account of India's past. In fact, in spite of the awareness that Tharoor has of the problems of reconstructing the past and the provisional nature of the discourse itself, he is keen on giving his versions.

That the tone and tenor of Tharoor's version of India's history is shaped by his consciousness of the **historiographic** context is borne by the fact that it makes reference to earlier accounts, hagiographies as he calls them, which are indiscriminately laudatory in their evaluation of particular individuals, who had a part in India's struggle for freedom and its post-independence politics. His main complaint is against the ones which give too much importance to the role of Nehru. He is particularly unhappy with versions made current after Nehru's death by the Congress party, particularly by Mrs. Gandhi. In the same vein, the narrative disapproves of the flattering estimates of Jayaprakash Narayan's abilities and his role during the emergency. However, the dissatisfaction with older accounts does not lead to any radical sift in his methodological apparatus or his historiographic stance. He does not, for example, approach the story of India's freedom struggle through classes or groups, which played a significant part in the nationalist movement, but were overshadowed by leaders of higher stature. Like the accounts he censures,

Tharoor's account is dominated by the leading lights of the day and is elitist in its approach. This is confirmed by the choice of the model for writing his version; the Mahabharata too sidelines ordinary beings for heroic figures. It is difficult to say whether Tharoor's allegorical mode foreclosed his option or whether the choice of the model reflects his understanding of the essence of what happened in India's freedom struggle. All that can be said is that Tharoor's account is an alternative version of the extant elitist versions. He implicitly criticizes them, because he thinks that they need to be redressed, to be cured of tilts and imbalances. However, though Tharoor recognizes the role of heroes in history, he neither romanticizes them, nor is he unduly deferential towards them: ". . . this is one memoir which will not conceal the crassness of its heroes. No more than it will be embarrassed by their greatness" (333). The author adopts neutrality and impartiality here.

Tharoor does not consider pluralistic historiography as a Western phenomenon. He thinks that it is an offshoot of a peculiarly **Indian** phenomenon, which is both a source of strength and weakness of its people. Tharoor's account is also informed by a specific understanding of history, which could partially explain his preference for concentrating on key figures in India's past. He considers history a process of births and rebirths, caused by sudden changes, projecting thereby a kind of catastrophic view of history; for the flowing dance of creating and

evolution is visualized by him not as a tranquilizing wave of smoothly predictable occurrences, but as a series of sudden events, unexpected happenings, dramas, crises, accidents and emergencies. He explains this cataclysmic view with the help of a familiar metaphor: This constant rebirth is never a simple matter of the future slipping bodily from the open womb of history. “Instead there is rape, and violence, and a struggle to emerge or to remain, until circumstances bloodily push tomorrow through the parted, heaving legs of today” (245). Tharoor thinks that it is universally true and it holds the key to our learning about what is right and proper. That is why he says through V.V.:

This is as true of you or me as of Hastinapur, of India, of the world, of the cosmos. We are all in a state of continual disturbance, all stumbling and tripping and running and floating along from crisis to crisis. And in the process, we are all making something of ourselves, building a life, a character, a tradition that emerges from and sustains us in each succeeding crisis. This is our dharma. (245)

It is probably this mellowed understanding of historical processes that enables Tharoor to look upon the bleeding wounds of history with nonchalance. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, which is called the Bibigarh Massacre to spite at the likes of Paul Scott, is described with cool irony: “They loaded and fired their rifles coldly, clinically, without

haste or passion or sweat or anger. . . [The result was] a frozen tableau from a silent film, black and white and mute, an Indian *Guernica*" (80-1). The exploitative aspects of the British presence in India and its harmful effect on the economy have also been stressed: "...the British killed the Indian artisan, they created the Indian 'landless labourer', they exported our full employment and they invented our poverty" (95). This is yet another expulsion of positive ideas we may have about the rule of the Raj. The technique used is irony with a tinge of sadness.

The Indian resistance against the British is seen mostly through the efforts of Gandhi. The narrative provides his compact and well-rounded portrait, with the intention of reviving his memory among the public. For, Tharoor states that although Gandhi left behind a thoroughly documented life, almost like an open book, contemporary Indians have consigned him to the mists and myths of historical legend. With characteristic wit, he feels: "he might as well have been a character from the Mahabharata" (47). He believes that Indians have failed to relate him to their lives, not merely because of the bastard educational institutions the British sired on us, but also because the political system of the country promoted its own favourites by pinning the ones it did not like, including Gandhi, to concrete slabs. Through this ingenious mechanism, Gandhi was erased from the realm of cultural influence. Whenever Gandhi talks as Gangaji,

or acts as Ganga Datta, his self is conscious of what he is saying and to what effect. In his case study of the novel, V. S. Seturaman says:

The world of *The Great Indian Novel* is the world of Ved Vyas and Gangaji, the typical twentieth century vision of Bhishma, haunted by obsessions caused by repression and struggling to pull himself up with Dritharashtra oscillating between the materialism and socialistic ideas of the West on the one hand, and the moral and cultural values of the East as represented by Gangaji on the other. (30)

Gandhi is commended for awakening public consciousness against the British by perfecting a system of non-violent struggle against their unjust exercise of power. As solid examples of Gandhi's triumph, he documents his charisma in Motihari, where he pushed the British to the defensive and forced them to see his point of view. The uniqueness and efficiency of his concept of truth, which entailed taking punishment willingly for the strength of one's convictions is thoroughly approved: "No dictionary imbues the word with the depth of meaning Gangaji gave it. His truth emerged from his convictions: it meant not only what was accurate, but what was just and therefore right. Truth could not be obtained by untruthful, or unjust, or violent means" (48). Gandhi's concept of non-violent struggle is praised not only for being worthy in itself, but also as a timely and effective method for fighting the British:

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

One of the significant aspects of Gandhi’s campaign was that it brought ordinary men and women into the mainstream of the freedom struggle. With this mass base, the poor and the middle classes got ‘their place in the sun’ and the concept of nationalism acquired a new orientation. The account also emphasizes that in spite of piquancies in Gandhi’s style of functioning, he was a master strategist; though there was a great deal of drama and theatricality to his campaigns, which has been used at times, even to great comic effect, he gave the movement much-needed publicity in and outside India. The people, whom he made into a strong force, were convinced that they “were not led by a saint with his head in the clouds, but by a master tactician with his feet on the ground” (122). They imagined that he was an idealistic dreamer till he proved that he was a great pragmatist. Amidst the illusion of freedom, they could see the truth of his will.

Though the narrative praises Gandhi’s role in India’s struggle towards freedom, singling out in particular his honesty and steadfastness of purpose, it does not overlook the amusing aspects of his personality and thinking. Repeated attention is drawn to his numerous fads and his

baggage from the past—enemas, sanitary preoccupations, fasts, love for the cow, etc. On account of the bewildering diversity of his reading—Vedas, Manu, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Bible, Gita—his dividing line between matters temporal and spiritual often became somewhat fuzzy: “His manner had grown increasingly other-worldly while his conversational obligations remained entirely mundane, and he would often startle his audiences with pronouncements which led them to wonder in which century he was living at any given moment” (26). His **realism** had an unexpected touch of **magic** in it.

This aspect of Gandhi’s thinking, in which he would lapse into the nebulosity of timelessness, has been severely censured, for being inimical to changes which were necessary for shaking Indians out of their fatalistic moorings. Tharoor’s narrative draws attention to its other serious implications. 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 at no place does the narrative suggest that Gandhi caused disaffection among the minorities, but makes it amply clear that it led to the alienation of political leaders like Jinnah. This eventually sharpened the sources of conflict between the Hindus and Muslims which led to the division of the country. Since several historians have expressed

their uneasiness over this aspect of Gandhi's thinking and practice, it is interesting to note how Tharoor touches the disapproval of Jinnah 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 . . . all this made the young man mistrustful of the Great Teacher. . . . And Gangaji's mass politics were, to Karna, based on an appeal to the wrong instincts; they embodied an atavism that in his view would never take the country forward. A Kaurava Party of prayer-meetings and unselective eclecticism was not a party he would have cared to lead, let alone to remain a member of. (142)

Jinnah's dislike of 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 and of several historians too. Tharoor's narrative unequivocally 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. That is why the scene of Gandhi's death in Tharoor's account is important; here the mythic charge is at its strongest. He lets Gandhi's murderer Shikhand berate him for his dereliction of duty and for neglecting the issue of leadership of the party. His words openly declare him a failure: "You make me sick, Bhishma. Your life has been a waste, unproductive, barren. You are nothing but an impotent old walrus sucking other reptiles' eggs, an infertile old fool . . . a man who is less than a woman. The tragedy of this country springs from you . . ." (232). These are harsh words and cannot be taken lightly. Their import is reinforced by the words Tharoor puts in the mouth of the dying leader. Instead of uttering "Hey Ram," as is commonly believed, he says: "I . . . have . . . failed" (234). Here is a beautiful work of Fiction—the translation of "Hey Ram" to "I . . . have . . . failed." The emotion, the effect, is the same.

The narrative picks actual words of various world leaders and famous people who spoke on the occasion of Gandhi's death. The narrators' comment suggests several causes for his death, in which both he and the people of the country are implicated. The overall tone confirms that he died a defeated and disillusioned man. This again shatters the myth that Gandhiji felt jubilant about the victory:

I will not ask whether Amba / Shikhandin was truly responsible for the Mahaguru's death, or whether it was not India collectively that ended Gangaji's life by tearing itself apart. Nor will I ask you, Ganapathi, to reflect on whether Ganga Datta might in fact have been the victim of an overwhelming death-wish, a desire to end a life that he saw starkly as having served no purpose, a desire buried deep in the urge that had led him, all those years earlier, to create and nurture his own executioner. (234)

Some supernatural element is at work here, as if Gandhiji in his disappointment had a death wish and eventually realized it. As a possible contender for the leadership of the Congress party, the narrative dwells on the vicissitudes of Subhash's career vis-à-vis his relationship with Gandhi. It praises his efforts in the cause of India's freedom, but also explains how he perished because of his quixotic dreams. Nevertheless, it is made clear that he lost the race for the leadership of the Congress party because Gandhi preferred Nehru over him. Tharoor's extremely negative estimate of Nehru's abilities and his role in the politics of pre-and post-independence India is suggested in the allegorical frame itself. As Dhritarashtra, he is made into Gandhi's "blind and visionary son," with a vaulting ambition and monumental ego. His English education comes in for special attack: it gave him only "a formidable vocabulary and the

vaguely abstracted manner of the over-educated” (41). His blindness is used to a trenchant metaphoric effect: “. . . the blind man’s gift of seeing the world not as it was, but as he wanted it to be” (85), made him completely out of tune with the reality around him. Even though he was absent from some of the most momentous events in Gandhi’s struggle against the British, he succeeded in gaining importance when the fate of the country was about to be decided. The account also implicates him in the hasty deal of the partition of the country, by colluding with Mountbatten and his charming wife Edwina. It makes no secret of his amatory liaison with her, and charges him for having failed to see that she was used by her husband as his secret weapon. Indeed a bold challenge levelled against the popular image of Nehru, but Tharoor’s sure and steady pen draws this new image realistically and convincingly.

Tharoor holds that after taking charge of the affairs of independent India, Nehru bungled the Kashmir issue and showed extreme shortsightedness in taking it to the United Nations. He is also charged with having mastered the technique of self-perpetuation by issuing periodic threats of resignation. His major policies also come in for attack. Nehru’s emphasis on setting up big and heavy industries in the country was ill-conceived, because it ignored the unpleasant reality that eighty percent people were without the basic amenities of life, such as drinking water, shelter, and electricity. It was wrong to concentrate too much on

building institutions of higher learning, because they only turned out products for the international market, and ignored the huge forests of illiteracy which covered vast regions of the country. The setting up of the huge centralised and cumbersome machinery of parliamentary democracy proved ineffective because the parliament passed laws that a few implemented and many ignored. Considering that the efficacy of the Nehruvian model of economic development has been disputed and that the authority of the state in rendering social and economic balance has proved ineffective, there is a great deal of truth in Tharoor's attack on Nehruvian policy and performance. It is an eye-opener to the millions that adore the Nehruvian monarchy and divine right theory of the present day. Nehru's popularity, if at all, was illusory, whereas his mistakes were real.

Tharoor's main complaint against Nehru is that at the cost of neglecting the need of his country, he directed his energies towards gaining recognition in international arenas. He worked for promoting non-alignment without estimating whether the country was strong and powerful enough to give it any meaningful credibility. In a sarcastic tone, the narrator states that he and his friend Menon developed into a fine art the skill of speaking for the higher conscience of mankind, though "neither could control the convictions or even the conduct of those who were to implement their policies" (295). This is reflected most conspicuously in his failure on the foreign front, when the country had to

suffer military humiliation at the hands of China. This broke his heart and hastened his death. In Tharoor's allegorical design, which is his main Factional device, Indian democracy, represented in the person of Draupadi, has a mixed parentage: she is the product of the illicit union of Nehru and Edwina, which is meant to suggest that India came into being because of their unholy alliance. Through her marriage to Arjun, Draupadi is shared by his other brothers, who personify "the hopes and the limitations of each of the national institutions they served" (319). During Nehru's tenure, her health remained stable, but started deteriorating after his death, especially during the time of Mrs. Gandhi. The narrative records, how, after the short spell of Shishu Pal's (Lal Bahadur Shastri) tenure in office, the elders chose Mrs. Gandhi to lead the party, mainly because they thought her pliable. But very soon she turned into a menacingly arrogant person, and threatened the very fabric of the democratic structure of the country.

Tharoor prepares the readers for a negative portrait of Mrs. Gandhi through a piece of well-conceived anticipation, in which he uses animal imagery to suggest the brutality and oppression of her times:

[Her birth-cry] was a rare, sharp, high-pitched cry like that of a donkey in heat, and as it echoed around the house a sound started up outside as if in response, a weird, animal moan, and then the sounds grew, as donkeys brayed in the

distance, mares neighed in their pens, jackals howled in the forests, and through the cacophony we heard the beating of wings at the windows, the caw-caw-cawing of a cackle of crows, and penetrating through the shadows, the piercing shriek of the hooded vultures circling above the palace of Hastinapur. (73)

Horror and terror are the pervading forces in this tactic of using metaphors. The scene is reminiscent of Calpurnia's ominous dream before Caesar's assassination in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. This arguably allusive association powerfully evokes the political psyche of a country in the throes of agony and rebellion.

At first, Mrs. Gandhi tried to entrench herself by carrying out a series of populist measures, such as the abolition of privy purses and the nationalization of banks, which made hardly any difference to the people in general. Later, she promoted the culture of slogans, which replaced policies. Tharoor blames the left and progressive forces in the country, including recognized political parties, for being taken in by her rhetoric and bluster. In her own party, Mrs. Gandhi reduced even cabinet ministers into non-entities. Her return to power made her more arrogant and dictatorial in her style of functioning. She succeeded in arrogating to herself the power to "prohibit, proscribe, profane, prolate, prosecute or prostitute all the freedoms the national movement had brought to attain. . ."

(357). Events took on a dizzy turn when, after the Allahabad High Court judgement, she declared a state of Emergency in the country, which proved the most disastrous part of her tenure. What she accomplished, says V.V., is “. . . An India where a Priya Duryodhani can be re-elected because seven hundred million people cannot produce anyone better . . . her greatest failure—the alienation of some of the country’s most loyal citizens to the point where two of them consider it a greater duty to kill her than protect her, as they were employed to do” (412). According to John Calvin Bachelor, “Ved examines his granddaughter from birth to death, and what he finds is a poisonous, treacherous, loveless, pointless human being, a sort of career pest” (1).

Tharoor understands the Emergency in its very immediate context, when it was declared by Mrs. Gandhi. He is critical of her decision, but also blames the people whose attacks pushed her into taking the extreme step, especially Jayaprakash Narayan, who launched a full-scale movement against her. Though he concedes that arrests and censorship and other repressive measures taken by her were “primarily cynical and self-serving,” he adds, “I still believed that the political chaos in the country, fuelled by Drona’s idealistic but confused Uprising which a variety of political opportunists had joined and exploited, could have led the country nowhere but to anarchy” (369). In this, Tharoor’s thinking is different from that of Nayantara Sahgal in *Rich Like Us* (1985) and

Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* (1981). In fact, his scepticism about the worth of the people who combined against her is reflected in his comment on their coming to power: "The Indian people gave themselves the privilege of replacing a determined, collected tyrant with an indeterminate collection of tyros" (402).

Tharoor's views on the Emergency and the people who fought against Mrs. Gandhi stem from his estimate of the character and abilities of Jayaprakash Narayan. The narrative gives him his due by documenting in detail how he was far away from the taint of power and made strenuous efforts for raising the consciousness of the people by educating them about their rights and duties; he provided moral support to the protecting pillars of Indian democracy, but his complicated thinking proved his undoing. In spite of the praise showered on him after his death, in which he was compared with Gandhi, the narrator makes a mixed comment:

. . . he was a flawed Mahaguru, a man whose goodness was not balanced by the shrewdness of the original. He had stood above his peers, a secular saint whose commitment to truth and justice was beyond question. But though his loyalty to the ideals of a democratic and egalitarian India could not be challenged, Drona's abhorrence of power had made him unfit to wield it. He had offered inspiration but not involvement, charisma but not change, hope but no

harness. Having abandoned politics when he seemed the likely heir-apparent to Dhritarashtra, he tried to stay above it all after the fall of Dhritarashtra's daughter, and so he let the revolution he had wrought fall into the hands of lesser men who were unworthy of his ideals. (409)

With the coming to power of Mrs. Gandhi, the narrative brings to an end the story of India's political vicissitudes. Its thrust is to suggest Tharoor's disillusionment with the country's declining political culture. Its institutional structures, such as the press, bureaucracy, and party system have not done much in promoting any meaningful change in the country. Tharoor makes us believe that the Indian people in general have perfected the art of living with whatever they get, strengthening their vestiges of fatalism. He visualizes a bleak future for the country. This partially explains why people have become obsessive about their past. For some it is a source of power, for others a comfortable retreat.

A kind of appropriate **parody** is at work in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* as a major aspect of Fiction. The manner in which Tharoor appropriates and parodies narratives and engages in a dialogic relationship with the reader is noteworthy. Tharoor acknowledges his indebtedness to the Mahabharata, the master-narrative that has come to play a major role in the Indian consciousness. He remarks that the Mahabharata has come to stand for so much in the popular consciousness

and the personages in it have become household words, standing for public virtues and vices, and the issue it raises, as well as the values it seeks to promote, are central to an understanding of what makes India. To take characters and situations that are so laden with resonance, and to alter and shape them to tell a contemporary story, was a challenge that offered the author a rare opportunity to strike familiar chords while playing an unfamiliar tune. Tharoor's experiments with Faction, in this regard, are not merely attempts to explore the thinning line between history and fiction, but also an effort to portray the national consciousness of a people embodied in the myths, legends, and the socio-political and cultural milieu of its narratives.

Apart from its parodic parallelisms with the Mahabharata starting with the title itself, the eighteen chapters of Tharoor's narrative also draw upon seminal texts of the colonial and postcolonial canons, such as *The Jungle Book* (1894), *A Passage to India* (1924), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966) and *Midnight's Children* (1981). While these texts are appropriated as chapter titles, such references also enable Tharoor to decrown the epic and, at the same time, to regenerate it, showing the blend of truth and imagination.

Tharoor's text, in other words, activates a dialogue with other texts which are submerged or referred to, engendering a new kind of language. This kind of discourse can be termed parodic, though the other texts are

not held in ridicule. Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* suggests that the older texts that are parodied serve as a background and as ‘an ideal’ or ‘norm’ from which come the modern parts (1985: 5). The backgrounded text is thus activated, and can be seen as one sure method of dealing with the past and the present. Tharoor’s endeavour is not mere allegorizing by incorporating the political scenario of twentieth-century India. It is an attempt at a re-reading of an old story and an exploration into the relationship between the narrator, the scribe and the reader. In “The Novelist as Teacher,” Chinua Achebe makes a comment that would aptly suit Tharoor’s objective: “I would be quite satisfied if my works (especially the ones set in the past) – did teach my readers their past with all their imperfections. . .” (Achebe 1988: 45).

In *The Great Indian Novel*, the very writing of the text throws up postmodern implications. As in the epic, Ganapathi is the scribe, named by the South Indian word rather than the North Indian Ganesh, and described as having “shrewd and intelligent eyes through which he is staring owlily at me as I dictate these words” (18). In the epic, Ganapathi lays down the condition that the narrative should not be broken in between and if it is broken, he would refuse to continue and leave. Ved Vyas in lieu lays down the condition that Ganapathi should understand the verses before taking them down. This pact is here transmuted to a lot of questions about the narrative. Ved Vyas and Ganapathi enter into a

similar pact but the tone of the passage which describes this is one of cheerful irreverence:

I made my own condition: that he had to understand every word of what I said before he took it down. And I was not relying merely on my ability to articulate my memories and thoughts at length and with a complexity which would give him pause. I knew that whenever he took a break to fill that substantial belly, or even went around the corner for a leak, I could gain time by speaking into my little Japanese tape-recorder. (18)

V.V.'s talk is fiction but 'taking a leak' and using a Japanese tape recorder are facts. This anachronism acts as a means of blending the old and the new, and raises the question of how accurate the memory of the narrator is. Ved Vyas admits he cannot rely entirely on his ability to articulate his memories. The very fact of V.V.'s contemporaneity, that he is not the divine seer who is the omnipotent creator of the text, underscores his subjective position as the postmodern narrator. Ved Vyas tells the story to Ganapathi and the story is written down. In other words, the text is born out of a written transcription of an oral narrative. One tends to ask in this context, who gets to tell the story? Could either version—that of Ved Vyas or Ganapathi—be authentic? Where does the

reader position himself in such a narrative? Is the author subconsciously inside the novel or self-consciously outside it?

Ayyappa Paniker sees the Ved Vyas-Ganapathi relationship as the “most delectable part of this work.” He suggests:

. . . the author versus scribe is an interesting question: how much of the resultant work is wholly the author’s or wholly the scribe’s – the duality is one of the crucial features of the entire work: it makes the ancient tale a very modern one. It is a typical postmodernistic work. This means the reader has to know his ur-text – the source work – as well. (Paniker 13)

But merely knowing the ur-text does not help position the reader in the narrative. The reader has to enter the text through a dialogical act and engage himself with the narrator and the scribe as one more voice. He thus identifies himself in a Factional world.

The reader enters a world of **polyphony**. A polyphonic novel, is essentially dialogic. The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of

polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event. V.V.'s voice which encapsulates other myriad voices, speaks out to Ganapathi, and becomes the written voice we read. V.V.'s narrative, then, combines all the other voices and stories that engender his story and engage Ganapathi and the reader dialogically in the story. It is not the individual voice of V.V. that tells the story, but the voice made polyphonic through a process of dialogism that transcend the limits set by the master-narrative to tell the story. Tharoor the master narrator is the one who really talks to us as Ved Vyas and the other characters. Where is the truth and where is the fiction then? They blend into the margin and bring out Faction.

The level of discourse moves in such a way that the reader is also drawn into it: "Behave yourself, Ganapathi. What do you mean, how could I know? You don't expect me to spell out everything, do you? I just know, that's all. I know a great many things that people don't know I know, and that should be good enough for you, young man" (65). We see humour here, clothed in false authority. It is obvious that V.V. leaves gaps in his narrative. It is a dramatic monologue. The reader's voice is implicated in the questions that Ganapathi asks Ved Vyas and to the voices in the gaps. The omniscience of the narrator is also rejected, evident in V.V.'s comment many a time. Tharoor is here problematizing the authority of the narrator and questioning his very legitimacy to narrate stories. In the epic, Ved Vyas' narration is layered with stories. There is

Ved Vyas himself appearing in the epic to tell Yudhishtir, the eldest of the Pandavas, the story of Nala and Damayanti, Sanjaya giving an on-the-spot commentary of the Kurukshetra war to Dhritarashtra, and so on, emphasizing the validity of the tales and the teller. *The Great Indian Novel*, like the epic itself, evolves as a tale told by many a narrator, but sans the legitimacy of any one voice or version.

The authority of the one, omniscient voice gives way to **multiplicity**. The writer, as Mikhail Bakhtin purports in *The Dialogic Imagination*, is in a quest for freedom from a unitary and singular language. He contends:

Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is not something given but is always in essence posited—and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia.

(270)

It is perhaps Tharoor's yearning to be free from a unitary language and story that makes him at times relegate the epic to the background in a mocking way and embroider modern Indian history and raise narrative problems through it. He is also destiny's observer. Ved Vyas' mind here encapsulates Indian history into the epic that he knows. The growth of the

Kuru family is loosely followed in the novel except for the **mythical distortions** which confirm the movement of the discourse towards parody. In the epic, Gandhari who ties a black cloth across her eyes and who has one hundred sons through divine blessings lives on with her husband, bearing the loss of all her sons in the Kurukshetra war. Tharoor's subversion presents Gandhari the Grim who gives birth to a baby girl who is named Priya Duryodhani. Gandhari the Grim is seen complaining to Ved Vyas that she had been promised one hundred sons and the promise was not kept. Gandhari the Grim dies much before her daughter's death. Priya Duryodhani is assassinated in the novel and not killed in war as the sons of Gandhari were. These changes, effecting thematic re-orientations necessary in Tharoor's narrative, make it Faction, and a literary work in its own stead, rather than confining it to an imitation of the original.

As the reader who has entered the text as one more voice in the double-voiced narrative, he has to decode the parodic structure envisaged and also the subversion. In Linda Hutcheon's terms, readers "who decode parodic structures. . . also act as decoders of encoded intent." "Parody" for her is "not just a structural 'phenomenon' but the entire enunciation of discourse" (Hutcheon 1985: 23). The enunciative act demands communication as the primary thing and it is in Hutcheon's terms "the contextualised production and reception of parodied texts" (Hutcheon

1985: 90). Tharoor's act of enunciation realizes itself in the narrative when the reader participates in the double voicing. In other words, the act of enunciation itself is doubled.

This kind of double enunciation can be seen both in the scene where Draupadi Mokradi is disrobed and in the subsequent game of dice. Draupadi who came out of the flames of the sacrifice offered by King Drupada, in the novel is born of the union of Dhritarashtra and Lady Draupadi. Draupadi Mokradi, in addition to being the wife of the Pandavas, is raised to the level of a symbol. She stands for democracy. The attempted disrobing of Draupadi in the court is given a repeat performance in Tharoor but the result is a political commentary on the plight of democracy. The game of dice and the subsequent attempt of disrobing Draupadi occur in V.V.'s dream but, unlike the original where the Pandavas are exiled for fourteen years, Arjun challenges Priya Duryodhani for a game of dice and Duryodhani is given the first chance:

She picked up the dice, then looked at them, at Arjun, and at the silent faces around the room. And as she prepared to throw them, Ganapathi, I realized, even in my sleep, that I didn't need to dream any more. Her strained face, her staring eyes, the trembling of her hands as she picked up the instruments of her fate, told their own story. She was going to lose. (383)

The very confession that V.V. saw all this in a dream and is recounting it makes his story all the more suspect. However, the dream is the encoded intent which the reader has to decode. By making the disrobing scene a dream which he experiences and the game of dice yielding different results, the narrator forces upon the reader the need for a decoding. The scribe, having been chastised before for questioning the narrator, is quiet this time. The narrator's voice which comes from the dream world has to be responded to by a voice that questions and at the same time reinforces the dream. In other words the reader is compelled into the narrator's vision, and is forced to enter into complicity with his vision.

It is perhaps the same complicity which makes the story told by V.V. problematise the notion of ending:

.... 'the end' was an idea that I suddenly realized meant nothing to me. I did not begin the story in order to end it; the essence of the tale lay in the telling. 'What happened next?' I could answer, but 'what happened in the end?' I could not even understand. . . . there is, in short, Ganapathi, no *end* to the story of life. There are merely pauses. The end is the arbitrary invention of the teller, but there can be no finality about his choice. Today's end is, after all, only tomorrow's beginning. (162-3)

The novel, in the words of Clark Blaise, “. . . ends on precisely the note it had begun. . . and will go on. . . that Indira will reappear in many disguises; dogs are gods, Bengalis are Belgians because even anagrams hold equivalent philosophic truths” (345). Inevitably the story continues elsewhere. In a sense, the story keeps changing hands between the narrator, the scribe and the reader. It is in different states of encoding and decoding and double voicing, another method the author uses, to bring about Fiction.

V.V. himself is critical about the act of narration raising issues of appropriation, narrative occlusion, and the pleasures of the text. He remarks: “This story, like that of our country, is a story of betrayed expectations, yours as much as our characters.” There is no story and too many stories; there are no heroes and too many heroes. What is left out matters almost as much as what is said” (411). The pleasure of the text for the reader is finally in the act of enunciation. So, too, V.V. realizes that he has no choice but to retell the story, he must begin again. For this he has to have his scribe back and gets him back: “Your eyebrows and nose, Ganapathi, twist themselves into an elephantine question-mark. Have I, you seem to be asking, come to the end of my story? How forgetful you are! It was just the other day that I told you stories never end, they just continue somewhere else” (418).

V.V. confesses that he has told his story from “a completely mistaken perspective” and has thought about it and realized that “[he has] no choice. [He] must retell it” (418). This is a technique employed to activate the sense of unreliability of the narrator, thus heightening the act of reading itself. Even Ganapathi as scribe and reader is not spared: “I see the look of dismay on your face. I am sorry, Ganapathi. I shall have a word with my friend Brahm tomorrow. In the meantime, let us begin again” (418).

Parody thus emerges as a technique by which one text encapsulates the other. Tharoor’s adherence to facts is in fact a subversion of the method of realism. To an assiduous researcher who is very particular about minute details, the constant reference to facts is a veneer with which the narrator of the biography enters into the story. Tharoor subtly hints at the state of mind of the narrator through the course of the novel. The statement is so well concealed that it comes almost as a sudden volte-face in the uniform thought flow in the reader. Tharoor as discussed earlier asks for an un hiding of the possibilities shelved by the narrator. Tharoor has created an elaborate fiction and to get into it, the **reader** has to **author** the sub-text. The reader also has to become the **narrator** Tharoor as he is forced to recognize contradictions in Ved Vyas’ narrative. But he must avoid the kind of appropriation which makes the reader of the ‘life story’ its ultimate hero, a replacement for the subject.

Tharoor problematises both the act of reading and the act of storytelling. Parody, as a technique of narration, does not stop with the narrator. It extends to the reader as well. Parody as a narrative technique subverts the colonial narrative and repositions it to cater to the needs of a post-colonial world. As Linda Hutcheon puts it: "Parody today is endowed with the power to renew. It need not do so, but it can. We must never forget the hybrid nature of parody's connection with the 'world,' the mixture of conservative and revolutionary impulses in both aesthetic and social terms" (Hutcheon 1985: 47). The narrative technique employed and the reading it elicits strongly affirms that there is not just one story or a definitive ending. Stories are generated. They are possibilities. The master-narrative of colonialism is rewritten through the act of telling. Telling the story occupies centre stage. This is made possible by the narrative strategy employed, which calls for a dialogised interaction with the reader. The internalised dialogue between the writer and the master-narrative has to be redialogised by the reader in an active reading and a recontextualising of the old story. The reader then becomes an active agent, along with the writer, in the creation of the post colonial narrative.

According to S. Chakravarty, the primary emphasis of the author is on characters and not on events. In the novel, "history becomes transmuted to myth, characters become figures from contemporary history" (103). He continues:

. . . The two desires or obsessions for country and off spring i.e.; ‘Rajyamoah’ and ‘Puthramoah’ are at the root of Nehru’s failure as well as his daughter’s declaration of the dreaded Emergency. Jinnah, who is Karna, is seen as a person who suffers from identity crisis. His problem is an existentialist one .The great orator that was Jinnah cannot but be respected for his love for his country, hatred for the foreigners and Jawaharlal Nehru himself, who usurped the Prime Minister’s post from him was of the opinion that in all truthfulness, Jinnah was a good man at heart. This is where the hidden as well as obvious factors fuse. (102-3)

Just as Shikhand was only an instrument in Bhishma’s death, Godse has only indirectly reprinted and recreated the atmosphere. One has to remember that many were against Gandhiji at that time because they felt this way— not that he loved the Hindus less, but that he loved the Muslims more. Ashwathama with the beard can be a disciple of Jayaprakash Narayan, viz. Chandrasekhar. Ekalavya has been equated to V.V. Giri though the parallelism is not clear or foolproof. A tactfulness in forcing another’s will is common to the original as well as the clone. Manimir stands for Kashmir and it can also stand for money for which people fight. The Republic of Chakra is China, where we see a wordplay; ‘chini’ means sugar and while ‘chakra’ is a Sanskrit word, shakar (sugar)

is a Hindi word. Being sugary with China, we landed in trouble with the meaningless and exploited slogan “India-China Bhai Bhai.”

There is an instant mingling of past and present styles and the fusion is so gradual and unnoticeable that the book becomes highly readable. Tharoor’s language is a combination of Indian, British and American English. His attitude to life in general and his approval and positive as well as negative criticism of Indian traditions and native customs, his thoughts on Hinduism, Gandhi, and world politics, his treatment of love, politics and philosophy, his economic, cultural and social stand in the community, his attitude towards women— in toto, all his attitudes and aptitudes have come out beautifully in all his works especially in this political rhetoric.

Though the restless and retired but venerable Ved Vyas, India’s oldest politician, dictates his singular memories to Ganapathi his scribe, he is at times cantankerous, digresses at his will and goes to the extreme of stream-of-consciousness. Yet he is convincing. He is accepted by one and all, axiomatically. From the princely state of Hastinapur, soon to be annexed to the British Raj, V.V.’s saga unfolds to oddly familiar events and personages. From the passionate coupling of a blind nationalist and a British Vicerine our democracy is born, shameful though it may be. *The Great Indian Novel* has everything—what is, what was, what should have been as well as what could not possibly be. With calculated effrontery

and considerable brilliance, India's tale has been re-cast and retold as a dazzling patchwork of traditional mythology and contemporary history with a new insight into both.

Thus, using dozens of literary techniques and introducing new journalistic trends in style, Tharoor has made *The Great Indian Novel* an unforgettable work in all literature. Though many critics have written and scholars of research study have estimated it as a postmodern parody, it can be legitimately argued that the parodic aspect as well as the postmodern preoccupation with historiography, magic realism, pun, metaphor, political criticism, positive and negative outlooks on India, all put together, have created the best example of Faction right from the days of Capote and Mailer who started the genre in the sixties.

A STUDY OF *FACTION*
IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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CHAPTER III

BETWEEN OBLIVION AND MEMORY: BRICOLAGE IN *RIOT*

Like *The Great Indian Novel*, *Riot* (2001) also voices the insecurities and angst of a postmodern world, torn by strife and a mediated reality. Quoting the postmodern poet Octavio Paz, Shashi Tharoor, in the Afterword to the novel, comments that our civilization is wedged between the twin forces of oblivion and memory, “how one leads to the other, and back again, [which] has been the concern of much of my fiction” (269). The liminal space between the unconscious and the conscious, between the factual and fictional, the traces of one ever-present in the other, is the perennial condition of the human mind which Tharoor elucidates.

Riot recognizes the fundamental instability of the world order in a moral sense. It has been attempted in this chapter to show the brilliant experiments of Shashi Tharoor with narrative form, chronicling the mystery of Priscilla Hart’s death / murder. Not only is the murderer to be unearthed, but the reason for the crime should also be exposed. The true love of an American girl for an Indian officer is set against the reciprocal yet cowardly love of the protagonist, who is an insincere and opportunistic escapist.

The narrative establishes that similarities of temperaments pale before forceful cultural differences; and goodness by itself, cannot exist without the support of luck and the ability to convince. Western scepticism and pragmatism and the so-called oriental superstition and obstinance are to be contrasted. The ensuing chapter attempts to examine how the Factional frame of the novel moves the narrative set in a political milieu to a soul-stirring climax. The criticism of the novel touches upon the controversies of history and love, hate, cultural collision, religious fanaticism and the impossibility of knowing the truth. Sometimes, one reaches such a crossroad in life that it is difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction.

The novel is set against the communal riot between the Hindus and the Muslims over the territory claimed to be sacred by both groups. While the Muslims consecrate the place on account of a mosque built by Babar on these premises, the Hindus deem it the place of birth of Lord Ram, the Hindu God. Consequent struggles have stormed the fire of mutual hatred into raging flame. Gory fights and hatred-emitting sentiments take away whatever holiness was attached to the beliefs of the Hindu as well as the Musalman. When considering the incident as an act of terrorism, the following words of Tharoor in “Beyond Boundaries” are insightful: “Terrorism is a method, not cause; there can be no ‘solution,’ until people stop resorting to this method in pursuit of their causes” (Tharoor,

www.shashitharoor.com 2005). Among all this turmoil, wafts in like a breath of fresh air, a sweet-tempered American journalist who amidst her social work, falls in love with the district magistrate who is also the Collector and therefore the law enforcing officer. Partly rooted in historical incidents and partly the creation of Tharoor's imaginative genius, the novel deftly interweaves numerous narratives in the form of letters, diaries, notebooks, scrapbooks, interviews and conversations, ultimately defying all conventional expectations of form, truth and meaning.

Riot was published simultaneously by two different publishers with two different cover designs and subtitles to suit the readers of different natures and cultures. Its acceptance became universal, when leading writers and eminent personalities accepted and appreciated it. In Tharoor's own words to Mendonca and Hirani in *The Times of India*: "All my books are a self-interrogation of what I think, what I believe about India" (Mendonca and Hirani, www.shashitharoor.com 2002).

Riot comes directly under the scope of this research because it is a typical example of Faction. Though Tharoor appears the quintessential international diplomat, one can take him out of India, but one cannot take India out of him. In *Riot* he seems to search the way out of pacifying communal riot and violence that is plaguing Indian historical awareness to a great extent. Unlike his earlier novels, this novel focuses on the

collision of various sorts between culture, ideologies and religions. Tharoor has attempted to showcase multiple perspectives, and the disputed ownership of history, trying to uncover the fact behind a certain event, which may be fictitious or true.

Riot is a beatified amalgamation of all the nine elements—love, anger, hate, joy, sorrow, pity, discouragement, pride and compassion. *Riot* reads like a political and social treatise, but the reader occasionally gets a taste of wonderful love poetry. The progress of the love of Priscilla and Laxman and their intimacy lapse into romantic verses and there are plenty of instances of eroticism, all fictional reconstructions of a factual incident. According to Tharoor:

What I wanted actually was the kind of thing that happens in the real lives of people in some insignificant town. I also tried to use difference in two ways: to bring out a certain sense of reality of life experienced, and truth. . . . where there is no omniscient narrator, ultimately there is only the reader. (qtd. in Tharoor, www.keral.com 2005)

One of the strengths of the novel lies in the unconventional narrative structure the words have come up with, perhaps successfully. Tharoor is an experimentalist, and therefore, it does not seem surprising that he tried his hand on a very unconventional structure, that is, a fusion between fact and fiction. An attempt is made here to highlight some

features of the narrative structure of the novel. How well time has been interwoven in the Factional narrative has also been illustrated.

The genesis of this novel lies in two historical facts. A friend of Tharoor sends him a very detailed report about a riot in Madhya Pradesh. Almost at the same time, he reads a newspaper report that an American woman has been killed in a racial riot in South Africa. The skeletal facts of these two events have been intermingled and given a fictional body and shape through the love story of Priscilla and Lakshman. Tharoor explains in his interview with *Diva International*: “In *Riot*, there is no one point of view, there are a number of them and ultimately, the one that matters is that of the reader” (Tharoor, www.divainternational.ch 2004)

The whole novel is divided into seventy-eight sections of varying length; these help to unfold the story in a two-tier system. The first strand runs through records, entries and letters, whereas the second one unwinds three interviews, conversations and interrogations. Each section brings a fresh perspective on Priscilla Hart’s multidimensional personality and her universe. Many of these sections also try to explore the socio-political conditions of the time in which she lived and worked in India, and finally got trapped in a whirlpool of tumultuous emotions as well as riots leading to her death. One great merit of this novel is that each fusion in each section is independent to some extent, but also has an interrelatedness. Besides, we can take the liberty of reading it in any order without missing

the crux of the story. The novel begins with the resolution and then keeps on alternating between exposition and complication. Lakshman writes in his journals: “‘I’d like to write a novel,’ I tell her, ‘that doesn’t read like a novel. Novels are too easy—they tell a story, in a linear narrative, from start to finish. . . . I’d do it differently’” (135).

In short, Tharoor, through the character, has expounded his own philosophy of writing a new kind of work, rather unconventional, but interesting to the reader. He appears to have the idea of a transportation of the theme of a work to the level of making the reader wonder about the authenticity of this story. In *Riot* Lakshman dreams of writing a novel that can be in any order but the readers will definitely enjoy a sort of inter-connectedness among different sections and also will enjoy the factual descriptions with fictional decorations. The novel is descriptive at times, emotional at times, and epistolary at other times. The dates and entries appearing in the letters, diaries, notebooks, scrapbooks, interviews and conversations do not follow strictly, the same time sequences in the book. In fact, the reader here is expected to reconstruct the scenes not only to show thematic inter-connectedness, but also to show how every **fictitious** event can be made to look **natural** and **real**. The sections have been arranged according to ‘text time’ or narrative time, and not according to story time. Story time ideally refers to the natural chronology whereas

text time is a special dimension, the way the text has been arranged in the novel, irrespective of a natural chronology.

The manipulative use of text time can perhaps be best illustrated by a quick overview of Lakshman's conversations with Priscilla Hart. The thematic interconnectedness of the conversations will be discernible only when the spatial arrangement of text sequences is reordered according to story time:

27 Feb. 1989—Talks about India, its languages, its diversity and problems including the Naxal Movement. Also talks about his social relationship and marriage.

1 July 1989—Speaks of Hindu-Muslim relationship in India. Also tries to develop his relationship with her.

22 Aug. 1989—Lakshman tries to convince Priscilla of his deep love for her but she is not happy with his rhetoric of love, as she wants a permanent relationship with him which seems utterly unlikely in their case because of the cultural gap between them. (Roy, www.shashitharoor.com 2001)

The modes of letters, newspaper reports, diary entries, and conversations that form the corpus of the novel are consciously employed to create the semblance of factuality, which nonetheless serve to deconstruct and subvert the primacy of 'true,' first-hand perspectives in the narrative. This device also serves to debunk the unilinearity to

traditional literature. A brief examination of the diary entries arranged according to text-time will throw sufficient light on this:

12 Oct. 1989 From Randy Diggs' notebook

12 Oct. 1989 Ram Charan Gupta to Randy Diggs

16 July 1989 From Priscilla Hart's scrapbook

26 Aug. 1989 Prof Mohammed Sarwar to V. Lakshman

16 Feb. 1989 Letter from Priscilla Hart to Cindy Valeriani

13 Oct. 1989 Randy Diggs' interview with V. Lakshman

26 Mar. 1989 From Lakshman's Journal

12 Oct. 1989 From Randy Diggs' notebook

5 Apr. 1989 Letter from Priscilla Hart to Cindy Valeriani

12 Oct. 1989 From Katharine Hart's Diary (Roy, www.shashitharoor.com 2001)

Tharoor requires the reader to take an active role in the construction of meaning, piecing together the bits and fragments of incidents and narratives in the novel, ultimately foregrounding the constructedness and provisionality of reality. The events of the story, utterly minced up in the novel, can be reconstructed thus:

Priscilla Hart, 24, of Manhattan, a student doing research for doctoral degree at New York University, presently engaged with an NGO named Help-US, was killed during the Hindu-Muslim riot in Zaligarh, UP. Other details regarding her killing remain obscure. Reports and reactions

of her teachers and parents on her death are given. Everyone praises her as a student and also as a human being. Again, Tharoor has given a lot of Factional incidents through sharp, precise and clipped sentences.

After saying good-bye to her friends on 30 September, Priscilla bicycles to an abandoned fort on the Jamuna River perhaps to have a last glimpse of the sunset in India. On 1 October she is found dead with 16 stab wounds. Hindus had organized a big procession to take the issue finally to Ayodhya site. Priscilla's separated parents plan to visit India to view the site of their daughter's death and also to talk to her friends about the circumstances leading to her death. The mother remembers her past family life especially her daughter's qualities. She meets Help-Us worker, Kadambari. She visits Priscilla's room, does not find the scrapbook which her daughter was very fond of using. She visits Zalilgarh hospital with Kadambari and goes back with her divorced husband to the USA. She senses her daughter's love affair with Lakshman, but does not know the truth about her daughter's death; she knows only the official version.

Scenes of Delhi airport and features of Priscilla's parents' comments on the heat and dust of Zaligarh are given in detail. We feel we are actually in the hot climate in Zaligarh. A brief talk between Rudyard, Hart and Mr. Diggs who meets some local Hindu leaders including Ram Charan Gupta to know the politics of the riot is mentioned. Priscilla describes Professor Sarwar's perspective on the riot and writes about the

SP Gurinder Singh's version of the riot and his association with the District Magistrate (DM), V. Lakshman. She writes to her friend about her first meeting with the collector of Zalilgarh, his arranged marriage, his wife Rekha and daughter. She likes the DM but makes it clear that she is not in love with him. She feels obliged to the DM for his help in making her know India and also the Hindu-Muslim conflict. Priscilla feels that she has found Mr. Right in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Priscilla writes about her love relationship with Lakshman. She writes to her friend about Fatima Bi's incident in which she had to face a tough time when she (Fatima) suggested to her husband to think about birth control as she could not cope with seven malnourished and sickly children. The feminist angle where helpless women fight for survival and their unwilling submission to their men are dealt with. She has her meeting with the SP, Gurinder Singh, at a dinner at the DM's house and describes The Independence Day and her intimacy with and longing for the District Magistrate comes out.

She writes about Fatima Bi's call and her abortion in her husband's absence. Superstition factually gives into awareness of medical facilities and seeing reality for what it is. She seeks her friend's advice as to the expected turn her relationship with the DM should take in the given situation and also informs her about the cruel treatment Fatima had to suffer at her husband's hand for aborting the unwanted pregnancy. She

shares her intimate moments with the DM and wonders if the DM also is in love with her.

The diary-like entry is given by the scholar to show the precision and clarity with which Faction is brought out in an epistolary style. The style here is that of the text itself. Both the textual as well as story categorization show that it is the credibility of the reading and not the structure that matters in a novel. Supporting the epistolary form, Michael McKeon says, “. . . a claim to historicity is inextricable from its epistolary form” (357). A survey of the tables show that *Riot* ships **back and forth in time**, before and after the murder. When the murder of Priscilla Hart takes place on 30 September 1989, the narration goes long back down memory lane and also takes an excursion into the future of the story. Tharoor, while allowing his pen to go back and forth in an innovative style, also authenticates the pseudo-reality mingled with the fictionality of the novel. The whole novel is set in 1989. This year has been selected for historical reasons. It is the time which led to the major Ayodhya episode.

Going by all the entries of the novel, it is evident that the events start on 2 February 1989 and end on 16 October 1989. So, it uses an actual timespan of only eight and a half months. Going by the various historical events in the book, the readers get a bigger canvas of encompassing the events of pre- and post-1989, for example, the Hindu-

Sikh Riot in 1984 and the Ayodhya incident in 1992/93. One commendable aspect of the whole work is that Tharoor has given a historical event a lot of fictional value. If the “Afterword” of the novel is considered an extension of the narrative, Tharoor also refers to the declaration made by the various affiliates of Sangh Parivar regarding “commencement on the construction of a temple in Ayodhya in March” (269). Facts of history have been exploited by the novelist to bring fire and dynamism to the novel, and in turn, to make the novel highly interesting. Tharoor, while advocating the importance of historicity of time in his novel, gives us a perfect example of Faction in *Riot*.

Tharoor remarks:

I think the best crystal ball is the rear-view mirror. . . . it is part of the writer’s job to recapture moments of history. . . . My novel stands as a portrait of a time, of tendencies that were brought to the fore, the genie that was let out of the bottle and could not be put back. I felt we should take that genie by looking it squarely in the eye. (qtd. in Roy, www.shashitharoor.com 2001)

When taking the subject matter of the novel seriously, one realizes that different narrators help in weaving the **fictional plot** more closely into the **factual raw material**.

A young American lady researcher doing her doctoral degree at New York University spends ten months in a small town of Uttar Pradesh working for a female population control awareness programme. Just before she is to leave for New York, she is murdered. All the narrators try to place together what could possibly have led to her murder. In conversation with Shobori Ganguli, Tharoor agrees that “the novel is about the knowability of truth, the emotional as well as the rational” (Tharoor, www.shashitharoor.com 2001). The irony of the situation is that from the local politicians to civic and public authorities including a foreign correspondent, everyone has been able to come to know the truth which is, in reality, the fictional truth. When there are several unresolved questions, there is the difficulty of telling the untold. The helplessness on the part of the narrator as regards to the untold is perhaps inevitable. A work of Faction does not necessarily provide a readymade combination of fact and fiction. The Factional narrative, on the other hand, abrogates the legitimacy of fact and fiction and invites the reader to partake of meaning construction along the response-inviting and self-reflexive structures of the text.

In the interview between Katharine Hart and Lakshman (253-54) in spite of a clever dig about the circumstances in which her daughter Priscilla lived and died, Katharine Hart is not satisfied with his response. In the same interview she also refers to the fact gathered from her

daughter's letter that she was in love with someone with authority. Lakshman very ingenuously tries to brush her doubt aside. However, she tries to reconstruct the untold on the basis of her intuition and conviction of the facts from the correspondence she had with Priscilla, and ignores Lakshman's explanation. Looking at the whole scene from the viewpoint of Lakshman, it seems that he is terribly helpless to suppress the urgency because of its far flung implications. Tharoor exploits the tension between the told and the untold to unravel the different facets of human drama which again is an effective technique to bring about Faction.

The whole novel travels through the eyes and voices of different narrators, flitting between all kinds of documents like news clippings, personal letters, note books, journals, scrapbooks, private conversations and transcripts of interviews. The omniscient narrator no more leads us through the dark and circuitous corridors of history. That is why we witness a first person narrative in which the identified speaker relates everything from his or her point of view. This type of narration renders the novel a realistic touch. In the case of an omniscient narrator, the writer leaves behind a deep seal of personality on his characters. But in Faction, the narrator among the multiple narrators gets the freedom to shape his / her views and philosophy. Tharoor, while talking to Sandip Roy-Chowdhury, explains the value of this ability to enhance: "In describing Zaligarh from Mrs. Hart's perspective, I had not just gone on

to visualize the town, but to ask myself what a middle-aged, intelligent but fairly conservative American woman would notice about it” (Roy-Chowdhury, www.shashitharoor.com 2001). That means Mrs. Hart’s description may be exaggerated in a positive or negative way, but that exaggeration would make it seem more real.

Riot portrays different types of conducts of people, attributes, philosophies, religions, loves and hatreds. Therefore, it is difficult to show just one point of view and naturally, a multitude of narrators are having different points of view. Tharoor, in *Riot*, acknowledges the suitability of this particular narrative structure, which in any work of Fiction, brings a multiplicity of perspectives. He further elaborates that this special feature of Fiction enables each character to have his/her own voice, whatever be the biases, prejudices and levels of comprehension/incomprehension.

Though the movements among the various points of view facilitate the readers’ sense of **contrasting perspectives**, some examples will make the point clear. Ram Charan Gupta in the story is an extremist firebrand Hindu who feels the Taj Mahal is actually a Hindu Temple, whereas Professor Sarewar believes in India’s pluralism but by no means is he a representative of the majority of Muslim opinion. The character Fatima Bi likes the idea of birth control but her menfolk threaten Priscilla Hart with serious consequences if she continues to influence Fatima’s thoughts.

Finally, the themes of juxtaposition used by the narrators also render greatness and Factionalism to the novel. To put differently in the novel, a national narrative has been sharply contrasted with the narrative of individual love and loss. This brings the work closer to the category of the great novels of the world. Actually, Tharoor tries to raise big issues like communal peace and harmony and population control using the lives of ordinary people. Further the narrator's views of romance, conventions and historical realism not only creates a pleasurable tension but also gives a momentum to the novel because of the fusion of romance (fiction) and history (fact).

The multiplicity of stories in the novel, resulting from an experiment with Faction, contests the linearity of narrative as well as the hegemony of beginning, middle and end. Further, the presence of several narrators is aptly justified because the writer requires different perceptions in an attempt to know the unknowable truth. Here again, there is a **fictional search into truth**. It appears in a world where cause-and-effect relation is not always tenable; we need to understand history in an alternative way, using our imagination too. Here, history does not seem to have a rational unfolding but a chaotic succession of events in which these narrations randomly clutch bits and pieces in a futile attempt, to make sense of this work. In spite of all these, the narration has to go on, using Faction, because it is perhaps the only force capable of healing painful fits

and weeping wounds. Additionally, the plot of the novel justifies the way **Time** has been treated. Though the story actually spans only eight and a half months, which is from 2 February 1989 to 16 October 1989, it takes the reader much deeper into his / her personal as well as collective memories and imagination.

A synthesized view of *Riot* shows Shashi Tharoor chronicling the mystery of Priscilla Hart's death through the often contradictory accounts of a dozen or more characters, all of whom relate their own various versions of the events surrounding her killing. Who killed the twenty-four-year-old Priscilla Hart? Why should anyone want to murder the idealistic American student who had come to India to volunteer in a woman's health programme? Had her work made a killer out of an enraged husband? Or was her death the result of a xenophobic attack? Was she involved in an indiscriminate love affair that had gone out of control? Or, was she simply the innocent victim of a riot that had exploded in that fateful year of 1989 between Hindus and Muslims? These are the most relevant questions this novel addresses.

Though separated from him, Katharine feels a tinge of pity for her husband and Kadambari takes her to the women's ward of the Zaligarh hospital. She is able to see some of the women Priscilla was trying to help. When the sick nineteen year old—Sundari, who was 75% burnt, tells the story of the torture from her husband, Rudyard, Priscilla's father,

expresses the wish to sponsor her with education and care and a lot of money. She feels a new respect for her husband (245). The author has recorded the happenings of October 14th, 15th and 16th in a diary-like-form—the very idea of a diary evokes a semblance of reality but the substance in these pages is naturally pure fiction.

The time-space in the narration here, swings irregularly from October 14th to October 5th to October 3rd and then again to October 16th to move on again to October 7th. But it has to be remembered that, though the diary entry is a Factional technique, the writings are from different people in their own different diaries during different days and timings. The unity is maintained only in the chain of incidents that lead up to and then culminate in the catastrophe.

Rudyard says, “But there is one thing I should have said to you a long time ago. A very simple thing: ‘I am sorry’. It’s never too late to say you are sorry, is it, Kathy?” (263). Though made-up, these words touch the reader as if he experiences the apology. Priscilla’s scrap book of 1988 is a book of sheer poetry with an incurable romanticism. A lonely house had become a rendezvous for Lakshman and Priscilla. Her scrapbooks are full of sketches, poems and letters revealing the loveliness and nobility of her character. She is on a par with the sweetest and most innocent Shakespearean heroine, Desdemona. The character has been given the qualities of perfect Indian womanhood to enforce reality on the Indian

reading mind. Yet Priscilla is also a realist at times. She says, “. . . appearances are more important than truths . . . loyalty is all one way, from the woman to the man. And I am in love with an Indian. I must be crazy” (63).

Lakshman's marriage, love and sex life are described in detail. The need to be one with Priscilla but the inability to break the sacred Hindu marital rites and bonds are lamented. As the District Collector, he takes action while the riot is on. Priscilla dies while she was in the early stage of pregnancy. No one can ever say whether her death was accidental or not because she got trapped in the place of agitation, or during the agitation, Fatima's enraged husband Ali might have stabbed her for trying to make his wife think and act independently. Though there is dramatic monologue from many characters, the soliloquies, journals and letters of the protagonist Lakshman are given a lot more weightage than those of the other characters; quite a few of them can come into the category of principal characters. While Priscilla is on the emotional plain, Lakshman is on the practical and down-to-earth plain and therefore factual. The mystery of Priscilla's death is not solved. It is never meant to be solved. The mystery shall remain a **myth**, yoked with **fantasy** as well as **fact**.

Shashi Tharoor's third novel, *Riot*, confirms that he strives for novelty in his fiction. Novelty was a prominent feature of his very first novel, *The Great Indian Novel*, a narrative about Indira Gandhi's

usurpation of civil rights during the Emergency and Tharoor's quest for novelty continues in *Riot*, a love story set in recent troubled times of communal tensions in India. Since he adopts a mixed narrative mode of postmodern bricolage, telling the story through newspaper clippings, diaries, letters, interviews, journals, notebooks, and scrapbooks, the tone of the narration is continually shifting, as is the point of view. But technical innovations apart, Tharoor presents his characters with sensitivity and understanding, deftly bringing out the complications of a multicultural society. A motivelessness is seen in Priscilla's murder. Like Iago in William Shakespeare's *Othello*, Priscilla's killer is a motiveless villain, i.e. he is a villain for the sake of being a villain. He is 'villainy' personified.

The search for Priscilla's killers runs parallel with the search for clues to the deaths of two locals that sparked the riot, and also with a search for the historical facts about the Ramajanmabhumi-Babri issue. All are in vain, however, for in a multicultural and pluralist society, such things as truth are necessarily pluralistic, as the novel makes very clear. Set against self-righteousness and communal violence, *Riot* acquires a poignancy that is sure to move critics and readers alike with its powerful fact-fiction fusion.

In an interview with Tharoor in the *Harvard International Review*, the interviewer asks:

Your most recent novel *Riot*, focuses on an American girl who is killed in a riot, while working for a non-governmental organization in Uttar Pradesh. Was this *Riot* inspired by a particular incident, perhaps the 1992 demolition of the Babri Mosque? (Tharoor, "A Diverse Life" 78)

Tharoor answers this question by saying that the book was actually set in 1989, and it was based on a period in Indian contemporary political history when a group of Hindu zealots led an agitation that ultimately led to the 1992 mosque demolition. In 1989, there was a movement to consecrate holy bricks and carry them to where the Babri Mosque stood, in order to build a temple to replace the mosque. That movement actually did cause real riots in late 1989 and he had a first hand account from a friend who was a District Administrator at the time. Tharoor was also struck by the tragic death of an American young woman named Amy Biehl in South Africa in 1994. Here was somebody who had gone to do good and had been murdered by the very people she had been there to help; by black people who could not look beyond the colour of her skin. Though this had no particular direct relevance to India, the image of this foreigner caught up in political turmoil and murdered by the forces of incomprehension, her own and those of others, struck him as very powerful. "The two merged, this image of the young woman and the story

of the riots, and I put them both together and created my own fiction” (78), says Tharoor.

Tharoor stresses the point that the overall situation of what is seen in India called communal conflict—the religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims—was something that he had been concerned about and written about for some time in non-fiction. According to Rajay Panwala, “Tharoor astutely fastens fiction to politics . . . and ultimately puts forth a tale arisen from the depths of his soul” (Panwala, www.panwala.com). His last book, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, dealt in great part with the notion of the plural Indian identity and articulated a vision with which communal hatred was incompatible. In his newspaper columns in India for “The Indian Express” and “The Hindu,” he had articulated that vision as well. Those political and social concerns were very much present in his thinking and in his writing for Indian audiences. By putting them into a novel, however, Tharoor was able to “reach a different sort of audience and to bring certain issues into sharper relief” (Tharoor, hir.harvard.edu 2002).

When asked whether he saw that constant looking back into the past as being an inherent part of the difficulties that plagued India, Tharoor has to answer the question about the main difference between the United States and the rest of the world, a difference in mentality with regards to the importance of history. The idea of *Riot* in its embryonic

state was a political fact but when the metamorphosis was complete, the finished product, the novel *Riot* became a first-rate love story with a political background.

Tharoor emphasizes that India is unfortunately obsessed by history in a negative way. Many clashes and conflicts have occurred as a result of contending narratives, and those narratives are often based on recapitulations of history, in some cases contrived to make a point for its contemporary relevance and often not in a constructive way.

In short, we receive not only past information about the characters, events and storyline mentioned at that point, but also a glimpse of the subsequent events. Recapitulating the whole work, it can be said that Shashi Tharoor seems successful in his experiments with the narrative technique employed in the novel. *Riot*, with its proportionate and symmetric blend of historicity and imagination, is a typical example of Fiction and it endorses a postmodern worldview where the real is inextricably merged with the representation.

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CHAPTER IV

ON THE THRESHOLD OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS:

A READING OF *SHOW BUSINESS*

Darkness and light, delineating the point of intersection between life and death, between memory and oblivion, have been recurrent motifs in literature. These and other oppositional pairs in aesthetic discourses such as the natural and the artificial, reality and representation, and the materialistic and the imaginative, signify the liminal spaces in every culture, and the 'in-between' existence of humankind. In postmodern literature, especially, these spaces acquire added significance, for contemporary intellectual endeavours are poignantly aware of the thresholds that modern man inhabits.

Show Business (1991), Shashi Tharoor's second novel, exposes the artificiality of the film world centred around Mumbai, India's hub and business capital. *Show Business* as Fiction is a vision of an imaginative world turning on itself. The idea is to show how much people depend on art itself to feel life tangible to some degree. Super filmstar Ashok Banjara lies suspended between life and death, critically ill, in the intensive care unit of a plush Bombay hospital, watching the final rerun of his life. While this is the last scene, typically movie-like, the analysis swings backwards like the flashback of a movie depicting the earlier lives

of all the protagonists. While the rewind session is played in Ashok's mind, visitors come and go, talking, praying, and pleading with him to rise from his coma. Ashok is shown as the prisoner of the technicolour film that plays inside his head. The reader can watch Ashok rise to the heights of Bombay commercial cinema from an unremarkable beginning, encountering again all the people he met and used, along his way.

As a backdrop to these characters is an endless carousel of the major hit films of Bollywood with—a gaudy, exuberant beginning—a never-ending fantasy that takes over important lives completely and transforms them into an astonishing, compelling lie. *Show Business* is many books rolled into one, it is a story about the telling of stories, it is a wonderfully funny tale about the romance and folly of cinema. Perhaps, most importantly, it is a fable of our times, which teaches us that we live in a world where **illusion is the only reality** and nothing is what it seems. We can also see Ashok realizing the universal truth that he is unable to redeem a single moment that has gone by. The chapter divisions and techniques used are similar to a movie script; and *Show Business* is a novel narrated on an epic scale of ambition, greed, love, deception and death.

Shashi Tharoor's first full-length work of fiction, *The Great Indian Novel* (1990), was an attempt to fictionalize the history of modern India. Fictionalization of history, especially recent history, is fraught with

problems. Probably aware of this fact, Tharoor makes a detour. Since the work got rave reviews, naturally there was an air of expectancy about Tharoor's second novel *Show Business* even before it was published. In an interview with *Verve Magazine*, Tharoor says, "I talked to a few directors. . . just to get a sense of it all. The details are right. The physical details are as I saw them. . . I was looking for a new metaphor to explore the Indian condition and Cinema is a marvellous one" ("Verve Man," www.shashitharoor.com 2001).

Show Business, however, is conceived on a cinema scale and apparently lacks the seriousness of Tharoor's earlier work. The novelist adopts an innovative method of giving headings and subheadings to the chapters: "Take One," "Take Two," "Take Three," "Take Four," "Take Five," "Interior Day," "Exterior Day" and monologues by night are given. "End of Interval, Back to Main Feature" (167) is another example. There are screenplays and shootings and film songs (translated into English) and happenings in dressing rooms. The story is told from **several points of view** so as to lend it the aura of an all-things-considered affair. Like all good novels, it has emotions, dramatics and narrative style; yet, it deals with the perennial theme of **fiction and fact**, in this case the glamour that suffuses the personality of a film hero and the hollowness that lurks beneath it.

The hero's life, though claimed to be fictitious, is very much remindful of the life and career of Amitabh Bachchan, the superstar of the Indian film industry. The details of his life, such as his marrying a budding film heroine, his subsequent bulldozing of his wife to keep her out of films, his brash romances with other screen sirens, the fabulous amounts he received for his rabble-pulling histrionics, his sickness, and his forays into politics are well known to readers in India; and the reality of that life is far more interesting, complex, imaginative, and challenging than its fictionalization by Tharoor. The life of a man relentlessly speeding along in the path of wealth only to end up at the heart of darkness is dealt with. Something of this man's redemption is attempted in *Show Business*.

The world's biggest film industry is not situated on the western parts of the United States of America but can be found, a couple of oceans away, in India—in Bombay, to be precise—where, year in, year out, at least nine hundred gaudy, fantastic, escapist, preposterous, action-musical-romance-epics are churned out in various languages to entertain the subcontinent's movie-obsessed masses. It is not Hollywood, it is Bollywood, it is filmi land, and it is show business.

This is the setting for Shashi Tharoor's exuberant and cleverly moulded second novel of Fiction. Graham Smith contends on the nature of the genre, novel: "The novel's ambition is panoramic, even hugely

so, and it seeks to create, in the very act of unfolding its story to us, a sense of lives being lived in relation to social forces. On occasion we see private lives juxtaposed” (162). The story of *Show Business* is the career of a socially well-placed but indigent theatre actor. Ashok Banjara goes for the big bucks and the colossal fame of being a star of Hindi cinema. Somewhat to his surprise, he succeeds almost at once, and his second film, *Godambo*, launches him into the role of a dashing matinee idol virtually overnight. From there on, there is no stopping him. He marries his co-star, fathers a set of triplets, makes fifty trashy and lurid films, acquires great wealth which he salts away in a Swiss bank account, and beds anyone who takes his fancy.

The effortless rising arc of Ashok’s celebrity reaches its apogee—or so it seems—when he is persuaded to abandon the dream factory for politics. His father—the Minister of State for Minor Textiles—is persuaded to resign his post for his famous son. But here the seeds of destruction are sown. Ashok makes an appalling film, *Mechanic*, ostensibly to dramatize his new-found piety and proper humanitarian principles, but the film turns out, instead, to be his first flop. It is enough to get him elected, but he discovers that, fame in Bollywood does not parlay automatically into success in political life.

Worse, when he is caught in a scandal, Ashok has to resign his seat. Moreover, the reverberations of his political downfall have

irredeemably tarnished his screen image. In India, cinematic heroes strip away the veil of fantasy at their own peril. Facing penury and in disgrace, Ashok tries to revitalize his film career but discovers he cannot get a role. In desperation he agrees to start his comeback in an even lower rung of the Indian film industry, by starring in a quasi-religious, mythological film, playing the god Kalki, come to right wrongs and visit destruction on the corrupt and evil. In the course of filming a crowd scene, Ashok's flaming sword causes his horse to bolt. He is thrown, the flames ignite some costumes, and the entire set is torched, with dozens of fatalities ensuing. A comatose, badly injured Ashok lies in a hospital, visited by family and friends. **Irony heaps itself on irony:** unconscious, steadily weakening, he is unaware of the fact that his star has never been higher—his heroism has been transformed into something approaching sanctity; the entire nation prays for his recovery.

The portrayal of Ashok is both affectionate and fierce. He is quite prepared, when required, to act in a film that includes both his wife and mistress, and, on his public relation man's instigation, to fornicate with Cheetah, a loathsome gossip columnist for *Showbiz* magazine, in the interest of getting his name mentioned more frequently and positively. He decides to suffer her out:

My lips remain locked into hers and I am aware of the pressure of her teeth. They feel as if there are about two

thousand of them, each as large and strong as a key on Gopi Master's harmonium. She must chew *neem* twigs before breakfast, and unfortunate actors after. As I try to move she half-rises, mouth still glued to mine, and pushes me down with a firm hand. Boy, she's strong. The other hand is pulling my T-shirt out of my waistband. Christ, this is *serious!* (71)

Cheetah imagines that Ashok wants her but the fact is that he hates her. Films in India are subject to severe censorship; until very recently not even the chastest kiss was allowed on screen. A scene could be set in a bar, but the hero was never to be seen actually drinking anything, in case it reflected badly on his character. Musical numbers which fill Hindi films are mimed, very badly; to recordings. The miming makes the scene look real. Ashok tells us with his characteristic derision:

I turn up at Himalaya Studios and am hustled into costume: synthetic sweatshirt, blue baseball cap, unfashionably unfaded jeans and canvas shoes. A dirty white handkerchief is knotted hastily around my neck. I am some sort of a local tough, defender of the neighbourhood and general all-purpose good guy, who will, of course, go on to demolish the villains and marry the rich heroine. (76)

What makes *Show Business* particularly impressive and accomplished is its elaborate structure, a mix of first-person narration, synopses of Ashok's dreadful Hindi films and resentful and accusatory monologues by the supporting cast. The effect is to fragment and rearrange the chronology of the rise, fall and rise again of Ashok Banjara in a way that replicates the crazy razzle-dazzle of the Hindi film world, but that also permits Mr. Tharoor to comment, with telling irony and insight, on the curious parallels between India's unique film culture which is **fiction** and the swarming, baffling and beguiling variety—the vivacity and corruption, the serenity and chaos, the sophistication and naïve self-delusion—of India itself which is **fact**. *Show Business* is a clear work of Faction because what the readers feel as fact about the same initialled counterparts in the Bombay film world come as fictitious names and characters in the novel.

Show Business does not so much attempt to blend facts with imaginative fictions, as define the contours of the factual and the fictional. The novel explores the technique of Faction at two levels. On the one hand, facts are enhanced and rendered in the filmi masala style to be made more interesting. On the other, it explores the thinly veiled encounter between the superficialities and hypocrisies of the world of Bombay filmdom, and the deeper insights—psychological as well as social—of the individual consciousness face-to-face with the reality of

death. Faction in this novel acquires the additional vigour of bringing together an awareness of the inescapable constructedness of reality and conversely of how fictional identities become reality. The narrative seems to assert that contemporary societies have lost the capacity to distinguish between the real and the artificial, between light and darkness.

The techniques of **dramatic monologue and soliloquy** are used here to bring about Faction. Ashok Banjara, a public school product and Secretary of Shakespeare Society at St. Francis College, and son of the Minister of State for Minor Textiles, chases an ageing actress, Abha, trying to further his career by pleasing her. He succeeds to a certain extent by succumbing to her physical needs.

Pranay, another actor, narrates his lifestory. He envies Ashok for everything and compares their career lines. After the film, *Godambo*, three films of Ashok and Maya are released. Maya is India's heroine; Ashok makes her stop acting and marries her; Pranay is heartbroken. He calls Ashok a hypocrite, a crafty fellow.

Ashok meets with Radha Sabnis, the dangerous columnist who, writing like a cheetah, ends with a growl. He decides to win her so that she would stop slandering him in the gossip column. He hates her and thinks of her as “. . . this embarrassment to the species lighting her cancerous weed” (71) and drinking a lot of his champagne. After getting inebriated, she sort of rapes him thinking that sex was in his mind for her

all the time. He gives in, hating it, only thinking of his survival from her dangerous pen. Cyrus, his public relations agent, who stands by Ashok faithfully, is described in a friendly way as “who looks for the entire world like a bewildered owl at daytime” (72). His wife Maya is tired of his lack of attention and tells him of her plan to go back to films. But her pregnancy prevents it. Ashok is always at the studios going from role to role, costume to costume. He meets Mehanaz Elahi a stunning starlet, and falls for her head-over-heels. He regrets marrying Maya. But they both keep up the show of made-for-each-other-couple for business interviews and cover photos. In his spells of introspection, he condemns himself for his selfishness and is aware of his own shallowness of character.

The shooting of the film is given with all the details of the studio, humming with machines and technicians, lights, sets, directors and assistants make up, dialogue, action, etc. It is a typical Bollywood story of twin children getting separated, the semi-mad mother and one twin spotting the other twin, with stunts, romance and sentiments in between. Mehanaz is cast as a pseudo sister of the monkey man twin. Her father who had brought him up saving him from orphans had asked him to marry her off to someone like him. The foundling twin brother inspector Ashok marries her. The tailored story is made with convincing tangibility of real lower middle class India.

In “Take Three,” Maya is very upset. She is weeping at his change. Ashok does not pay any attention to his wife, triplet girls, or the house. A full-swing-affair goes on with the glamorous and sexy Mehanaz. Everyone inside and outside the industry knows it. But Maya is too proud to acknowledge it. In the sets, Ashok does not mind flaunting Mehanaz and his enjoyment with her. He realizes the differences he felt when he met Maya, how he felt like protecting her from every watching eye. Mehanaz is to be enjoyed in public / private. His bank account shows that he is earning a lot. He does not know what to do with it. Money as per Bollywood was to be spent as visibly as possible, but none ever talked about it. Maya announces her decision to act again. In a triangle type of script, Maya plays Ashok’s wife and Mehanaz plays ‘the other woman’, he understands her frustration and the reason for the decision. Ashok tries to dissuade her. But she has made up her mind. She is confident that after seeing the movie, the entire, public would say about her “Woh Kaisi aurat hai!” (145). Cyprus Sponerwalla, his faithful agent tries to talk him out of such a film in vain.

The original version of the entire script of shooting is given in the chapter “Dil Ek Quila.” It is as if one is watching the movie itself. Godambo the villain-hero of the previous movie appears here as well. In “Dil Ek Quila: The Second Treatment,” a hillside in Kashmir is shown. Ashok has been hospitalized. Mehanaz’s impersonation of Maya and the

wife coming to the hospital to expel the mistress are described. Even though it is an imagined story, the **fact** about jealous wives and polygamous husbands is made clear. There is a lot of satire thrown at the meaninglessness and absurdity of Hindi movie stories in general.

“Take Four,” the next chapter, shows Ashok trying to win his father’s approval in vain. The father disapproves of Ashok’s desire to join politics. Still Ashok wants a change from the world of **fiction**, only to be disillusioned by **facts**; the election campaign is headed by his wife Maya talking to ladies and children. Details of the election and a lot of political know-how are described. Ashok meets his guru who was an old friend, a master in Vedanta and Jesuitism. He also wants Mehanaz, who is getting a little too awkward for him right then, to be taken off his hands. From the fantasy world of a mistress, man always wants to get back to reality—his home and hearth.

In the chapter “Mechanic,” the detailed story of a movie in which Mehanaz gives a lift to a mechanic to his cheap dwelling is given. In the film, he is elected by the people. He gives a Pranaam. The movie ends with “This is not the end, only the beginning” (242). In the next monologue related by Ashwin, he eulogizes Maya. A mention of Malini, Ashok’s theatre days’ friend, is made. He hopes that when and if Ashok comes to power, the accident can even be a rebirth to his degraded and declined political life. Even Radha Sabnis, the nasty foul-penned critic

“growls” to Ashok, in her magazine, “...all is forgiven. We need you, lover-boy” (254).

In “Take Five,” Ashok realizes his mistakes. Maya as well as his secretary are bored with him. An actor’s make-believe life is more thrilling and fulfilling than an MP’s life in the thick of social reality. Even the Prime Minister avoids him. His negative roles as mafia king and black money holder in films stand against his political “Mr. Clean” image. His political career is finished. His father is very angry with him and even beats him with a stick as if he were a boy. Ashok is dismayed and unhappy. His world of reality is shattered, and he longs to escape into his favourite escapist world of fiction.

Now that his political career has gone down the drain, Ashok returns to Bombay and finds that nobody wants him. Even a producer who used to bow before him rebuffs him. Tool, his old friend cum guru, gives him a merciless yet honest appraisal. The important and decisive chapter “Kalki” comes now redoubling the fiction in the form of a **myth**. In a mythological movie produced by a Tamilian, Moorthy, Ashok acts as “Kalki,” the manifestation of God who is to come, as the destroyer of evil doings as well as evil doers. Ashok realizes that his going into politics had left a gap which was now getting filled with less costlier and more co-operative actors and finds no other way. He agrees to act as “Kalki.” His last film “Mechanic” was a flop and his black money scandal had

finished his reputation. So, no producer would touch him. There was only “Kalki” for him, a timeless memory to cherish.

The entrance setting is described. Coming in a sumptuous gleaming carriage drawn by healthy impeccable white horses, Kalki takes a beaten up victim, an old woman with flowing white hair, and promises that he would come to her rescue. The great horseback sequence is shot. To control the crowd outside, the studio gates are shut, which proves a fatal mistake. Kalki’s resplendent finery and look of righteousness changes to bring retribution to a faithless world. A flame seems to spurt from the sword seeing which, the horse bolts. The stallion runs wild, fire catching hold of and scorching everything and anything in its way. Twenty seven bodies are scorched, producer Moorthy among them. “Banjara has contusions, concussions, broken bones and burns. But he survives” (292). The fantasy tinsel world crumples into reality and ashes.

The last chapter “Voices” is very apt in its title because Ashok in a semi-conscious floating stage feels that he hears the voices of all the people in his life who knew and cared for him, in spite of his grave defects and major weaknesses. The **multiple voices** of fact-fiction-fusion are realized, as the redeeming fact and reality in his life. Pranay is not sad if Ashok dies because his departure would make things a lot easier. He hates Ashok for his meanness to Maya, whose emotional needs have grown to vast proportions and her physical needs have also been taken

care of by him. “The fact that I gave her my love made her, ironically, a better wife to you . . .” (297). For he adds realistically, in the course of discovering her love, “Maya, our Maya bore you my son.”

Ashok hears the voice of Kulbhusan, his father, Ashwin his brother, and lastly his wife Maya. She seems to say, “Now I see you lying there, and I have no words for you anymore. You wrote me out of your script Ashok. You left me nothing to say” (300). Ashok, in his dying state, sees all of them in a fast forward condition: “you are out of focus. . . the celluloid has caught fire. . . . Your shadows interweave with the flames in my mind, your silhouettes shift on the walls in a spectral dance, the flames flicker in your eyes, I am now falling endlessly through the flames” (306-7).

Ashok sees and takes in everything. He is in a stage between consciousness and unconsciousness, between light and darkness. He cannot discriminate between truth and imagination. Fact and fiction keep converging to and diverging from his thinking process. In his severe pain he sees that the son—though Maya his wife is the mother—is not his. He has hallucinations of Pranay, Maya, Mehanaz, Tool and others. But he ends his story in a note of optimism. Truth shall win over a lie. Some one will arrest the villain for the crime. “. . . Some one will gather the crowds for a joyous celebration and then, only then, will it be, only then it can be, The End” (307).

“Ashok Banjara was invented in 1972 by a subeditor of JS magazine in Calcutta,” says Tharoor in his acknowledgements (309-10). But none can deny that Ashok Banjara’s first initials coincide with that of Amitabh Bachchan. It may or may not be a happy coincidence of incidents but the entire novel with its stream of consciousness style with an abundance of monologues and soliloquies, and film details necessitate a nutshelling process as given above for the sake of coherence and codification. While the reader leafs through the fictionalized novel, consciously he reads between the lines too, to detect facts one cannot contradict.

Throughout the novel, different dramatic and poetic techniques are used, to enhance its Factionality. An author during creation is not really bothered into what genre his creation would fit in. He uses consciously or nondeliberately many –‘isms’ and **formations** and they in turn enhance the readability. Tharoor in this novel has taken up the difficult task of correlating and writing disjointed thoughts and actions of film people known for their quixotic temperaments and verbal battles. But the techniques and the poetic devices that he uses here enhance the Factionality. Even if each technique is illustrated with different examples, we can see that the common function points towards an understanding of Faction. An order of pagination has been observed to do the same: “I can’t believe I’m doing this” (3, 67, 127, 199, 259). Ashok

Banjara's chapters start with this sentence. This **encore** or **refrain** is used not only to improve the sonorous effect as is usually done, but also to give a ponderous effect and credibility to the character. The 'I' or the first person effect is complete and the super ego of the person is also established. When the film "is perhaps a hit, and then she is getting a lot of other parts, she doesn't have to earn on her back" (17). An extremely loathsome idea of prostitution is treated very **euphemistically** here. "What happened? Where is the villain? He had an urgent appointment with destiny," Ashok says (22). This is a master understatement about a man who had just met with a horrible death. The awesomeness is minimized.

Describing a widowed mother in a long sleeved blouse, white pallav covering most of the white hair on her head the narrator says, "She is draped in the colourlessness of chronic bereavement" (25). What better example of a **metaphor** can there be? Abha the great star narrates her life to the then budding star Ashok. She comments on her hands: "I hate their shortness, their stubbornness. . . that is probably a genetic trait. I come from a long time of insecure, nail-biting failures" (53). There is something appealing, something pathetic in the revelation of this proud woman. Here is the description of a tie which is a magical symbol of material success:

You've never stumbled into a big star's closet and found the most incredible collection of ties in the world, a real parade

of ties, red and black and blue ties, ties with stripes of every known width and colour, plain ties and polka-dotted ties, ties with the badge or shield of an exclusive club on them, ties in silk and rayon and polyester and cotton, broad ties and narrow ties, ties with discreet little designs and ties with psychedelic patterns. The most pointless article of clothing in the world, devoid of purpose, an anachronism even in the climates where it's wearable, a flagrant luxury in our country: what an advertisement for this star's success, that he could afford to throw away so much money on so many useless foreign ties! You wouldn't understand what I felt, Ashok Banjara. You've never reached up, awestruck, to touch these ties and brought the entire rack down upon your head, so that you sat swathed in a riot of colours, held down by a *dharna* of textures, trapped in a *gherao* of ties. You've never bent down to pick them up, one by incredible one, and rearranged them lovingly in that remote stranger's closet, knowing the distance that stretches between the stranger's world and your own, even as you touch and feel the dimensions of that distance. You've never vowed, Ashok Banjara, that one day you, too, will possess a

collection of ties like that, more ties than you will ever find occasion to wear. (53)

The long passages reveal the reality of interior India. Pathos strikes at the reader's heart that pulsates along with these ugly **truths** brought out in a work of **fiction**. The description of all the aspects of the tie is long and monotonous to a certain extent, but, so is life -long, descriptive and dull. “. . . the City is the perfect setting for the melodramatic contrasts of extremes of wealth and poverty, and the jostling of strangers in an abstract way,” says Graham Smith (190). We get a piece of hardcore **reality** in the prostitute Sunitha's words: “It's not much work and it seems to make them so happy,” she said innocently (55). “Imagine if some producer wanted me to sweep his floors instead, or clean out his bathroom. Now that would be much more difficult. I'd hate to do that, even for a role. But to give him sex? It's so easy, and sometimes it's even fun” (55). Realism is at its peak here, a kind of down-to-earthiness seen in Sunitha is unconscious and therefore natural. She calls a spade a spade, that is all. **Colloquialism** with its special adaptations is seen here and there: “Not everybody in movies was born into it, like me and all the Kapoors or lucked into it, like you” (57). The character because of her background gets away with her coinage ‘lucked’ because she has been successful in her communicative skills.

On Indian women, Tharoor shares thought-provoking ideas. In the novel, he describes women who are sexy and provocative and women who send a man's libido level to zero:

There are some women you look at physically, judge them primarily by what you think they'd look like under all those yards of cloth that Indian tradition and Indian tailors conspire to ensure they're swathed in. Then there are women you can't possibly think of that way—older relatives, for instance, or some of the asexual buffaloes with hairy moles on their chins you run into at Crawford market, browbeating the butcher. (58)

What a woman is and a woman should be are entirely different. Every man imagines a perfect woman, though it may be far away from practical reality. In this connection Tharoor tells us what is the epitome of womanhood, the quintessence of femininity.

But somewhere in between, there are women whom you relate to quite differently, women who are pleasant and attractive, may be even beautiful, but whose physicality is not the first thing that strikes you about them, perhaps not even the second thing. These are women with a certain other quality, a grace, a gentleness, an inner radiance that

surrounds them when they smile, or speak, or move; women
you can love, or worship or hope to marry. (58)

Tharoor employs the technique of parallelism in juxtaposing the ideal image of womanhood and its reality. In the above-quoted lines, the ideal image of the ‘Bharatiya Nari,’ a prototype for Mother India herself, respected by the Indians and the rest of the world, is projected. This image, however, is almost unattainable and is at odds with the image of the real but imperfect woman. Our attachment to British or foreign things even when we have these in plenty is seen in “nearly thirty years since Independence and we still associate pink skin with healthiness” (76), which is an example of **jingoism**.

Tharoor has resorted to **poetry** occasionally to intersperse the story with a light touch. The inferior quality of the poems is purposeful:

I shall get him
He won't escape.
I won't let him
Stay in one shape. (93)

You are my sunlight
You brighten my life
You are my sunlight
Come be my wife. (168)

My heart beats for you,
 I'd perform feats for you,
 You are the landlord of my soul
 My eyes light for you,
 I'd gladly fight for you. (170)

This is an example to show the use of **rhyming**:

You and me, locked in a room,
 With only each other for comfort
 You and me, locked in a room (177)

This takes us to the reality of a famous Hindi song “Hum Tum ek Kamre mem Band ho” where Shaadi or wedding bells are tolling in the distance.

We can see plenty of **hyperboles** in some of the other verses.

I am drawn to you like a moth to a candle,
 Your heat is more than I can handle,
 I am lost, and without shame,
 I singe myself in your flame,
 And fall at your feet like a sandal. (109)

Again the narrator writes:

You are the landlord of my soul;
 My eyes light for you,

I'd gladly fight for you,

Without you I don't feel whole. (150)

Quips and quibbles are common in this novel. For example, Mehnaz Elahi in her lament to Ashok Banjara says: “. . . not your lawfully wedded wife, but your awfully bedded wife” (185). “Elementary my dear hot son,” (294) exclaims Pranay in his thoughts about Ashok in typical Sherlock Holmes style.

Salma retorts **alliteratively** to Mehanaz about Ashok: “a married man is still a man; a married man doesn't have to stay married if he's a man” (186). “Creamy shoulders blouselessly bare” (233) is yet another one. Naivete and candour are seen throughout in Tharoor's realism. Mehanaz laments Ashok's ingratitude and callousness: “when you'd had enough, when you'd tried every position you wanted to try and got bored with the familiarity of me beside you, you just spurned me. You pretended not only that I didn't exist but that I had never existed” (193). **Extension** is seen on the word 'existed' here; **personification** of an organ viz. 'neck' continues in a lament. “You were so interested you didn't even ask me how my neck was feeling” (193). The use of Indian English lends originality to the character of the beautiful but illiterate Mehanaz Ilahi.

Another example of **neologism** is seen in “I realize now that Cyrus and I weren't the only people to have 'thunk' this particular thought” (201). Adaptation of the English language to suit the purpose is done

ingenuously here. A lengthy dialogue takes place between Ashok and his Guru / old pal Tool. Tharoor has resorted to a mixture of **philosophy** and **spirituality** to give an impression of transcending the realm of reality. The Guru tells Ashok what sort of a framework he would give to Bollywood in general:

‘What I will give Bollywood,’ he explains, ‘is a philosophical framework for its ills. I’m thinking of calling it Hindu Hedonism . . . The idea is to let people continue doing all the venal things that they are so successful with, but teach them to feel good about them rather than guilty. Done something you feel bad about? You were only fulfilling your *dharma*. Was it something really terrible? Well, you’ll pay for it in your next life, so continue enjoying this one. Guilt? Guilt is a Western emotion, a Judaeo-Christian construct we only feel because we are still the victims of moral colonialism. The very notion of ‘sin’ as some sort of transgression against God’s divine will does not exist in the Hindu soul and should be eradicated from the Indian soil’. (219)

The idea is not to seek forgiveness for sin and liberation from guilt, but to escape ultimately the **reality** of the entire human condition, to be liberated from space and time and the endless cycle of birth and rebirth.

The only sin is violation of dharma, which means not doing what the situation obliges. Arjun, having moral scruples about killing on the battlefield was in danger of violating his dharma, whereas when he fought and killed he was upholding it. Tool says:

. . . not the kind of thing your Westerner with his Judaeo-Christian moral code can easily live with, eh? The Occidental wants to die with no sins in this life to pay for; the Indian should look on death as an opportunity to experience immortality, with the sins of this and previous lives rendered irrelevant. (220)

Western scepticism and oriental superstitious beliefs are briefed. Tool says explicitly what is man—the Reality, and what is illusion—the Unreal. The endless cycle of birth and rebirth in which the Hindu believes, is real to him. But it can be a spiritual fantasy to another, a non-Hindu. Still when he continues in sentences like “After all, we are a country that still believes in handing professions down from father to son, the way the caste system came into being” (295) and then again, “Bollywood may still be a meritocracy but it is a meritocracy tempered by genes” (295), a poignant use of **sarcasm** and **parody** is discernible. Sentences like “she tries to insert a gold teardrop into a perfect earlobe” (12), show rich **imagery**. Again ideas like “lip synching the obligatory inanities that an invisible tape in my head plays back to me from a dozen

remembered screen scripts” (67), “I needed her laughter to shorten my hours” (58), “like a mouse evaluating a cheese of uncertain provenance” (13), “for in Agra, you can’t help noticing the Taj” (12), his brother Ashwin “had grown up attached to my shirt tails like a surplus shadow” (8), “one hand behind my rump like a bureaucrat seeking a discrete bribe” (9), and countless other sentences illustrate a breadth of perception and a mastery over literary expression. Enriched with all these poetic devices and many more, the reader of *Show Business* is taken into a dizzying whirlwind of fact and fiction.

Faction is brought out in *Show Business* through **satire** and **humour**, this being a novel dealing with the lighter entertainment side of life. Through the mishaps and heartburns, leg pulling and backbiting running rampant, the rise and fall of economy, white hot passions and red hot hatreds, the novel explores the intersection between appearance and artifice, between fact and fiction, which forms the lifeline of the film industry. All seriousness and no levity would have made *Show Business* dull.

Hence the author, while telling the story in shifting monologues, has not forgotten subtle humour and thought-provoking satire. While his satire makes us raise an eyebrow at the subject or nod our heads in agreement, the humour gives an amused quirk to the corner of our lips or at rare times, produces guffaws of laughter. Ashok swears to himself

about the ageing actress Abha. He says, “Oh Christ! I am not Christian, but fourteen years of Catholic education has taught me a fine line in blasphemy” (9). Abha is a lady with a fiery temper: “Abha’s rages are legend: she is efficient and professional and even occasionally pleasant, but once her temper is aroused flames leap from her tongue singeing wigs at sixty paces” (10). A director is derided for his lack of quality: “Calls himself a director! He couldn’t direct air out of a balloon!” (14). As for Abha the insatiable nymphomaniac in making love, or war, “. . . surrogates just aren’t good enough” (68). Ashok says while he is being seduced by Sabnis:

But no amount of practice would have prepared me for kissing Radha Sabnis. I am buffeted by a mistral of cigarette fumes, then swept away into alternate waves of asphyxiation and resuscitation. Holding my own in the exchange is like trying to out-blow a vacuum-cleaner. I am still orally imprisoned, eyes shut in breathless disbelief, when I feel her fingers explore my teeshirt like a skeleton searching for a burial place. (70-1)

During lovemaking, his hands touch something softer and fuller than he could have expected in her anatomy. “The appendage seems vaguely familiar like an old friend discovered in a strange country” (71). Ashok Banjara, when questioned by his public relations official Cyrus

about the incident with Abha, goes into uncontrolled laughter: “. . . in huge whooping bursts that startled my public relations agent, who looks for all the world like a bewildered owl woken unexpectedly in day time”

(72). The love songs are caustically nonsensical and comical:

I – I – I – I – I luff you,
 Don't you see it just like new
 It's the moment to see the light,
 Sweetie let's dance tonight. (105)

Satire takes on a prominent and noteworthy role in the novel. The film producers who invest money in the industry only to hoodwink the public and make money are called “. . . the manufacturers of mass escapism” (7). The gorgeous luxury of black money and the extravagance that the hyper-rich stars indulge in are given through a description of their houses with a more than enough number of bathrooms. Pranay lived a poor boy in a slum. Occasionally when his father in his meagre capacity got an invitation to visit a star's house on a wedding day or Diwali day, it was a great day for the poverty-stricken boy who had to get up at 4.30 a.m. to get hold of a bathroom commonly shared by eight families:

At the first opportunity I would go into the bathroom—one of the bathrooms, because they all had so many in their homes—and just stand there, on the marble or mosaic-tiled floor, just breathing in the reality of being in a bathroom

like that. I would run my stubby hands along the chrome towel-racks, caress the porcelain sinks, open the shower just to imagine what it might be like not to have to dip stagnant water out of a plastic bucket each time you had a bath. I would sit on the commode even when I didn't need to go, unravel the toilet paper—who in Matunga had even heard of toilet paper?—and roll it back again. (52-3)

The reality of a rich man's life is far removed from that of the poor. The poverty-stricken boy Pranay recalls his childhood in the houses of film stars. A chance to wash his ugly and work-hardened hands was a fantasy that turned real:

And I would wash my ugly and calloused hands. Incessantly, obsessively, wash them. I would make repeated visits to every bathroom in the rich guy's house and wash my hands, running creamy soap over the rough skin, over fingernails I had nervously bitten down to the very edges. I can't remember very much else of what I did at those places, but I would always come home with the cleanest hands in Bombay, the skin of my palms dry-white and wrinkled with all the water I'd poured on them, fragrant with the delicious, unattainable, unplaceable smell of imported soap. (52-3)

Star bathrooms and their unbelievable and unnecessary grandeur are made fun of here. For a poor man, such richness is much like a fib of the imagination; it is **fiction**. Poverty is his **reality**. The author makes fun of Parsis in general who take their surname from their profession. Cyrus a Parsi, is Cyrus soda-water-bottle-opener-wallah. It should be very difficult to convert a “. . . liability like that into an exclusive, distinctive slightly exotic-sounding name that fits on visiting cards . . . ” (68). There are lyrics like:

I shall get him
 He won't escape
 I won't let him
 Stay in one shape. (93)

And another one like:

I shall catch him
 By surprise
 I shall match him
 Size for size. (93)

These are like the crap lyrics and tunes that are turned out from Bollywood with no rhyme or reason. The author feels that a character touching another's feet in 'pranaam' or utter subjugation is ridiculous. It is highly hypocritical and misleading. If one were ever in doubt as to the North Indian conservatism of the makers of Hindi films, one need look no

further than the number of times their characters touch each other's feet. Some of the producers expect the same of their supplicants, and they do not always stop at the feet either. The show of respect or acceptance of the other's superiority is nothing but sham. Hindi films have an uncanny knack to show the absurd bordering on insanity. There is a party taking place but for those in any doubt there is also a red banner outside the entrance, which announces in bold white lettering: WOMEN'S COLLEGE. FANCY DRESS PARTY. IN AID OF POLICEMAN'S BENEVOLENT FUND (194). Had anyone suggested to the scriptwriter that no women's college in its right mind would have associated itself with such an event, and that even if it had, it would not have called it a 'fancy dress party' or misspelt 'policemen,' the objector would have been given a lecture on the creative necessity of artistic licence.

The misspelling, however, would have been attributed, not to the signwriter at Himalaya Studios, but to conscious realistic attention to detail—for which there is always a time and place in the Hindi film. One of the last digs Tharoor takes in this novel is at the censor board that throws discretion to the wind when caution is needed. *Show Business* teams with these and many more instances of **humour** and **satire**, two interesting media the author uses ingenuously and nonsparingly to bring out the **Factional** aspects. But, with all said and done, Bhuvana

Sankaranarayanan's words are noteworthy: "Media intrusion is one of the prices paid by celebrity status. . . . Yet, celebrity has its perks too" (4).

Show Business thus articulates ambivalent relations and spaces in the margins, evincing a compelling picture of the postmodern condition. The story of filmdom is told in order to compensate for the lack of reality in real life—how the factual life draws its life blood from the richness of fiction, that is, art (film) / and reality. Sometimes, the barbed arrow of experience is in the readers' hearts. They can neither endure it nor draw it out, for, with it flows their lifeblood. Such is the case with **Faction**.

A STUDY OF *FACTION*
IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
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CHAPTER V

INDIA: FROM MIDNIGHT TO THE MILLENNIUM:

THE FACTION OF A NATION

Shashi Tharoor embarks on a journey from the millennium trying to find the answer to the paradox that is India, to discover the essence of Indian identity. It is proposed in the present chapter to bring out Tharoor's forthright discussion in *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997) of sectarian violence that has ripped the country, the corruption that is rife in the ranks of the Indian Administrative Service and the difficulties that face a nation in which forty-eight percent of the population remains illiterate. Tharoor's optimism about the future of India and the Indian is highlighted. Tharoor's commitment to democracy and his upholding proclamation that, with all its faults, democracy as it is practised in India is better than the alternatives, is being elucidated. Secondly, his commitment to India's pluralism, the greatest asset of the nation, contributing to its identity as singular as well as plural, is examined. His commitment to secularism with its concomitant virtue of tolerance and his opposition to religious fundamentalism are also brought out in detail. The chapter seeks to establish that the imaginative organization of facts ultimately contributes to the Factional fabric of the narrative.

India turned fifty years old in 1997. What has been the story of those fifty years? What does the twenty-first century hold for India? Tharoor recalls his feelings about India when he was nineteen when he wrote articles on the Indian situation. A year after that, boys and girls very much like him, children of executives in Hindustanized multinationals accustomed to ease and privilege, came out in the streets of Calcutta and Delhi, threw off the apolitical detachment and campaigned door-to-door to unseat an authoritarian government. They asserted the sense of belonging Indians had already lost. In this book, Tharoor proposes to argue that India “. . . is the most important country for the future of the world” (3). The Indians stand at the intersection of four important debates facing the world at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the next one. They are:

The bread vs freedom debate.

The centralization vs federalism debate

The pluralism vs fundamentalism debate

The ‘coca-colonization’ debate or globalization vs self-reliance. (3-5)

While analyzing the work, Rajeev Srinivasan says, “The modern India he describes possesses entrepreneurial spirit, diminishing corruption and a strong sense of democracy” (www.rediffindia.com 1997). Since the century has begun with Indians accounting for a sixth of the world’s

population, their choices will resonate throughout the globe. In the entire book, Tharoor embarks on a sweeping and highly personalized examination of contemporary India. It is not a survey of Indian History; it is instead, a **subjective** account of the forces that have made and nearly unmade today's India and about the India that he hopes his sons will inherit in the second half century after Independence. Tharoor's books are not for easy reading. They tell stories as they relate history. He says in an interview with *Verve Magazine*: "My point of view is in India. From Midnight to Millennium—that's where I have nailed my colours to the mast" ("Verve Man," www.shashitharoor.com 2001).

This book is a paean to India; yet it emanates from the pen of a man associated with the United Nations for the major part of his official life, who has lived outside India for the most of his adult life. He can feel the multiplicity of India and connect it to his career in the U.N. which also works in plurality. The variety in itself is integral to his idea of Indianness. "The singular thing about India is that you can speak about it only in the plural" (Tharoor, www.rediff.com 2000). This is the story of the India he knows with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions etc. Tharoor feels: "Every Indian must carry with him in his head and heart his own history, that is, his story, of India" (6).

What makes so many people one people? Colonial administrators depending on the imperial project came up with the old Roman maxim—

divide and rule. Amputation came with freedom. Mahatma Gandhi refused to celebrate Independence because he saw it as a betrayal. But in spite of the communal hatred and riots that lit the midnight sky as the new country was born; there was reason for pride and hope. Nehru who took over did not think or talk for the lower strata of Indian society. He was an over-educated visionary according to Tharoor.

The most striking feature of the first year of independence was the absence of Mahatma Gandhi who was killed by a man who believed that Gandhi was pro-Muslim. Gandhi was idealistic, quirky, quixotic, and determined, a man who answered to the beat of no other drummer but got every one else to march to his tune. In 1983 Richard Attenborough won eight Oscars for the film *Gandhi*. The film's triumph might have changed the world forever. But did Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi triumph at all? The debate about the film was focused more on the man than his message. Gandhi's life was his lesson, his message. The film is discussed and critiqued in detail by Tharoor. The book throws light on Gandhi's politics and character, viz., lack of separation between beliefs and action. The political 'reality' of India is rendered imaginatively in such a way that the popular conception of reality is debunked and the 'real' behind the 'real' is revealed.

'Satyagraha' was a word coined by Gandhi. He disliked the English term, 'passive resistance' because 'satyagraha' required activism,

not passivity. The policy of non-violence is defined and explained by Tharoor here. It was essential to accept punishment willingly. Gandhi felt that if you believed in truth and cared enough to obtain it, you could not be afraid to be passive; you had to be prepared to suffer for truth. Martin Luther King, more than any one else, had used nonviolence most effectively outside India. He said that Christ furnished the spirit and motivation and Gandhi furnished the method. But in Gandhi's own day, nonviolence could have done nothing for the Jews of Hitler's Germany, who disappeared unprotected into gas chambers or from the flash bulb of a conscience-stricken press. Gandhi's opinions on other things are discussed. Tharoor agrees with some but disagrees with the others. But Gandhi's ideals had a tremendous impact as the founding principles of 'New India.'

Gandhian ideals are of tremendous relevance in the contemporary world torn by wars, sectarian strife and terrorism. The principles of the world of the spinning wheel—non-violence, fortitude and self-reliance—are becoming imperative in India as well as the rest of the world. In the new millennium, what is called for is a retrospection into and revision of post-independence India's trials and triumphs, and an investigation into the relevance of Gandhian thought in present-day India.

However, the Gandhian and the Nehruvian traditions took untoward turns in the course of Indian history. After the general elections

of 1996 the question was “Will she? Or won’t she?” (23). Will Sonia Gandhi the Italian-born widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi enter politics? If she did, for how long will it be? Not only was Sonia a ‘foreigner’ and a Roman Catholic in a land where fewer than two percent of the population share her Christian faith, but also she was reserved, intensely private and famously antipolitical; her reluctance to allow her late husband to entangle himself into India’s murky political life was legendary. But calls to change her mind were made every day. Sonia was the nation’s ‘Bahu’ and the destiny of India was soon to be in Sonia’s hands.

One of the lessons we learn from history is that history too often teaches the wrong lessons. Factual **history** can take on **fictional** proportions. The Nehru legacy to India is described with absolute candidness. Nehru died smitten by the China war into which he had blundered. There was no obvious successor. Tharoor then goes on to describe the history of the succeeding Prime Ministers till the ascension of Indira Gandhi. For many Indians of Tharoor’s generation, The Emergency was the seminal event of their political maturation. While writing about his life in America as a student, Tharoor takes up the cudgel for his country to rather unwilling hearts. The news received from Indians coming from India was very discouraging. For most Indians of the middle and upper classes, the Emergency was by and large welcome. The

Emergency became the defining experience of Tharoor's political consciousness. Sadly, Nehru's daughter had betrayed her legacy.

After Sanjay Gandhi's death, Indira Gandhi expelled any leader who was standing in her own path or who might have been a threat, or a potential rival. She drafted the one person she could entirely trust—her self effusive, nonpolitical and reluctant elder son Rajiv, to fit into the hierarchy (37). Rajiv had barely begun to grow into the role when Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated; she herself had primed, along with Sanjay, for narrow partisan purposes, the Sikh terrorists. "Operation Blue Star" is explained by the author with a firm assumption that she nurtured her own snakes that bit her. Mrs. Gandhi—ever tentative in wielding the power she was so skilled at acquiring, hesitated to respond to the Sikh's interest of A. S. Atwal's murder—she made a mistake there: Countless Sikhs saw "Operation Blue Star" as a betrayal and turned against her. That her own trained 'bulldogs' would not attack her was a figment of her imagination.

Yet it could be seen that the unity and diversity of the land which were very genuine went hand in hand with miracles and myths, especially those pertaining to Kerala. During their annual visits to India, Tharoor and family started learning about destroyed mosques, betrayed trusts and flames of communal frenzy burning. The Babri Masjid was burnt down in 1992. The meaning of 'secularism' had been distorted by the changing times. The India born in 1947, firmly separated temple and state.

Secularism in the contemporary scenario is a politically charged concept based on prejudices and biased views.

The India Tharoor visited in December 1992 did not seem to cherish that ethos. The national mind had been afflicted with the intellectual cancer of thinking of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Hinduism is the name others applied to the indigenous religion of India. Tharoor is happy being a Hindu and he gives many reasons for it. The Babri Masjid issue was a shameful deed of the Hindus. He says on the work under dissension: “Build Ram in your heart and if Ram is in your heart, it will little matter where else he is, or he is not” (56). In 1990 the Mandal Commission came into being which again brought to the fore, issues of religious and caste divisions within the Indian society, and the ethical dilemmas of job reservations for the underprivileged. Tharoor acknowledges that social and cultural identities are formed in the country through violence. Hindu fanaticism, according to him, is partly a reaction to other chauvinisms (58). The Muslims say they are proud to be Muslims, the Sikhs say that they are proud to be Sikhs. The Hindus say that they are proud to be “secular. . . . Hinduism is no monolith. Its strength is found within each Hindu, not in the collectivity” (59).

Tharoor is proud of his Hinduism. He takes pride in its diversity, in its openness in religious freedom. Defining a ‘Hindu’ is a foolish cause. History takes its own revenge. All his life Tharoor has started the day

with a morning prayer to Ganapathi. Description of Ganapathi, the remover of obstacles, is given; Tharoor's attitude towards the given Puranic version—the legends of Ganapathi, acquired from his late grandmother, is related. In September 1995, statues of Ganesh had begun drinking milk. Different opinions, like those of the rationalists and the believers, are given for this. Ganapathi statues absorbing large quantities of milk were real and visible. But the aura of religiosity and miracle attributed to it was an imagined fiction.

There was mass hysteria in Houston in America, in an Indian home during this affair. Tharoor fed milk and a Ganapathi idol drank it. He kept an open mind. Maybe there was a rational reason or it was a miracle. There was a mixing of the **fact** which he saw and the **fiction** of what they believed. He has an affection for Ganesh, “a god who—overweight, long-nosed, broken-tusked and big-eared—cheerfully reflects our own physical imperfections” (66). After all, a country with many seemingly insurmountable problems needs a god who can overcome obstacles. While narrating the habits of Keralites, he tells how typical a Malayali he is. Keralites are the chameleons of India. They can adjust anywhere. One part of the secret of Kerala is its openness to external influence. Arabs, Romans, Chinese, British, Muslims and Christians have all gone into the making of the Malayali people. More than two thousand years ago St. Thomas was received by the Zamorin of Calicut. Vasco da Gama, when

he tried to pass trinkets off as valuables, was thrown in prison. The Malayalis are open and hospitable to a fault but they are not easily fooled. They **mix fantasy with reality** only when the result is a pleasurable equation. In turn the Malayalis brought their spirit to the world. “Shankaracharya the Advaita philosopher lay the foundation for reformed and reviewed Hinduism, Aryabhata was another contribution” (61).

Kerala took everything from others and gave a lot to the rest of India. Many Keralites migrated to north India as clerks. Kerala embodies the Malayali miracle. Tharoor’s experience as a student in north India makes him say of Keralites who will adjust to any situation outside Kerala as well as India. The Malayali ethos, the Indianness—an India that denies itself to some of us, could end up being denied to all of us. It would be a second partition; the partition of the Indian soul would be as bad as a partition in the Indian soil. Tharoor here makes a presentation of glaring facts. The fiction is in the Malayali mind, a mind capable of imagining any possibility irrespective of any adverse fact.

Centuries of intermixing has given India the world’s most heterogeneous population, with respect to skin colour, varying even within the same family. Colour differences eventually gave rise to caste divisions that have run deep in the Indian soil. The caste system, especially in Kerala, has undergone drastic transformations, but caste is still a pressing reality in the country as a whole. A dalit woman stripped

and paraded naked in India, even after fifty and odd years of independence, is nothing but reality.

Inequalities persist. Caste is a factor in the mobilization of votes. There was a politically led social revolution. If the poor scheduled caste boy Charlis made it to the Indian Administrative Service, Tharoor predicts an even better future for his progeny. He asserts that even when an Indian belongs to a majority group in the country, s/he would at the same time belong to minority groups as well. Tharoor asserts, we are “all minorities in India” (112). The government recognizes seventeen languages and 22,000 dialects. Hindi is understood by the population, but that too is not the language of the majority. Ethnically, a name reveals where a man is from. When we introduce ourselves, we are advertising our origins. Though all castes have things in common they differ in practice from state to state, example, a Kashmir Muslim, and a Mopplah of Malabar are believers in Islam, but different in terms of culture. A man simultaneously has **many identities**. For example, Shashi Tharoor is a Malayali, a Hindu, Nair, Calcutta bred, Stephanian and so on. In his interactions with other Indians, each or several of these identities may play a part. These varied identities link him to a group as well as project his differences within that group. In that sense, multiple identity serves to highlight the uniqueness of each individual. The difference in the religious rituals and choice of deity within the Hindu community is an

instance of distinction within a group. Such common factors, taken as facts from a larger perspective, prove to be fictional.

Even after fifty and odd years of independence, religion has become a key determiner of political identity. The ban on *Satanic Verses* is an indicator of this. But religion was irrelevant in the advancement of military, business, sports and cultural figures of the Muslim community. Air Chief Marshal Latif, Mohd. Azharuddin, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, M. J. Akbar (India's youngest journalist) are a few examples. In all such cases, Indian pluralism worked neutrally by ensuring that religion was not a handicap or an obstacle to career advancement, indeed it was no factor at all. The secular Indian state has granted major concession to its minority religions. Amartya Sen, the Harvard economist and Nobel Laureate of India, is quoted here. Nationalism is neglected by Hindu leaders. Sen says:

Not for them the sophistication of the Upanishads or the Gita, or of Bhrahmagupta or Sankara, or of Kalidasa or Sudraka; they prefer the adoration of Rama's idol and Hanuman's image. Their nationalism also ignores the rationalist traditions of India, a country in which some of the earliest steps in algebra, geometry and astronomy were taken, where the decimal system emerged, where early philosophy—secular as well as religious—achieved

exceptional sophistication, where people invented games like chess, pioneered sex education, and began the first systematic study of political economy. The Hindu militant chooses instead to present India—explicitly or implicitly—as a country of unquestioning idolaters, delirious fanatics, belligerent devotees, and religious murderers. (qtd. in *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* 134)

The facts of a great religion are rendered a fictional colouring by them. If there is fact-fiction fusion, it is done in a negative way by the Hindu militants.

In the five decades since independence, we have failed to create a simple Indian community. Language and religion have around the world proved themselves as an inadequate basis for the unity of a nation. Nations are formed due to varying and divergent impulses. Examples are France, Thailand, Germany and the U.S. What is **real** for some of them is false or **make-belief** for the others. India cannot claim ethnicity as a uniting factor since what Indians have in common is only a generally recognizable type which they share with Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Lankans, Maldivians and Nepalese, with whom India however no longer shares a political identity. A third element for uniting nations is language. K. J. Yesudas sang Hindi songs written in the Malayalam script. But an Indian Prime Minister reading out the Hindi address on Independence

Day in vernacular script is a startling affirmation of Indian pluralism. The reality of pluralism bases itself on the capacity of a nation to forget the past traumas upon which it built its edifice of unity. **Historical amnesia** is an essential part of nation-building. Nonetheless, Indians inhabit the threshold of past, present and future; they wear the dust of history on the forehead and the mud of the future on their feet. Ultimately, what matters in determining the validity of a nation is political will. Nehru's views on India and the Indians are detailed and an analysis of his *Discovery of India* is done to show how **fact** and **fiction** intermingle.

Swami Vivekananda had made two famous speeches. "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" generally means that each man has his own law and his own fate, his own path of life to follow; but this is generally preached not practised. Nehru, an agnostic, never visited a temple in his life, wrote in his will to be cremated, and ashes thrown by air over India especially over Ganga. Though the mixing of his ashes in Ganga was a fact, that he was a believing, puritan Hindu was not true. One way of making pluralism work in practice as a force for progress rather than confrontation is to harness its diversity for common endeavour.

On August 6, 1993, fifteen thousand Indian expatriates assembled in Washington Hilton for a global conference titled "World Vision 2000." There were only advertisements signifying nothing. The expatriate feels guilty of not involving himself in his homeland affairs. But his nostalgia

is based on the selectiveness of his memory; it is a simplified, idealized recollection of his roots. Tharoor depicts many aspects of the life of the non-resident Indians and provides elaborate stories of Indian immigrants in the U.S. and Canada. Liberal Immigration Act of 1965 came into being and the direct descendants of Indians settled in many countries all over the world, their **myth** and **fantasy** of India remaining the same.

Financial contribution made by the NRIs has been a substantial asset to Indian economy. The NRI thrives with hard work, discipline, self sacrifice and thrift. Tharoor gives a list of Indian restaurants in the U.S., a list of successful NRI and edifying experiences of NRI children visiting India. An India-hating NRI syndrome also is coming up. There are both positives and negatives in the NRI's condition—grounds for fear and loathing as well as opportunities to exercise influence on Indian behalf. The NRIs represent an enormous potential for constructive contribution in India. The involvement of NRI with the Indian predicament is symptomatic of the perpetual pull of the motherland; whatever you feel about her, Mother India never really lets go. The problems in India are **facts**. The NRI wishful dream is the **fiction**.

Tharoor goes on to enumerate the impact of the Emergency and other urgencies on the Indian psyche. Democracy is an engine rather than a vehicle; it is the engine that powers the vehicle of the state. The Emergency framed the “bread versus freedom” debate in India. On

Indians, a senior civil servant B.K. Nehru said, “We are not indulging in a race with China. . . we want to develop at our own pace, but the fact of the matter is that. . . people. . . do make comparisons” (qtd. in *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* 203). Critics during Mrs. Gandhi’s time started asking what the point of India’s democracy was if it could not adequately feed, clothe and shelter Indians (207). Democracy had prevented economic development and social justice. The question is: Has democracy been more of a **fiction** than a **fact**?

Radicalism, Conservatism, Emergency and its problems—all these are brought out as Mrs. Gandhi’s faults. Abuse, shouting, threats and intimidation became a constant feature of parliamentary life. Bureaucracy was not the only force upholding the status quo. National integration according to the *Hindustan Times* was still a matter of debate. Ms. Gandhi split the Congress party in 1969 because she considered its organization an obstacle to reform. Now, her very success in attracting the bulk of the old Congress to her side guaranteed her failure. So, India’s political democracy, its critics argued, had nothing to do with performance, but everything to do with power. Indira’s existence was **real**. Her hope to succeed was proved **false**.

In modern India too, intellectuals remained aloof from the quotidian concerns of governmental policy. There was a self-conscious divorce of the intellectuals from the masses. The land reform, according

to scholars, was a failure. The factual statements about Gandhiji are real and not theatrical. Was it quiet suffering or impotence on Gandhi's part? The prescription of the sainthood did not work because Gandhiji, though a realist to the core, could neither comprehend nor tolerate nonreal or untrue ideas. However, though people of an artificial realm could not live up to Gandhiji's ideals of truth, they respected him for his principles.

Tharoor vividly explains the global scenario which tears the masks of smug hypocrisy, exposing the stark reality. Now even terrorists and arsonists resort to hunger strikes when caught. The ennobling principles of Gandhism have thus been subverted by such vested interests. Gandhiji's ideals, taken as a fact, are thus fictionalised by today's world. Similar is the case with the Indian public sector companies. In 1992-93, a vast majority of the still extant 237 were running huge losses. Hundred and four companies raked up losses exceeding 40 billion rupees of tax payer's revenue. These were the backlash of the colonial era. In colonial times, imperial forces treated India just as a source of raw materials. But the postcolonial period is no better as Indians were doing themselves in, with corrupt practices.

As far as the automobile industry was concerned, the Ambassador car became popular. The government did not want a repetition of the East India Company, where merchants became rulers. So India relied on economic sufficiency as the only guarantee for political independence.

The Birlas, Tatas, Kirloskars and others thrived in spite of the difficulties posed by the British Raj. Socialism was corrupted and bribery was rampant. Tharoor clearly depicts the official apathy towards industrialisation by comparing the development of Kirloskar of India with Japan's Toyota which began around the same time. Bank nationalization or BJP's replacing Mrs. Gandhi between 1977-80 proved no better to improve the scenario. The cases of Coke, Thumbs UP, and the state of Indian telephones right up to 1990s are analyzed by Tharoor to emphasise his stance. He brings out these facts to tear off the mask of ignorance in the common man.

T. N. Seshan stands for truth, according to Tharoor. Seshan announced that he would destroy the 3 Ms, money power, muscle power and minister power. The election was considered widely dull, colourless, uneventful and boring, but was unquestionably the freest and fairest India had ever known. To the question "Are you Jesus?" "Sorry, I am only Moses" (264-5), was Seshan's answer. Such a man was T. N. Seshan who tried to explode the **falsehood** of the electoral system with his painfully honest, piercing and **realistic** statements. According to Tharoor, elections are only a tool. The entire system needs an overhaul. Now, we have no Snow-white, only the seven dwarfs. India's challenge should be to make democracy better. Tharoor shatters **myths** and false notions about the Indian political scenario. He drives home bitter and unpalatable **truths**.

Tharoor started understanding the new India in January 1996, with elevators, hotels and modern facilities. India's economic reforms focused on the somewhat chimerical Indian middle class. He asks, "Are we so insecure in our Independence that we still need to prove to ourselves we are free?" (278). A change in the new economics of post-reform life in India is seen in the Indian Army. Usually there are a hundred viable candidates for every job but the army is suffering from shortage of officers. Our soldiers, diplomats and administrators are finding themselves poor cousins of the businessmen, bankers and television-talk-show hosts of the new India. Mistaken notions and hard to face, hard to accept facts, which amount to Faction, are interwoven in the book throughout.

Foreigners see our acceptance of the quotidian deaths, many of which now rate only a few column inches on the inside pages of most newspapers, as a confirmation of Indian 'fatalism.' As an Indian, Tharoor asks himself what this daily haemorrhage is doing to the quality of the national blood. In death, as in life, we are not individuals. Tharoor throws light on certain truths that emerge when we penetrate false illusions about our country. For example, though the family is the quintessential Indian social unit, it extends only upto a caste group in a village. The second is the staggering data on air pollution according to the 1996 World Bank study. Finally, Tharoor argues that India's population will overtake that of

China by the year 2020. Tharoor elaborates on how poverty breeds overpopulation. Kerala's literate villagers are compared with the western world. Tharoor finds in his last visit to India that most of the print media people he knew had gone into television. Today's India offers its residents more choices than ever on where to work, but also on what to buy, what to drive, and what to listen to. This development is not imagination; it is a pleasant reality.

Tharoor grew up in an India obsessed with the concept of 'Swadesh,' that is, one's own motherland. He is astounded at publicity stunts by an Italian firm for our cricket match. Amitabh Bachchan and Co. won the rights for Miss. India in 1996. Miss. India contest coverage, reporting the mob's reaction, tarnished India's image abroad immeasurably. Painter Maqbool Fida Husain, was threatened, his works set to fire when he painted Saraswathi in the nude. A politicized Hindu has risen, who reacts to real or imagined slights the way some Muslims reacted to Rushdie. Imagination and reality intermittently confuse the people. The Hindutva leaders are guilty of the worst kind of 'me-tooism.' The only solution to that is to fight philistinism with culture. Calcutta, Tharoor's hometown for nearly three decades, has become a backwater and he is disappointed. The Calcutta that still had the lingering aura of the former first city of the British Empire, Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray; 'JS', India's first youth magazine, many other landmarks and clubs are

cited. Calcutta is described in all its multifarious dimensions. The city is now a hotbed of illusion and reality. The entire Delhi, in all its magnitude, is also described, the archetype, prototype and neotype.

About Indian food, Tharoor says that, where a foreigner says “curry” (317), it just means any dish with a gravy. The pluralism of India is reflected in its cuisine with McDonald’s fast food, idlis and its crepelike sibling the dosa. What food is cooked and eaten, and how, is described. When Tharoor thinks of India, he thinks of “steaming breakfast *idlis* and pungent coconut chutney, of lissome women in saris the colors of paradise” (321). He remembers how, each time he came home; he stood in the sun and felt himself whole again in his own skin. He often fantasises the truthful tastes of those mouth-watering dishes and feels that they are real experiences. There is fantasy and truth, bitter realities mollified with sugar-coated wishful thinking in every aspect of the Indian, from the midnight of freedom to the millennium and after.

Prior to the new year of 1993, Tharoor made a depressing visit to India on 6 December 1992 – howling mobs of Hindu extremists tore down a disused mosque in India’s northern heartland. It was a wanton act of destruction. Three bombs exploded in Bombay’s nerve centres. People at the U.N. asked “Is it all over for India? Can India ever recover from this?” (323). The answers were ‘no’ and ‘yes.’ Was the country too torn apart by ancient and incomprehensible hatred to be taken in the direction

that Malaysia, Indonesia and now even China were going? Was it too vast? He did not know what to believe, what not to believe. **The real and unreal had all mixed up.** Still he feels that a geographic separation will not take his thoughts away from India.

India's vital problems have been the border States, Kashmir and Assam, Punjabi Terrorism which was imported, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and so on. A new consumer culture was born in which sixty five percent were below poverty line and twenty five percent earned less than twenty-five rupees a month. The list of Indian woes seems endless. There is widespread illiteracy. No per capita income figures, no indices of calorie consumption can capture the wretchedness that is the lot of the Indian poor. Why economic progress is difficult is because self-reliance as an end in itself is increasingly irrelevant for economies in today's interdependent world, but individual self-reliance in a free and fair economic environment could yet transform the lives of India's people. Any systematic reform must not favour stability at the expense of democracy. Any political system in India should take into account the diversity of the country. In a pluralist state it is essential that each citizen feels secure in his or her identities where there will be more than one identity for each citizen. Political democracy needs economic content. In a country as diverse as India, the interests of the various groups of Indians will tend to diverge and political contention is inevitable. Even senior

political leaders like P.V. Narasimha Rao, L. K. Advani and Laloo Prasad Yadav are under indictment for alleged criminal wrong doings. Who is who? What is **fact** and what is **fiction** in India now, is the question. That India has entered the brave new world of the twenty first century. Pluralist democracy is our greatest **strength**, but its current manners of operation are the source of our major **weakness**. Faults in the parliamentary system have to be rectified. Change must come to India. Solutions to Indian problems are already being found in the country indigenously by its own people. India is being listened to and respected for its various foreign policies by the major powers of the globe.

Tharoor uses disconnected and disjointed ideas to convey this point. The technique of crowding together ideas as they come is purposefully used to enhance Faction. Fact and fiction do not fuse in the work. But the true, factual version of the pre and post-independence Indian scenario, with the fictionalization of a lot of beliefs, dogmas and superstitions inherent in the racial subconscious of the Indian mind blends beautifully in a subtle, at times even obscure way. One has to have a keen perception to delve deep into the metaphors and figurative language of the work to establish and get convinced that *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* offers a subtle presentation of Faction. Tharoor writes in a free, lucid stream-of-consciousness style, where historical facts intermingle with the dreams and aspirations of the average Indian.

Though he presents the book as history, no authority or historical source is quoted, as in conventional history. The form adopted is that of the novel, which normally originates from fiction.

India: From Midnight to the Millennium rings with more factual theories than fictional renderings apparently. Stephen Coll feels, “The Book’s greatest strength is that on all the most important political and economic questions facing India today, Tharoor has it right—his analysis and prescriptions provide a useful outline for how to begin the next 50 years” (X05). Shashi Tharoor uses the technique of juxtaposition in the work. Truths are said to tear up the veneer of myths, superstitions and false beliefs. Religious mores, norms and customs are elaborated to evoke the unity of the Hindu masses in the diversity and plurality of common India. That the singular India can be conceived and understood only in its plurality is the keynote of this perfect Factional work. Though the book can be called a discourse on Indian politics and political leaders, the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the work cannot be ignored. The presence of other texts and other ideas are very suggestive as well as subtle. Any writer of Faction resorts to such techniques but in Tharoor’s work, in which he brings the whole of pre- and post-Independence India before the reader, he has concrete and mind-piercing ideas very explicitly stated to enable us to look at the wrongly adored and eulogized leaders with our inner eyes open for the first time. The inter- as

well as intratextuality helps him to establish this. While writing about social beliefs and milieus, he neither condemns nor praises such practices. He only consolidates the fact that the Indian mind unlike the western, loves myths, adores fairy tales and extolls puranic feats impossible for the common man to indulge in. The fact that the Indians want religious beliefs, customs and practices as they want air and water is what the author tries to make us understand. *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* is not a political history of India, it is the **fusion of fact and fiction** in the average Indian mind, that he has consciously webbed around India for the world reader to enjoy to the fullest extent. We can see no country other than India where supposed facts turn out to be improbable illusions simultaneously with myths and age old beliefs metamorphosing into astounding facts. Tharoor himself says from the US, in the interview with Diva International 2004 entitled "Licence to write":

In my writing I have focused very much on the things that matter to me about India, in both fiction and non-fiction. I will say though, that a writer really lives in his head and on the page; geography is merely a circumstance. You can certainly look beyond your geography as a writer, and just as people can sit in America and write about the Caribbean (or vice-versa!), so why cannot I as an Indian sit here to

write about India? (Tharoor, www.divainternational.ch 2004)

In an article in *Resurgence Magazine*, Tharoor contends:

If the overwhelming majority of a people share the political will for unity, if they wear the dust of a shared history on their foreheads and the mud of an uncertain future on their feet. . . . a nation exists, celebrating diversity and freedom. That is the India that has emerged in the last fifty years, and it is well worth celebrating. (Tharoor, www.resurgence.org 2005)

Thus Tharoor presents a glorified and nationalistic, yet a stark and authentic picture of India, a country inhabiting the liminal spaces between Truth and Illusion, Fact and Fiction, ultimately foregrounding the heterogeneity and cultural polyvalency of this ancient nation. Tharoor's narrative is an eloquent argument for India's cultural and religious traditions as well as a compelling statement of India's importance in the future of the technocratic world. In an eclectic analysis touching upon contemporary issues as divergent as democracy, religious fundamentalism, Western consumerism and economic self-sufficiency, Tharoor reflects constructively upon what lies in store for the nation and its massive population in the twenty first century. He asserts that India goes on in Truths and Illusions and she shall go on forever.

**A STUDY OF *FACTION*
IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR**

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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CHAPTER VI

PRISMATIC PERCEPTIONS:

AN ANALYSIS OF THAROOR'S MINOR WORKS

Tharoor's collection of short stories entitled *The Five-Dollar Smile* (1990), which also includes a farce, by name "Twenty-two Months in the Life of a Dog," reveals the sentimental, creative and thereby human aspect of the author's mental personality. It is proposed in this analysis to show that however dissimilar and unrelated the stories are, the elements of multiple perceptions and the blending of fact and fiction into Fiction are present in each of them. The stories are individual and independent in plot, construction and theme. While in certain stories like "Death of a Schoolmaster" and "Friends," facts are made to resemble fiction, other stories like "The Boutique" and "The Other Man" are designed in such a way that pure imagination looks real to us and the story or the character haunts the reader's mind for days to come.

An Indian weaving Indian stories has to have every fibre coming out of an Indian loom. The case of Tharoor's novels and short stories are no different. K. S. Ramamurthi reflects on the 'Indianness' of Indian writing: "A novel written by an Indian will certainly be Indian without any conscious effort on the part of the writer, to the extent to which it depicts Indian life and culture, reflects faithfully, the life and spirit of the Indian ethos" (4). Tharoor's short stories teem with Factional elements,

deliberately construed or otherwise. Realism, history or protruded biography, fantasy, imagination, self-consciousness where the author determinately makes us feel his presence in between sequences, stream-of-consciousness, intertextuality, narrative, myth, comedy and redaction, are all scattered in plenty here and there, making Tharoor's minor works, comprising fourteen stories and a one-act play, a beautiful example of Faction. Real episodes of his youthful life, taken in their intensity, sometimes ameliorate and at other times deteriorate and are given to us in a fantasized and fictional text. The background for every story is social reality—but the author communicates this social reality through the medium of imagination—thus every story is a mixture of **fact** and **fiction**. The same is applicable to the farce entitled “Twenty-two Months in the Life of a Dog.”

In the Foreword to *The Five-Dollar Smile*, Shashi Tharoor tells us that after the publication of *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*, a variety of people showed interest in his early work; hence his decision to bring out the present volume. He says that he began writing at a very young age, “his first ‘story’ emerging when he was only six” (11). The stories collected here, however, were written during his adolescence. In fact, one of them was composed when he was fifteen. Tharoor clarifies that he wrote for audiences of mass-circulation magazines and to be published and read, not to pursue an obscure literary aesthetic.

The Five-Dollar Smile is one of the earliest of Tharoor's ventures into fiction. Like the entire gamut of his works, this collection of short stories also attempts a postmodern assessment of contemporaneity, employing parody, playfulness and multiple perceptions. *The Great Indian Novel*, similarly, brims over with playful high spirits, assembling the entire cast from the Mahabharata, the ancient Indian epic, and having them descend upon the modern Indian scene to enact a latter-day version of the events of the epic. In his employment of the technique of playfulness, Tharoor crams into the narrative of *Show Business* stage techniques, screenplays, film songs, makeup-room gossip, bedroom scenes and more, to create a simulacrum of the celluloid world.

The first story of the volume, "The Five Dollar Smile," was an attempt to come to terms with a number of Tharoor's most immediate concerns—the experience of geographical and emotional dislocation, the internationalization of aid for the needy, and nature of the charitable impulse. He tried to write the story from the point of view of the recipient of assistance, rather than the provider of it. Tharoor had often seen advertisements like the one described in the story, and wanted to look beyond their obvious message to the needs and feelings of the children they depicted. Joseph's situation is a universal one—he could easily be an African, Latin-American or Indo-Chinese child, and the story would not change. Joseph Kumaran, the boy hero of the story grows up in an

orphanage belonging to HELP—an international organization for the poor and the needy. One day he is asked to be a model for a photograph—a photograph with the caption.

“Make This Child Smile Again.” (19)

This photograph was to become internationally famous. Joseph became a symbol, even a synonym for the suffering, refugee juvenilia in the world. The photograph touched the chord of sympathy in many a maternal and paternal bosom. People start sponsoring the poor children of HELP. Joseph himself gets sponsors from America. His tearful face involves the sympathy of one couple in America. The authorities of HELP receive five dollars every month for his needs. People said he had the “Five-Dollar Smile” but he is not intimidated. Three couple send money for the “boy in the photograph” and Sister Celine was happy along with Sister Eva and Sister Angela that “Joseph Kumaran’s five-dollar-smile was actually getting HELP fifteen dollars a month” (20).

He is made to write three identical letters of thanks to the three couples. Once, he takes the liberty of showing interest in seeing America, adding sentences like “I suppose it is cooler in America. . . I think I would enjoy America very much . . . I often wonder whether America, has trees like the ones in my drawing . . . if I come to America, do you think I might like it?” (21) as postscripts after the censoring of the letters by the nuns got over. It works. His ‘parents’ express their wish to see their

'adopted' child. Since they would never be able to manage a trip to India, would it not be possible for young Joseph to be sent to America instead? Sister Celine smells a rat. She shows the letter to Joseph and asks, "You haven't been up to anything, have you?" (22). In the end Sister Celine agrees. He is not just a little brown face in a crowd around the gruel bowl; he is Master Joseph Kumaran and he is going somewhere. Joseph boards the plane to America. He is awed and at a loss as to how to manage or conduct himself in the aircraft. He asks and gets a pair of earphones to hear the sounds of the movie shown but has to give them back. Joseph looks at the four year old paper clipping which carried the picture of his face. He experiences mixed feelings. He was not sad to leave the orphanage on a month's holiday to America because he himself had contrived it. He tries to think of the magic of America—the movies, parties, delicious food of infinite variety, outings to the beach and to Disneyland. But his eyes dilate and the photograph blurs.

He does not know why he feels suffused with loneliness more intense, more bewildering in its sadness than he had experienced in the gruel-crowds of HELP. He is somewhere between a crumpled magazine clipping and a glossy brightness of a colour photograph of his foster parents. The story ends simply like this. "On the screen in the aircraft the magic images flickered, cascaded and danced on" (26). To Tharoor, Joseph Kumaran's situation is the universal state of not belonging

anywhere, the vacillation between this and that, here and there, the contemporary state of being 'in-between,' which is another expression of Faction.

Tharoor's position in the United Nations looking after the department that takes care of the problems of refugees in many parts of the world was a **reality** that influenced his life and embedded itself in his imagination. Thus, Joseph the adivasi orphan was born. The insecurity suffered by Joseph is the true experience of millions of inmates in thousands of orphanages today. The boy's **fantasy** about how America would be and how his foster parents would accept him and how they would make him feel wanted during his short stay there qualify the dream of every orphan. The incidents proceed sequentially, though we do not know what would ultimately happen to the Joseph Kumarans of this world. The photographer who would wake with Joseph's tearful and hungry face the collective conscience of the reading public on the issues of hunger and poverty, the caption that HELP had created—"Make this child smile again" is real only peripherally. It has no depth, no true value nor effect. Sister Celine says, "Your photograph is going to be used in a worldwide appeal. You are helping us to get money to help other children" (18). But it is far from the truth because poverty and hunger will remain, child abuse, insecurity and fear will also remain. As the story ends with the aircraft carrying the little lonely seven-year-old towards the

U.S., we hit the brass tacks—the monotony, despair and hopelessness of all the orphans in the world.

Tharoor tries to confront this world in two very different ways—represented here by the almost painful empathy of “The Boutique.” The story depicts with social realism the situation he had felt at first hand. Amma and her teenager son go to attend a sale at a very elite hotel. Amma is always anxious to see how the sophisticated urbans live. Amma’s curiosity has made her come to the grand sale escorted by her son. Amma is overawed by the landing leading to the suite where the boutique is. People in twos and threes stand around, sipping tea served by a uniformed waiter. Looking at the impressive array of shirts, ties and jackets before her, Amma is awed. Then the salesgirl points out to a “Please don’t touch” card among the clothes (30).

The son understands her anguish at the treatment as well as the unexpected price of the shirt and camouflages it by saying, “It is far too big for me. I would look like a scarecrow if I wear this” (31). Amma is not consoled. Just then, a famous radio disc jockey strides in, tall and ruggedly handsome and begins to play with the clothes and flirt with the salesgirls. The boy envies him with all his heart. He feels physically sick. He wants to get out of the ratified air conditioned atmosphere away from the mirrors that thrust reminders at him of what he really is. But Amma says in a loud shrill voice of complaint, “I thought we weren’t supposed

to touch the clothes” (31). An offended silence descends on the group. Faces turn to look at them. The DJ too turns from his flirtation with the ties and the women. Incredulity and hurt writ all over her face, Amma stands still for a moment. Then slowly, resignedly without a trace of bitterness or resentment walks away with him. With a break in her voice she says, “Yes, son . . . let’s go” (32). No one notices their exit. It is as if an insect is removed from a cup of tea. Evading the eyes of passing waiters, they use the stairs. The boy smiles. “We are going home Amma. The usual way, by bus” (32). He feels the pressure of her hand on his arm as they walk slowly on to join the queue waiting for the bus. This is a story that touches and pulls at our heart-strings not through its spectacular developments, but on the contrary, by the softness and mutual understanding that can be seen only in the unique mother-son relationship. That the tie of the umbilical cord never really gets broken and acts as a soothing balm in heart-breaking moments is seen here. The wavelength and mutual coordination of Amma and the boy are perfect and complete.

As the mother and son move away, the latter thinks, “I wanted to pick up a brick, a tile from the pavement, anything, and throw it at the glass front of the building. I couldn’t. I didn’t have the right to” (32). In the world of artificiality and hypocrisy, the softness the mother and son feel for each other makes them accept the realities not only of their

mediocre surroundings, but also of the fleeting unreality of the higher-up world which was fictional and to which they could never really belong.

“The Boutique” exposes certain binary oppositions that define a local culture. It reveals how the society prioritizes money, glamour, youth, popularity and success as against the “Other” it perpetually marginalizes. It takes the reader on a quick journey down the avenues of the social psyche, manipulated by equations of power and financial considerations. The story explores the lines of intersection between appearance and reality, between the private and the public, in everyday life. The cultural encounter that forms the lynchpin of the story offers multiple perceptions of the society, the indistinguishability of one from the other.

“How Bobby Chatterjee Turned to Drink” is consciously different in style and intent. It is also, deliberately, as divorced from reality as the lives of its protagonists are from the world around them. The story has a club setting, a scenario taken after the Saturday Club in Calcutta. The story begins in the quiet premises of the Light Horse Bar where Bobby Chatterjee was sitting alone, staring at his half-full glass of scotch moodily. Bobby never touched the stuff in normal circumstances and considered liquor the cause of all the ills of our society. Now Cedric was narrating Bobby’s woeful tale of love to his bar-mates in return for a

drink. He says that now the confirmed misogynist Bobby had fallen in love with Myra, a fairly popular and beautiful model.

The culmination of the affair came in the form of a verbal invitation from Myra to spend the forthcoming weekend at her Suburban Budge Home. Flight Lt. Rahim Ali of the IAF was introduced at Budge Home. To overcome his insecurity and misery, Bobby decided to dress up in faded jeans with an awkward patch, pull on a bed ragged T-shirt and speak out of the corner of his mouth like Humphrey Bogart not forgetting to drawl like John Wayne or smile enigmatically like Marlon Brando. Bobby was thoroughly upset to know that Myra had found his usual clothes most charming. His put on slur in speech was identified as talk due to ulcers, “like a hydrophobic canine with throat cancer” (41). When requested sarcastically not to pollute her house further with his undesirable presence, Bobby gave her a strained calmpose smile and with a truly ‘majestic’ stride, he walked up the stairs to collect his things.

Once out of the house, he tried to condone her, looking at things from her point of view. Bobby shot like an arrow straight to the Light Horse Bar, there to drown his sorrows in alcohol. By the time Cedric reached thus far, he had managed to get quite a number of pegs from listeners, for his excellent narration. We now come to know that Bobby never even knew about a girl called Myra. What was his drinking session in aid of then? “I placed a thousand bucks on a hot-tip—Happy Boy in

the 2.30—and it came seventh.’ . . . He walked away through the door through which Cedric had just passed” (42). The whole story is thus built around a non-issue, taking the listeners and the reader for a ride, thus problematizing the very authenticity of narratives and truths.

This is a very humorous story, interrogating the margins of fact and fiction, narrated in a light-hearted way. Sentence after sentence is steeped in mirth and Cedric has spun an excellent and credible yarn to a credulous audience. That the binge was about losing a horse race comes as an anti-climax. The fact that a man with a ready wit and the gift of the gab can get away with anything is brought out here in the form of an imagined story. Tharoor is without doubt stretching the limits of fact and fiction here so that one spills into the other, thus debunking the separate identity of either. His narrative proves that contemporary readers have lost the capacity to distinguish between the real and the imagined, and enjoy an irreversible side of Fiction unconsciously.

The art of good and lucid narration without much fancy trimming is seen in “The Village Girl.” For many urbanized Malayalis of the narrator’s generation, Kerala was a world of private inconvenience and mosquito bites, associated with family but not friends. Yet Kerala depicted “green paddy fields and unpolluted air, endless card games, succulent idlis and dosas that never quite tasted the same elsewhere, laughing girls cheerfully picking lice out of each other’s hair, swaying

palm trees against a twilit sky” (43). Sunder had met a lot of Behanjis. But not anyone like the girl he met in his village once. The girl sitting with her hands on her lap looked closer to his real age than his mother’s estimations of it, but she was certifiably a ‘Behanji.’ As far as Sunder was concerned, the flight to the south every year was strictly for the birds. Home for him was always Delhi. So, every year he had to vegetate with his grandparents in Kerala, eat palate-numbing quantities of coconut chutney and attempt to respond in his insufficient Malayalam to predictable jibes about the length of his hair. The girl however seemed to regard him with a sort of light in her eyes.

“Susheela is Narayani Amma’s niece,” said his mother by way of introducing ‘behanji’ to him (46). She had passed S. S. L. C. in the English medium. When he looked at Susheela, she averted her own gaze. Sunder had to grant that she was pretty in a typically Malayali way. His mother asked Sunder to show the garden to Susheela. He was irritated. But there was something in the girl’s expression—part awe, part delight, part anticipation, part nervousness that changed his mind. Sunder stood on the veranda and sensed, rather than saw, the girl’s silent approach. She was standing, her mouth partly open in nervous excitement and Sunder found his perception of the girl widening to take in two more details. First, she was even shorter than he had guessed; second, her figure was as close to female perfection as he had ever seen. ‘Sunder etta’ she called

him. The 'Behanji' had gone and made an elder brother out of him. That was of course, the Kerala custom. He was nineteen but she was only seventeen.

Sunder could not believe that she had never been to a city, not even Cochin. The farthest she had ever gone was to the Guruvayoor temple with her Amma. He then described the city to her. Yet as he spoke, he realized, "the access he offered was illusory; she lacked the framework, the knowledge, the vocabulary to translate what he was saying into terms she could relate to and evaluate" (52). Her father had said that a girl had to graduate from homework to house work. She said quietly, "I am getting married next month. The week after my eighteenth star birthday" (52). 'Congratulations,' yet another formal word with no equivalent in Malayalam, came forth from him.

She told him how the thin, dark widower with the smell of arrack in his breath and a two year old daughter in his home, came to see her. Sunder felt deracinated, urban outrage welling up in him. Unthinkingly; he put a hand under her chin and lifted her face to meet his gaze: "Are you happy about this?" (53). Her eyes glistened. What else other than marriage then? Sunder struggled with anger and impotence, and anger about his impotence. One hand still holding up her chin, he raised the other to her face to wipe away the tears. She suddenly caught it and kissed his palm. Sunder's free hand started for her chin. It fell upon her breast

and after that there was nothing more he could do to prevent what happened. Neither of them spoke. He had destroyed the illusions of a simple village girl, a nervous young thing who called him 'Sunder etta.' He caught her by the arm at the doorway and spoke the only words that occurred to him. "'I am sorry,' he said" (54). Her face lit up with dreams fulfilled, her smile no longer that of a nervous girl but a woman who had touched a happiness she had not expected to be hers she said, "Thank you, Thank you—Sunder" (55). The story of the unsophisticated village girl and highly sophisticated Sunder is told in a very poignant manner. The ending, typically Tharoorish, is a surprise. It also brings a relief to the reader in the sense, that, what is expected to be averse for a girl is relished with enjoyment and gratitude by her. It is not because she is flirtatious or promiscuous. The realist in her accepts the ecstasy with wholehearted eagerness in the same way as she is ready to accept her miserable, ill-fated and frustrating future. She had been unprepared and undemanding, but when the windfall came her way, she was too much a woman not to take it. Perhaps her "Thank you Sunder" speaks volumes.

This one happy encounter may be cherished by the girl throughout her dull and monotonous wifhood, which she accepts with the stoic resignation of a well-brought up Malayali girl, trained to accept what life offers. The momentary joy that Sunder gave her will be the elixir that sustains her through the rest of her life. The Bhagavad Gita instructs that

one should do one's duty without expecting the fruits of one's action. This tradition is seen in the girl's readiness to agree unwillingly to a marriage proposed by her father. She performs the dharma of a daughter. The one and only experience with Sunder could be the best one for her whole lifetime. The Shelleyan slogan—the sweetest songs are those that tell of the saddest thought—is seen in the story of this simple village girl.

The narrative is rendered in a realistic style. The urban-rural divide is foregrounded in Sunder's perception. He describes Delhi: "Big buildings, lots of cars, crowds, concrete. No paddy fields! Water out of taps and not out of wells" (51). His reality is her fantasy since she has never gone beyond Guruvayoor from Palghat. The author uses the device of **self-consciousness** here and there, he writes about the boy's life in Delhi which is really a reflection of his own experiences. Though at the time of writing the story, Tharoor had outgrown the "resentment of this forced discovery" (43) of his roots, he could empathize with the likes of Sunder for whom annual visits to Kerala was an obligation rather than a pleasure. This story is a rediscovery of the virgin beauty and innocence of Kerala. **Autobiographical** slices are thus interspersed to bring about Fiction to give a fuller, truer picture of life, which is a mixture of fact and fiction.

There are a lot of **paradoxes** in the story. The physical tallness and shortness. Urban and rural backgrounds. The experienced city slicker and

the village girl, his happy future and her miserably unhappy future, his richness and her poverty etc. are in such steep contrast that these opposites themselves might have attracted them to each other. But **irony** is at its pinnacle when having completed his physical advances on her, he is too suffused with guilt and shame to find words. When he apologizes, rather than getting offended, her face lights up in the radiance of fulfilled dreams and she thanks him. All these mechanisms give us a short story in the Factional mode, showing the blend of reality and fantasy in human life.

The techniques of flashback, stream-of-consciousness narration and nostalgia are used in the story, “The Death of a Schoolmaster,” which is one of the best in the whole collection of Tharoor’s short stories. It is autobiographical. For a man with no Kerala upbringing, and one who had only visited the state during school holidays, Tharoor’s settings are so exact and precise that it seems a straight-forward account of his own upbringing in Kerala.

Most of the incidents are retold by hearsay. The traditional addresses, ‘Achan,’ ‘Amma’ and ‘Ettan’ lend a very realistic touch to the story. Their twist in fortune, a positive one is described very philosophically. Describing his loving, lovable and selfless sister Thangom, he says:

Thangom who saved her next few days' busfare to buy the needle and thread we never had. Thangom who woke up early in the morning to sew the sheet we had torn the previous night before Achan (Father) saw it and beat us all. Those were days when simple sacrifices meant a great deal.

(144)

A great universal law as well as the great selfless love of a sibling is expressed in fiction. "In any case it never crossed Amma's mind to urge any change upon Achan. He was what he was and it was her duty to serve him and raise his family. Whenever Achan was around, her habitual manner was one of compliant diffidence" (145). The iron hand of a patriarchal family scheme where only men wore the pants is information for Tharoor's non-Malayali reader about Kerala.

Achan had given the tending of land to Balan Nair who in turn took the family for a ride. "The land I use here is mine. I have tilled it for the last fifteen years. Last week I registered my possession of it, quite legally under the new Land Reform Act" (155). The agricultural laws in Kerala, a fact that proved highly beneficial to people who had only possession but no ownership and which literally brought to the streets a large number of lords now without lands is effectively woven into a fictional fabric here. Reminiscential autobiographical elements are used effectively:

My father had instilled in me the view that ideas were unrelated to life. I can remember the shock when I knew Achan had cancer. I can also remember the simultaneous euphoria at the news of my victory at the polls. I am no longer sure whether one succeeded in crowding out the other. (153)

The story again ends with nostalgia. Achan died with a book in his hands. The son was there to gently close his tired eyes. He feels, "I knew that, thanks to him mine would always be open" (156). The story thus deftly interweaves social commentary with personal history and emotional states of euphoria and nostalgia.

A dramatic event, in this case an accident, opens the story "The Pyre." The very first sentence "He died in my arms that night" (95) fans the flames of the reader's interest. The two friends on a sly trip on a stolen bike meet a headlong collision with a tree at night, in an inebriated state. One of them dies on the spot. The narrator is the survivor. "My friend was now slipping sway from my life and his" (95), says he, in the style of a dramatic monologue. He keeps lamenting his folly. "God, I wish I wasn't draxed, I couldn't even think properly. And where, when, how would I go?" (97). The dead boy was the only child of Harijan parents, their only hope in an unjust world, the eldest in a family, the blessed future provider. He was dead.

The funeral is announced dramatically. Nostalgia for his past life, reminiscing another funeral that of his favourite grandfather, is related very naturally and looks too real to be fictional. Racist and casteist antipathy is seen in the prophetic sentence “. . . Ram, and you know what? At the end of the whole bloody thing when I’m finally dead and gone, bloody Brahmins are going to come to my funeral” (100). The Harijan scholars stood in a solemn circle away from the rest. The loss of an ambitious life was of no avail to anyone. Tharoor lost two friends at college to motorcycle accidents, neither of whom were on drugs. The proximity of death was not easy to come to terms with, at the age of seventeen; “The Pyre” was a reflection of his attempt to do so. He deliberately fictionalized every subtle detail, so all that remains of the experience that inspired him is the death itself. Here, Tharoor traverses the boundary of fact and fiction in order to transcend the real trauma of personal loss to reach out to larger questions of human mortality.

In the bike accident, one died and the other one survived. In the morning when they came with daybreak to the scene of the accident, they found the dead man and a spent one, both silent and unseeing. The survivor could not weep. Sorrow required a strength he did not possess any more. He signed the papers, wherever the inspector asked him to. To avoid what he thought was a black cat crossing the path; Sujeet had swerved to one side and crashed head first into a tree branch. The cat did

not exist, not outside of Sujeet's imagination, but the branch did and it should not have been there. The survivor wails, "No, the scooter did not belong to him, no, he did not have a licence, but there was nothing wrong with his driving, inspectors. No, its owner was unaware that we were using it. Sujeet's dead! He's dead inspector. . ." (96). The repeated negation is a **refrain** used to increase the dramatic as well as sonorous effect.

The sentimental dramatic monologue, the main Factional technique that is used in the story, continues in this strain. There is only a single narrator and all the conversation, incidents and the accident are understood through the responses and replies of the narrator. The narration itself is in the stream-of-consciousness style as a flashback of the Harijan Sujeet, brainy and smart but carrying the cross of inferiority complex due to his dalit blood, and who gave up his life due to intoxication. His friend and survivor considers himself unlucky for being alive to narrate the story. The easy camaraderie as well as close emotional tie the two young men had for each other and the feeling of the deadman's fiancée Mira are brought out clearly in the elegiac lament. The funeral is described, with the whole college and hostel inmates attending. As they poured vanaspathi "into the crackling fire the flames leapt higher enveloping the body in its shroud under the wood. And the smoke that was Sujeet rose towards the sky" (101).

Thus a social reality, which is the accident itself; a psychological reality which is the feeling of the survivor; a spiritual reality, which is the inevitable truth contained in the last sentence, combine with the fact that the story itself is pure fiction or imagination, to result in Fiction. The incident, though imagined by Tharoor the story-teller, also tells us many facts of life, namely the evil effects of alcohol and the ruthless oncoming of Death, the Leveller, at His own sweet will.

Demythification of a myth through parody, irony, foresight, satirical narration, and shocking and even jarring human sensibility is seen in “The Temple Thief,” a story curiously reminiscent of O. Henry’s works. Raghav is a thief who tried to rob a temple. All the movable idols were taken and put into a sack. He felt the sweat on his palm making his grip on the torch clammy. Then he walked towards a stone-engraved image of Shiva, sitting impassively in a corner. A shudder passed through him. The temple had been stripped bare already. In this profession, he could not afford to be finicky. This was his feeling as a realist. Thieving was no concept. It was a concrete and real necessity. He laid his hand on the Shiva. Do you really think you are going to get away with this—it seemed to ask. Something held him back. God would understand. God would forgive. He would not punish a sinful devotee for wanting to keep his bread buttered. The eternal conflict of good and bad, which is a reality in everyman’s mind, is seen in the story. The Lingam, strong, potent,

indestructible, stood there, a symbol of the immutability of the Saivite ethos. Raghav prostrated before God. He felt the presence near him, before he actually heard any footstep. The sound of light breathing convinced him his companion was no extra-terrestrial apparition, but an all-too-human intruder. Raghav was well and truly caught. It was a Brahmin priest. A small smile played on his ascetic face.

The priest gently asked Raghav why he had ventured into such a sinful profession. He went on that in the Hindu religion; much was tolerated by the Lord. But to do something at the expense of others; not just of one person, but the entire community which maintained in its worship, the temple and all within it; that was a cardinal sin. Raghav had chosen to prostitute his religion to the deity of wealth, to rob his own temple of an idol. The hapless thief trembled in his guilt. The priest added that Raghav was not beyond redemption. Raghav could be saved. “Abandon your sinful ways, my son. Leave now—but never again turn to this means of living. And may the Lord go with you” (60). Raghav’s eyes widened. He sank to his knees to kiss his benefactor’s feet. Tears streaming down his cheeks, he stumbled mutely past the stuffed sack he had put back, and walked out of the temple. The Brahmin smiled sagely at his retreating back. Slowly, deliberately, the Brahmin sighed, padded soundlessly to the sack, picked it up and walked to the temple doorway. His watchful eyes travelled in every direction, his ears pricked for the

slightest sound. "Then he heaved the sack over his shoulder, cast a surreptitious look around him for pursuers, and disappeared into the night" (60).

The last sentence comes up as a sudden shocking revelation. The evolution of thought in the thief's mind shows his simplicity and goodness. Man is never born a criminal, he is made one. The temple thief has his own logic for his profession. Though he steals from a temple, the religious soul within him stirs. Generations of ethnic dos and don'ts make him seek pardon to the very God, whose idol he steals for a living. The idealism of his redemption is probably predictable. He will not only give up looting temples forever, but also will give up thieving altogether in his entire future. He may beg, he may borrow but he may never steal. Such is the change brought about in him by what seems the Brahmin's piety and holiness and his compassionate advice.

But the Brahmin, high-born and priestly, is beyond the naïve expectations of the reader. The baseness of his soul is bared when he uses his religiosity, intellectual superiority and 'put on' companionship to beguile the poor fellow and makes a cakewalk with another man's effort. The Brahmin, who was rhetorical about sin, is the real sinner. Unlike the priest, the thief is not a hypocrite. But for the Brahmin, who is so called because of his proclaimed knowledge of the Brahma, i.e.; having Brahma Jnana, preaching was as remote from practice as can be. He can never be

forgiven. He can also be taken as an archetype of our modern successful yet benign society-tycoons and magnates for whom as a principle, preaching should never be practising. This is again a story that maps the collapse of appearance and reality, exposing society as Janus-faced and deceitful. The fiction of the Brahmin priest is juxtaposed with the fact of the sin of the thief. The horrendous realization that all fact is contaminated by fiction, that purity, genuineness, sincerity and reality are fictions, dawns upon the reader. Fiction, thus, serves to expose the true nature of society, where fact and fiction have spilled into one another.

“There was something ominous about the statue’s unblinking repose, as if the idol was assured of its eventual triumph over all forces of evil, from atheists to temple thieves” (56) shows the ultimate victory of virtue, symbolized by the idol and later the priest, which itself Tharoor reveals to be fiction. In the contemporary world, virtue cannot possibly win over vice because the two are inextricably intertwined, and one cannot be distinguished from another. In each of the characters virtue and vice are blended inseparably, metaphorically signifying the condition of the contemporary world. There is **satire** in the justification the thief gives to himself, since he thinks that “being a temple thief was so much better than being a pick pocket or a blind alley rapist. It was in many ways, a respectable line, stealing from the exponents of religion to sell to the connoisseurs of art” (9-12). When the thief feels that the statue of Shiva

looks at him with a “strong, unmoving countenance” (57), the religious dimension of the deity is being humanized. His belief that Shiva was all knowing, all powerful, all wise and that such a Shiva would not punish a faithful devotee for wanting to keep his bread buttered, contradicts itself when he steals the same statue.

The use of **irony** is seen throughout from the entrance of the Brahmin priest whose “eyes were kindly, almost indulgent” (58), the most unexpected climax, when “with his smile no longer on his face, he heaved the sack over his shoulder, cast a last surreptitious look around him for pursuers, and disappeared into the night” (60). The **fact** was that he was a cleverer and bigger thief than the protagonist, his sagacious and benevolent expression, his soothing advice and philosophical approach was the **fiction**.

The first line of the story “The Simple Man” suggested itself to Tharoor when letters from friends were delayed by the famous railway strike of 1947 which has inspired the story. The scene is a bar where an anonymous person asks his bar-mates, “Have you ever received a letter from someone who is dead?” (61). He had received that day, a letter from his friend Karan B. Dhillon, from Ludhiana. Dhillon, the cricketer who had played for Punjab, had been dead then for five minutes. A cricket fan in the audience seemed genuinely upset.

He wanted to know what kind of man Dhillon was. The title is introduced here: “A very simple man” he said, “a very simple man indeed” (63). The cricket fan read out the letter eagerly to the listening public and handed it back reverentially. The story now switches on to Mamta, the narrator’s Bengali wife, whom he loved to distraction.

The narrator, Southey, suddenly says that he did not know how often he had stabbed them both. “I came back from my official trip I saw them. . . they hadn’t even bothered to shut the bedroom door. . . they heard me and turned in shock. . . Karan, with my Mamta. . .! There was a ceremonial dagger. . . before I knew what I was doing it was over. I don’t know how often I stabbed them both. . .” (67). The cricket fan is wide-eyed in horror. Meanwhile, a large man who had been sitting next to him got up, put a protective arm around the narrator and asked Southey to relax and go home. The narrator sobbed. The cricket fan wanted him to be arrested. But the large man himself was Dhillon. Southey was a poor unsuccessful novelist, failed sportsman, marital dropout, who gave vent to his frustrations in cooked-up stories. This story elucidates the common statement that fact is sometimes stranger than fiction.

“The Simple Man” seems to be a simple story told at the height human imagination can rise up to. Alcoholism can create a staggering fantasy when it inebriates the drinker as seen here. The story begins suddenly, the first sentence startles the reader to immediate alertness.

While relating a fictitious story about a dear friend to the people in the bar, the protagonist seemed to relapse consciously into silence, “his mind elsewhere, at an anonymous plot in a cemetery perhaps” (62), says the author with humour. The techniques of **rhyme** as well as **refrain** are used effectively, in statements like “we grew up together, walked and played and fought together, worked and studied and holidayed together, cried and laughed together, learned to face the world together. . .” (62). Elsewhere the narration goes like this: “Shattered and desolate he sank his head into his outstretched arms, his eyes swam in tears, finally the dam burst, the rivulets of salty sorrow came cascading down his cheeks. . . his chest heaved on the bar rail. . .” (68). Lovely, exaggerated and **hyperbolic** expressions like these create an effect of **pathos**.

Karan Dhillon is described in Thackeray-style detail. His character, his nature, how he played all games, and why he specialized in cricket comes to life before us in a way similar to how Thomas Hardy described the Mayor of Casterbridge with his saturnine features, etched lines of impatience on his forehead and the very crease in his starched trousers creaking in displeasure as he walks, an utter pessimist. The description is so precise that the reader sees Karan Dhillon as a **real** person rather than as a creation of **imagination**. It is an effective presentation of Fiction. Being **spectacular** is another way of concreting story value, Fictionally. Any reader would read open-mouthed and see

the ghastly murder right in front of his eyes. **Humour** is seen here in a subtle manner. The explanation given to the unlimited fantasy of the drunkard is created out of a psychological insight.

In "The Professor's Daughter," fantasy is a distant kind of narrative, told in the mind of the narrator. The stiff professor Chhatwal academically brilliant, but sentimentally aloof from his students, is the typical academic walking encyclopedia of college days. Many a reader would find this character ringing a chord of resemblance in the memory of a similar teacher somewhere in his life. But the story unrolls into the arrival of a daughter, a heady perfume for the all-male butterflies. The protagonist happens to be the lucky one to get a chance to visit the professor and to his awe, horror and hatred finds that even his innocent behaviour as a guest triggers suspicious wrath in the girl's father to such an extent that he canes her. The youthful eulogy with which the campus had shortened her name Jaswinder Kaur to 'Jazzy' and the heroine-worshipping she was unaware that she was recipient of, pales before the truth of her suffering at the hands of her sadistic and maniacal father who never trusts her with men and as a result of the brutality, has usurped her of whatever self-confidence an eighteen year old needs to have.

The 'Jazzy' legend grew unnourished by any contact with the subject (76) while the hero casually touched her fingers by way of introduction, the father had entered the room and in a quiet, harsh edged

voice suppressed with anger, he said “go to your room” (79). Exiting after an order to get out, the hero listens and watches from a mango tree branch, the incredible sight of Jazzy “...bent over her bed, her salwaar pulled down from her hips to bare her rear.” (81). The narrator stands nowhere, bewildered between reality and fantasy. “...the veins stood up on his huge hands as he wielded the ruler in deliberate punishment and with each stroke the girl flinched, the tears streaming down her cheeks fell on her hands, the hands that I had so thoughtlessly held” (81). Such realities never exist even in the remotest and wildest imagination. “He stood transfixed watching in a blur, the regular rise and fall of the ruler, the mass of red welches and welts multiplying across the girl’s pale posterior” (81). Back in the hostel, when his waiting friends eagerly ask him whether he saw Jazzy, the protagonist finds his revelation waiting within him for release. But remembering the girl’s suffering and degradation he ends the story with “No, she wasn’t there” (82).

Psychology bringing out the abnormalities and anomalies that the human mind is capable of is the backbone of the narrative technique here. Professor Chaatwal has to be a **schizophreniac**—suave and sagacious in the college classroom but demoniacally perverse, sadistic and brutal to his own daughter in the privacy of his own home. The moment the atrocious caning is over, “his face had again been restored to its habitual expression of calm complacency” (82). He is a psychopath, a homicidal, sadistic

maniac who finds untold pleasure while inflicting acute physical pain on his one and only child. The **fiction** the college boys bore in their imagination was that of the comfortable and adored life of the eighteen year old Jasvinder, but the girl, “bared and beaten, whimpering her pain, pleading to be spared” (82) was the **fact**. In the combination, the axiomatic statement that ‘fact’ is at times stranger than ‘fiction’ is justified.

Tharoor was startled to hear the story of two friends recalled by a group of Stephanians who had been at college sixteen years earlier. The debating circuit, the girl-chasing, the fatuous puns, the café and the dhaba were all hallmarks of a certain kind of university existence, which he has very faithfully transcribed in fiction through the story ‘Friends’. Though the story revolves in a triangle love of a sort, its philosophy on friendship, the puns that come spontaneously to the characters’ lips and the ultimate sadness when even a really thick friendship breaks over a girl, shows the transience of all human ties in this world. Vicky Vohra shortened to Vicky and PM the author’s initials by which they are both addressed by friends, are thick as thieves with Vicky “physically small and slight with a perpetually serious expression on his face, a shock of hair falling over his right eye. . . a cheerful attitude to people and a lack of inhibition with his jokes that kept even newcomers in splits” (84-5). V.V. and P.M. (expanded by V.V. as Prize Money, Perfect Mammaries and the Prime

Ministry), the best of friends remained so, till Rekha the best debator in a neighbouring college came into their lives, between their lives. P.M. falls in love with her, who is “thin to the point of boniness, tall and short haired, attractive only because of a natural grace in her narrow figure and a small, remarkably lovely face that made every sentence she spoke worth watching in rapt attention” (85). For Vicky it is part of ordinary flirtation. He grows out of it with the usual ease and talks disparagingly of her “she has got shoulders like a clothes hanger; if I took her to our room and the warden came in he’d really find a skeleton in the cupboard” (92). P.M. hits him and they split. He packs up after a few days and leaves P.M.’s room. Their amity and enmity are real while in college, but the **reality** fades into **oblivion** years later.

The story, “The Political Murder” is narrated in the first person. The narrator is a policeman. Gobinda Sen, an MLA, got himself murdered. He was widely respected. When fired by the boss for being late in reporting, the narrator ironically salutes, smiles an off-duty grin and leaves, ignoring the caustic humour and vulgarity in the reprimand of the senior officer. The murder is investigated. The servants are questioned. He finds that there was not enough security for the M.L.A. at night. He sardonically muses, “out there, he was about as safe as the swimmers in ‘Jaws’ ” (105). The houseboy, more than the other servants, is more visibly affected. The maid, having a giving-away look, is questioned.

Sub-inspector Jacob and the narrator do not appear to see eye to eye in the modus operandi. It is proved very cleverly that the odd job man in a cuckold's fury killed the politician who was having an affair with his wife, the maid. The case is closed. All the credit for unravelling the murder goes to Inspector Jacob and not to the narrator. Years later, Jacob a highly placed officer, now due to the promotion he received because of the famous murder case meets the narrator. The suspense of the story lies in the fact that Inspector Jacob was either the murderer or the chief accomplice and the narrator Nayar had falsely imagined that he had caught the real culprit. The story ends there with the deeply sarcastic words of the real villain. The fact that villains run rampant in our society undetected and unpunished, whereas, the really good people go to the grave unsung and unwept for, is seen in this story where politics as well as the law-enforcing agencies are no more the real protectors of the people. The values preached by them comprise a myth. The atrocities practised by them are the reality.

Stream-of-consciousness and poetic expressions are used as Factional methods in "The Other Man". The perennial psychological fear of man to go from the known to the unknown is seen in the narrators' apprehension of his wife ever getting attached once again to her former lover. The narration goes on as smooth as a calm river flowing to its destination. The style is modern. The narrator's anxiety, insecurity and

futile one-sided love are stated clearly. He accepts with stoic resignation that his love and its demonstration are one-sided and therefore a real waste and would roll away like water drops from lotus leaves. The pinnacle of “The Other Man” is its sheer poetry. Tharoor is on a par with William Shakespeare who steals our hearts with the tender love story of “Romeo and Juliet” and its balcony scene where ‘the moon touched with silver, the fruit tree tops.’ “I see you in her eyes, I know how you smile. . . how your eyes twinkle as you toss your hair back from your forehead. . .” (114) has a romantic resonance.

The narrator fears Aravind, his wife’s lover of yester years, as he has seen him and his wife with lasting memories in her inner eyes and sowing insecurity in his. Aravind goes away to make more money and she takes it as unavoidable providence. “But that was the tragedy of it all. She waited. She waited for years. In her waiting she was yours” (114). The husband is all broken up inside: still, all along, he is “gentle and loving and patient” (114). The lyrical beauty reminiscent of Keats’ lines are breathtakingly poetic “I see you in her eyes when she speaks of you” (113). He goes on to describe her: “She looks incredibly beautiful, head partially bowed, eyes away like moving stars. She sits wrapped in a tender impenetrable cocoon of remembered love” (113). Such words take the reader to the world of Keats’ medieval quality, the very emotion of “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” or yet another sensuous damsel Magdalene

in "The Eve of St. Agnes." The mystery of Mona Lisa's smile, the unpredictability and even disloyalty of Lucrezia in Robert Browning's "Andrea del Sarto," are seen in the ethereal and sylvan look the girl takes on when she speaks about Aravind to her own husband; she is as sensuous, as lyrical, and as warm as any of Keats' heroines. The author shows us that even in beautiful lyrical fiction, these facts of beauty can be enjoyed.

The narrator has no control over his thoughts. He exposes his inner conflicts, his pain, love, disappointment and concealed frustration. In the streamlike flow of his conscience, the thoughts form a chain from his inner world to the world outside. With all said and done, Tharoor in the end, tilts the balance of justice to the narrator's side because after all, he loves the girl with all his heart. He eats, breathes and lives her. There is no secret between the two, as to where her fancies and fantasies are. That is paradoxical because, there is no such tolerance seen in husbands many of whom belong to the male chauvinistic world.

Finally, a Shelleyan optimism takes over. The same P.B. Shelley who lamented "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed", says in a later context, the greatest optimistic statement in all poetry: "O wind! If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" In the same way, the narrator, heartbroken over his wife's unchangeable attitude towards her earlier lover, though she deals with him with loveless affection and gratitude,

ends in a weirdly optimistic way. Beautiful expressions and sentences like “I loved her as one loves a finely turned sentence in a book that one wishes one could write but knows one can’t” (116), “. . . as long as you remain away and tell her that you love her from the other end of a postage stamp” and “. . . one day you will step out of the murky half-light of remembered importance. . .” (116), team in the poetically sentimental diction. His triumph over the other man, his rival, saying, “there is one thing in her you will never understand. That ring she wears is not yours but mine” (116). Her surname is not her lover’s but her husband’s. His final triumph comes with the climax, “There is one thing I know you will never learn and that the world will never learn. That six months after she became my wife, she bore me your son” (117). The pseudo-paternity he assumes for a child not his, is the jewel in his crown of achievement. The lover pales into insignificance before the stoicism and endurance of the husband. “The Other Man” a dramatic monologue, shows the best craftsmanship from Tharoor’s pen as a writer of Fiction, because the girl is knotted-up **fantasy** in a physical self; the narrator is all **fact**, enduring her fantasy like Patience sitting on a Monument. The “other man” is a whimsical aery creature, his corpus never present except as a representation in the form of an embryonic foetus. Fact and fiction throughout the story are inseparable. Tharoor has used poetry as a metaphor for mental infidelity, not rare in this world. On par with Anton

Chekov, Oscar Wilde, O. Henry and Leo Tolstoy, Tharoor scores equally well because of the Faction present, ever so subtly.

This chapter also contains the analysis of the farce: “Twenty-Two months in the life of a Dog.” Though outwardly light-hearted, this play in two acts is sizzling with political criticism and protest against what Tharoor feels the ‘autocracy’ in modern India at one point of time, i.e. from 1975-1977. Today, the issues raised and crystallised by The Emergency—the meaning of democracy, the value of the right of the poor unlettered peasant to be carted off to a sterilization camp—are seen as largely irrelevant. Tharoor thinks that the only valid way of portraying The Emergency is through the medium of low comedy. “History repeats itself as tragedy, the second time as farce. And farce is the medium of the playwright, not the historian” (160).

This is the main reason for Tharoor’s work because he finds an ideal platform to bring out through fiction the startling facts of that critical and dark period in the history of modern India. The twenty-two months in the life of the Dog Kutta, Professor Subrahmoniam and Mrs. Subrahmoniam, are none other than the twenty-two months of the Emergency. Irony speaks for itself: “. . . the troublemakers were in jail, the trains ran on time, Indira Gandhi, the only man in the Cabinet, ran a democratic socialist republic under its own Rising Son” (165).

Pun, word play, verbal wars through parody and aside, metaphors with hidden meanings are all used as Factional techniques. 'Kutta' (the English sound equivalent for dog in Hindi), a stray dog, is taken into the home of the Subrahmoniams, both doctors with scientific experiments to their credit. Through transmutation, the dog is made a human named 'Kutty.' He turns out to be an alcoholic due to the genetic characteristic of the donor of the pituitary glands and is more than a handful and a menace to the public. After a lot of political, social and sentimental chaos, The Emergency ends, with the Prime Minister losing her own seat by over 55,000 votes and the opposition Janata party claims victory, Kutty with another reversible operation turns back to Kutta the dog. Peace is established and the life of the Indian returns to normal, where kutta's operation on pituitary glands and genitals stand for the enforced sterilization-**Symbolism** is seen here. The Central Cabinet Ministers, the Youth Congress with its bullying leader are **parodied** as the Minister, Inamdar, Rekha and others. The Chowkidar Bahadur who is really Hawildar Bahadur Singh of RAW namely Research and Analysis Wing, stands for the cheap internal espionage system that told stories about and pinned down innocent people. Fareed the servile servant stands for the meek, unquestioning and spineless Indian, who would take without protest, any humiliation thrown at him by the authorities.

While the “Rising Son” (166) with a twist in the spelling of sun is obviously Sanjay Gandhi, Professor and Mrs. Subrahmoniam stand for that minority of good people who balance the rest of the evil world. On the whole, parody as a device of Faction, is present in this farce, as much as it is seen in Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, which is a parodic redaction of the Mahabharata.

Humour is a very significant agent in this play in bringing about Faction. At times it is straightforward and comical: “Doggy? What do these people think I am? A Congressman?” (168) protests the dog Kutta when he is addressed as one. “Yenna ide? What is going on here?” (173, 235) from Mrs. Subrahmoniam makes fun of the Tamil jargon. When Maryamma, having found that Kutty has cheated her says “Aiyō Karthavay!” (228), the Malayalam colloquialism sounds very natural in its humour.

Humour is sardonic when Kutta pleads with the Professor, “I don’t even have the strength to scare a Brahmin, please Sahib. . .” (169). About Indira Gandhi’s twenty-point programme, Professor Subrahmoniam succinctly says, “Even Moses was able to make do with ten” (190). Wry humour is seen when the professor with pain in his heart says about enforced sterilization, “How do you explain the desire of people like this to cut off bits of other people’s insides against their will?” (190) Humour with a tinge of **pathos** is seen when Kutta says, “who wants to have

freedom when you can have bread?. . . Give me slavery, but give me bread” (199). The selfish and self survival attitude of the Indian is seen here.

The artless art of **repartee** is also seen. When the Professor is asked whether he needs his scotch with ice in it, he retorts “On the rocks. Like my life at the moment” (191). The Prime Minister is quoted to have said that she had locked up half the decent politicians in jail to keep them free. The Professor laments the incongruity through a distanced **oxymoron** “why not ‘I must kill you to help you live?’” (191). The heartlessness of the medical profession, especially surgery, is seen in the overly matter-of-factness shown by Dr. Lakshmi Subrahmoniam before Kutta is operated upon: “. . .removal of the brain and replacement by donor brain. Transplantation of the pituitary glands. Transfusion. Rearrangements of limbs. Modification of sexual organs. Hair cut” (197). Typically as in an absurd drama, the complicated and next to impossible procedure of transforming a dog into a man is over simplified here, with a punch at the insensitivity of superspeciality in modern Medical Science, which supposedly gives to hair cut and modification of sexual organs, equal importance.

The radio jockey’s dispassionate and monotonous news-delivery through the air, simultaneously coincides with the actual operations of turning the dog Kutta into the man Kutty and later, the man Kutty back

into the now-happy dog, is the height of comedy and satire. A dog-barks-but-the-caravan goes attitude was seen during the Emergency, when the Indian masses suffered and suffocated under the so called “. . . interest of socialism and the common man” (197).

Pun is seen when Kutta, now turned to a man, while regaining consciousness on the operating table shouts “I can’t believe this! I’m a son-of-a-bitch. . . let’s celebrate!” (199). The “Vividh Bharathi” (202) being prohibited, shows how even the fundamental rights could be twisted and taken away during the Emergency. Kutta after becoming Kutty trying “to bite at a flea under the armpit” (206), chasing Billie the cat in hot passion in typical canine fashion, uttering guttural animal sounds like “Gnff bmf pmff. . . Dmff. Mff. Prgff. . . (215) barking ‘uff ruff’ at the Professor even when he is a man, singing “Rup Thera Masthana” (200) and other sexy Hindi songs like “Saamne yeh kaun aaya, dil me hui halchal?” (210) at nobody in particular as well as everybody, are hilarious to the extreme. But the humour transcends its peak, the parabolic curve descends and touches our patriotism when we hear the dog’s assumed name:

Professor: Is that your name? Bharat Kutty?

Kutta: Yes. Kutta—Kutty see. And Bharat, for India. Don’t you like it? (207)

A dog personifying our great country Bharat is a shock treatment, a hard fact Tharoor gives us amidst all the hilarity of an imagined farce.

Tharoor wields humour as a powerful weapon, at times direct and subtle, which leaves a deep imprint on the reader. Even farcical at times, humour highlights the stark reality of socio-political situations, especially the atrocities committed during the Emergency. Through the prismatic perception of humour and irony, Tharoor's narratives locate 'reality' in between the realms of fact and fiction, experience and imagination, triumphs and losses. This ultimately contributes to the plural, hybrid image of the Indian consciousness that Tharoor foregrounds in his *oeuvre*.

**A STUDY OF *FACTION*
IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR**

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Historical discourse and literary practices share a common domain in contemporary culture. Current approaches to cultural historiography have brought theoretical tools from literary and cultural studies into historical practice. Historical writing, in this regard, is subject to various “literary” determinations that shape the perceptions of the past. Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra are major poststructuralist historicists who look upon history as inevitably subject to ‘literary’ conventions and linguistic determinations. The work of LaCapra offers a ‘dialogical’ concept of historiography that acknowledges both the otherness of the past and the inevitable intrusion of contemporary theory and politics into the process of historical reconstruction. Thus, history, in the present time is inextricably intertwined with ideology and textuality—an integration of fact and fiction into what has been called *Faction*.

A journey through the analysis of the works of a brilliant author with faith in the viewpoint of *Faction*, gets completed in this thesis. Since any research is a re-search of existing facts, discovering the unknown possibilities and establishing new theories, the same has been done in the works of Shashi Tharoor only from the angle of **Faction**, as befits the topic “A Study of *Faction* in the Works of Shashi Tharoor.” An in-depth examination of the author’s works has necessitated one to do inter-

disciplinary work because from the thought that every Indian must carry with him in his head and heart, his own history of India (his story) as pictured in *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, and the sense of humour mixed with considerable wisdom shown in *The Great Indian Novel*, we go on to a world of the most sublime form of prize fiction in his collection of short stories—myths, ideas and fascinating imageries throw a myriad of ecstatic colours in the aesthetic mind of a student of literature. The works of Shashi Tharoor have a wide range to cover. Though not considered highly prolific as a novelist, his writings have more qualitative than quantitative value.

In the introductory chapter, the research topic has been introduced and explained. To give a scientific base to the structure of analysis, the etymology of the novel 'roman' has been followed through different sub-species of the genre. Since the author Tharoor has made use of many of these styles, giving an outline of their characteristics is appropriate in examining the nature of Fiction itself. How Fiction develops from a blend of the existing types, and the history of Fiction in literature have been specified. The social / political / historical context, i.e.; the social change in which Fiction came into existence, and reasons for Fiction in writing are given. Important writers of Fiction like Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Dan Wakefield and Robert Kroetsch are mentioned; their works discussed and compared. Shashi Tharoor is

introduced, his personal and professional background given. The unbreakable affinity between history and literature is established, and Faction has been 'defined.' Since Faction is a word taken from 'fact' and 'fiction' and since it is seemingly a strange coinage, the scholar has resorted to explaining to the reader what Faction is, at some length.

Chapter II, "The Mythopoetics of History in *The Great Indian Novel*," has taken up the chunk of the thesis because the most important Factional work of Tharoor viz. *The Great Indian Novel* is not just a novel but a parodic version of the great epic Mahabharata. Hence, it has been given the deserving treatment in epic proportions. How *The Great Indian Novel* is a typical work of Faction is established beyond doubt.

In Chapter III, "Between Oblivion and Memory: Bricolage in *Riot*," a critical appreciation of the novel *Riot* has been attempted. The combined theme of the Babri Masjid incident in Ayodhya in India and the murder of an American girl who had gone to do good to the society in Africa as a social service, found their embryo in *Riot*. Tharoor has mixed a lot of techniques like the use of letters, diary scripts, interviews between characters, memoirs and scribblings in scrap books to bring about Faction in the novel. That an apparently simple event has been developed into not only a gripping adventure, but also a soul-stirring romance is the clarion call of Faction here.

Chapter IV, “On the Threshold of Light and Darkness: A Reading of *Show Business*,” shows the Factional aspects in the work *Show Business*, an action-packed drama on the lives of the film people in Bombay. The tinsel world and its false glamour is exposed. The real nature of the people with their peculiar character traits and inner angularities are brought out. The chapter divisions are into different monologues of the main characters. While expansion of the minimum is Faction, contraction of a vast canvas into realization of truth also can be termed Faction and the novel *Show Business* belongs to the second category. Breaking of the **illusion** that we call **reality** has been done.

“*India: From Midnight to the Millennium: The Faction of a Nation*” comes as Chapter V. According to the scholar, though *The Great Indian Novel* has a formidable outline and structure with hundreds and thousands of characters in it, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* is the author’s Magnum Opus. The interplay as well as display of fact and fiction and their fusion are seen here. The political / social / cultural / religious India, especially of the post-Independence day has been written in a semi-humorous, semi-serious way by the author. Through this analysis, facts about Gandhi’s India and our India fuse and merge with the imaginative backup of myths, folklore, idiosyncrasies and the ethnic mores of this second thickly populated country in the world, its unities in the diversity and the diversities in the unity are explained.

In Chapter VI, “Prismatic Perceptions: An Analysis of Tharoor’s Minor Works,” the book *Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* has been summarized, critiqued and paralleled. The fourteen stories are very different from one another. They have beautiful and abrupt endings and are thought-provoking in their own way. Factional techniques of a varied nature have been detected in the craftsmanship. Some of the stories inspire moral values, whereas the code of ethics and the do’s and don’t’s of our society are expounded in others. *The Five-Dollar Smile* is a fictional pleasure based on the hard rock of factuality. A farce in two acts *Twenty-Two Months in the Life of a Dog* has been presented as a beautiful work of Fiction on a par, though in miniature scale, with *The Great Indian Novel*.

The work *Bookless in Baghdad* (2005) brings together pieces written over the past decade by the compulsive reader and prolific writer Tharoor, on the subject closest to his heart, reading. In these essays on books, authors, reviews, critics, literary festivals, literary aspirants, The Empire and India, Tharoor takes us on a delightful journey of discovery. He wanders the ‘book souk’ in Baghdad under sections where the middleclass are selling their volumes so that they can live; he analyses the Indianness of Salman Rushdie; discusses P. G. Wodehouse’s enduring popularity in India; and drives around Huesca, looking to pay an idiosyncratic tribute to George Orwell. There are excursions into the

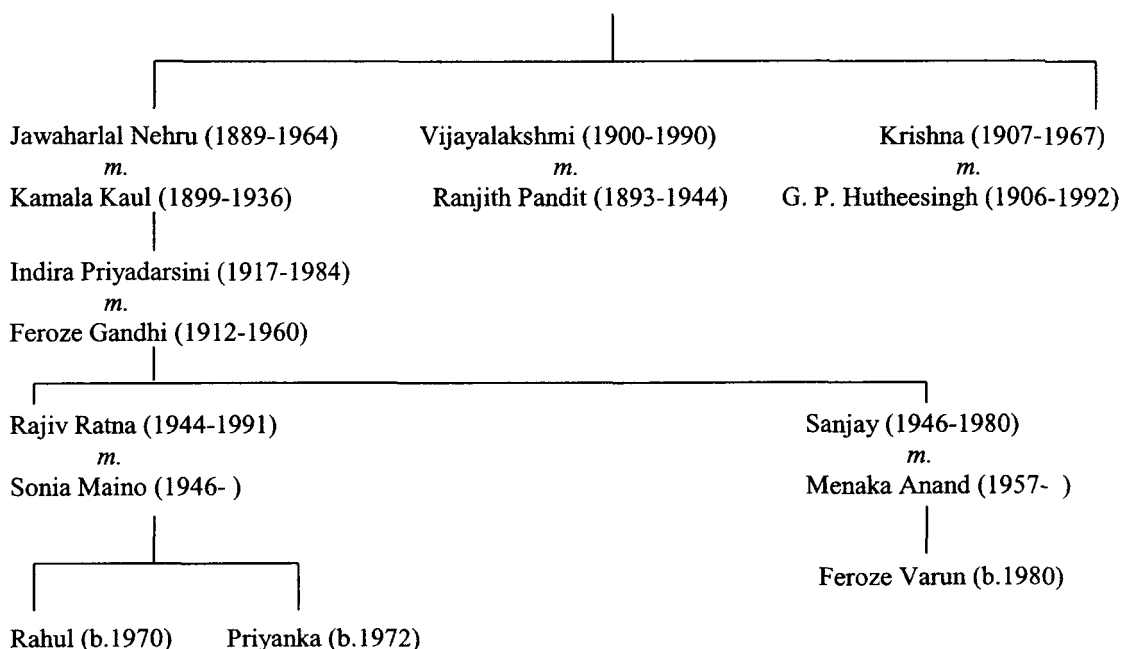
pitfalls of reviewing, explorations of the ‘anxiety of audience’ of Indian English writers, and a wicked account of how Norman Mailer dealt with a negative review. “Supremely personal, yet always probing and analytical, this brilliant collection of essays is part memoir, part literary criticism” (blurb review, *Bookless in Baghdad*). Tharoor is acclaimed as a fluid and powerful writer, one of the best in a generation of Indian authors. In the title piece, we learn what the Iraqis go through in their beleaguered land merely to go get hold of a book, and how they sell them at low prices for their livelihood. They sell **fiction** while their poverty is a hard-core **fact**. The books they sell and the circumstances under which they sell are illustrated in the work. This book also is a mixture of facts and fiction; but since it reads more as a travelogue and observations collected during travel, this work has not undergone deep analysis as a work of Fiction. It will suffice to say that *Bookless in Baghdad* deals with real incidents and attitudes given to us in high quality diction and makes good and interesting reading. It is the latest publication of the author at the juncture of submission of this thesis.

Though Tharoor has written two more books, they have not been analysed in detail because of the main reason that they do not come under the scope of our title. But their presence is acknowledged in terms of argument if not in discussion of the work.

Reasons of State (1989) is a political treatise on foreign policies and diplomatic affairs. A synopsis of the book is being given to justify the elimination. Chapter I, "The Theoretical Framework: Political Development and Foreign Policy," deals with the different types of policies and also the main political parties. Chapter II, "Mrs. Gandhi's Antecedents: The Nehru Prelude and the Shastri Interlude," delineates idealism and balance of power. Chapter III, "Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister," describes her personality, principles, prejudices and politics. Chapter IV tells about "Indira's Institutions: the Prime Minister and Foreign Policy making." Chapter V is about Indian Diplomacy in which the Ministry of External Affairs is stressed and elaborated. Chapter VI is about Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy, where the opposition in Parliament is expounded in detail. Chapter VII deals with popular pressures on Foreign Policy, Public Opinion, Interest Groups and the Press. "Political Development and National Consensus in Foreign Policy" is seen in Chapter VIII. The Epilogue that comes as Chapter IX sums up the Janata Dal Period and the Lok Dal Pause, The United States' Nuclear Non-issue, the Dependence of the Soviet Union, China which is an Initiative and Impasse, Accommodation and Amity of Pakistan and neighbours in general, trials and failures in a global way. Though this work is a laborious and well-studied observation of India's Foreign Policy and its related issues with their good and bad points, one can see nothing of fact-fiction-fusion in the treatise. Hence it has not been analysed for Faction.

Nehru: Invention of India (2003) reads more like a biography of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Unlike the unfavourable remarks Nehru gets in *The Great Indian Novel* as blind Dhritarashtra, because he was blind in two ways—blind to wisdom and blind in his love for his offspring—Jawaharlal Nehru gets a lot of attention, if not kudos, in this work for what he was. A good summing up of Nehru's triumphs and failures are given in a smooth and pleasant style. The book is a well-crafted design on the life of the Indian politicians and independence-movement heroes. It is a thoughtful account, likening Nehru to Thomas Jefferson in ways both positive and negative. A clear picture of the Nehru generation is given as a family tree. (xix).

Motilal Nehru (1861-1931) *m.* Swarup Rani Kaul (1872-1938)



In chapter I, “With Little to Comment Me: 1889-1912,” Nehru’s lineage is given. That Motilal Nehru was “A free thinking rationalist” (9) and had modern convictions, Jawahar’s “upper class distaste for the vulgar posturing of Indian politicians” (13) are asserted. His conviction was that “education does not consist of passing examinations or knowing English or Mathematics. It is a mental state” (18). Chapter II, “Greatness is Being Thrust Upon Me,” shows how Nehru “had not been saved for a life of mediocre lawyering” (23) and how the young man was “rapidly converted to the Mahatma’s zeal and commitment to action” (29). Chapter III, “To Suffer for the Dear Country,” shows Nehru’s highlights between 1921-1928. “Hope to Survive the British Empire,” the fourth chapter, tells how Nehru returns from Europe and how at forty he takes on the leadership of the party.

In Chapter V, “In Office but Not in Power,” India’s political events and conditions from 1931-1937 are described. In an emotion-charged chapter entitled “In the Name of God Go!” the strained relationship with Jinnah and the Muslim League, The Quit India Movement and the repeated jailing of the Mahatma and other freedom fighters are shown. Chapter VII, “A Tryst with Destiny,” heightens the narrative to a dramatic climax by portraying the moment of obtaining freedom. “Commanding Heights” juxtaposes Gandhiji’s sense of loss and sorrow at the event of Partition with the glorious “Bharat Ratna” being endowed on Nehru. The

years 1957-1964, dealt with in “Free Myself from this Daily Burden,” shows Jawaharlal at his finest, “passionately combining a reverence for the past with his aspiration for the future” (216). In the last chapter, “India Must Struggle against Herself,” we see a grand finale to the compliment Tharoor pays to Nehru, since he feels that in death too, as in life, Jawaharlal would become India. It may not be a glorious tribute to India’s first Prime Minister of his own unwise and adamant choice, but surely Tharoor gives him his due by highlighting his positive sides and literary abilities. In spite of all this, it is difficult to find Fiction in this work and as a result it has been sidelined.

Kerala, God’s Own Country (2002) comprises the painter M. F. Husain’s depictions of the scenic beauty of the State, supplemented by Shashi Tharoor’s descriptions and titles. In this work, Tharoor has however not fictionalized his impressions of Kerala. In their myriad perceptions and representations, Tharoor feels that Husain’s elephants embody the magic of Kerala: the exceptional natural beauty of the state, its lagoons, its forests, its beaches and above all, the greenery of the countryside, with its emerald paddy fields and banana groves, and coconut and arecanut trees swaying in the gentle breeze. But while M. F. Husain painted on canvas the beauty of the land, Tharoor has, as an accompaniment to the visual treat, painted word pictures in the book by subtitled Husain’s works very poetically. *Kerala, God’s Own Country*

does not fall under the purview of this thesis. Yet, the blending of the imaginative with the factual, the aesthetic with the rational, complements the rest of Tharoor's narrative output in the traversing of boundaries and endorsing threshold spaces.

Tharoor's attempts to fictionalize reality are ultimately an unprejudiced endeavour. In this regard, he emerges as a true practitioner of Faction. As Bhuvana Sankaranarayanan says:

The main cautionary note to writers attempting faction, the literary genre based on journalistic swoops, is that they should refrain from the intention to 'libel' or 'hurt' in the process of their interpretative exploration of the lives of the well-known, whose doings, as recorded by the media, provide readers a relief from the indolence and frenzy of their own lives. (4)

There are no jibes meant, no veiled insults in any of his lines. He adheres strictly to frank opinions and sincere suggestions. He does not hesitate to condemn what seems to him shallow, trivial or counterfeit, no matter how big a seller the object or subject in his vision may be. But his sympathies are warm and keen and his mind always responsive. He seems to illustrate Lyon William Phelps' observations on authentic literary judgement: "No person is qualified to judge the value of new books who is not well-

acquainted with the old ones, second, that the only test of the real greatness of any book is Time” (Phelps 252).

Chinua Achebe once remarked: “Man’s desire for fiction goes with his ability for making them, just as his need for language is inseparable from his capacity for speech” (Achebe 1975: 5). No one would suggest that the mute is silent because he has no need to speak. Man’s propensity for fictions and his need to create them are proportionate to each other. It is the reader’s duty here to see how much of reality has gone into the fiction. No work, no creation can be called perfect. Certain writing can be perfectly imperfect or imperfectly perfect. The perfection lies in the eyes of the beholder, in the case of writing—in the mind of the reader.

In this thesis entitled “A Study of *Faction* in the Works of Shashi Tharoor,” a sincere attempt has been made to highlight elements of *Faction*. *Faction* has been extended to mean the lines of intersection between binary oppositions—fact and fiction, appearance and reality, memory and oblivion, poetry and history, and so on. Tharoor’s fragmentary and multiple perceptions of what can be characterized as a postmodern world fall neatly into the technique of *Faction*, which narrativizes an ‘in-between’ existence. The principles of New Journalism and the Non-fiction novel were handy in this analysis, but attempt has been to transcend the focus on these journalistic movements of the 1950s to a larger and broader vision of the present-day world.

A world-famous author, who has been holding one of the most important individual diplomatic seats in the world, may have umpteen number of admirers and critics who do a lot of critiquing on his works. So an approach to his works from the angle of **Faction** may be new, and therefore, interesting. By giving form to the intellectual activity of comprehending life, both novelists and writers of factual narratives can contribute to literature, such a renewal as Tharoor has done. Whether or not these writers do so effectively, depends on the ways in which and the extents to which, they put up their imaginations at the bar of judgment, as they take the readers through the process of fact-fiction configuration. Tharoor's novels revel in multiplicity of tone and colour and their constant shifting patterns are on comedy, parody, tragedy, lament, protest, appreciation and general constructive criticism. Many of those articles could rise above racial and ideological burden and give an unbiased picture of time, then and now. The author's sensibility was shaped by the politics of the day and he has created a convincing picture of political revolt. Some of his works rise above the level of the documentary and weave artistically the pattern behind the events which illuminate the essential human conditions during a particularly important period of Indian History. Through **Faction**, the author has captured the richness and diversity of India's social, cultural and spiritual mosaic which never ceases to fill us with awe and admiration. We have to assign to him the

multiple roles of seer, teacher and chronicler. Tharoor along with Norman Mailer and Truman Capote has paved the way for contemporary as well as future writers of Fiction to follow. At the end of the critical examination one can feel the aptness in Tharoor's words, ". . . when I put my head on the pillow at night, I can think about how my work has made a difference in people's lives. It's been an amazing experience" (Tharoor, www.tufts.edu 2003).

Yet when the scholar's design in using it is fully served, it is time the pen ceases to probe further.

A Tête-à-Tête with the Author*



Lalithakumari: Almost all your works are a blend of literature and history. Did you take special care while writing to see that an equal proportion was maintained in the blend? Or, was it unconscious and there was a spontaneous mingling of expression with idea? The question sprouts from my difficulty to classify some of your works as beautiful contributions to literature or authentic works of history.

Shashi Tharoor: The expression comes from the idea and both originate spontaneously. I have once borrowed the words of George Bernard Shaw, who said that he wrote for the same reason that a cow gives milk. It has to come. The ratio between Literature and History has never been pre-planned. It is just a happy coincidence.

L.K: Your pen has an expert way of exploring the minds of people. The Collection of Short Stories, *Riot* and *Show Business* show this deep penetration

into the conscience of the characters. Did the mindbend and the train of thoughts of the characters come out of your pen unknowingly or, you used the author's prerogative for depicting their psyche?

S.T: I have definitely been mindful of how my characters develop. Their mindbend has been fashioned by me to suit the sequences in the story, and their idiosyncrasies if any, the positives and negatives of their nature, have all been designed to establish their varied importance in the respective works.

L.K: Other than your vast knowledge of the Mahabharata and your being deeply impressed and influenced by it, what gave you the tremendous courage to attempt the puranic redaction, filing away hundreds of characters into their respective parodic versions, even as early as in 1989 when you were comparatively young?

S.T: The Great Epic has had a magical attraction for me ever since my childhood. It sort of grew into me and I took up the challenge very happily when the time came. It was not an easy task but I think I have done my best. When we consider that my writing first came in print when I was only ten, I do not think that I was all that young at the time of publication of *The Great Indian Novel*.

L.K: Women in different plains and in different moods, like those in "The Boutique" and in "The Village Girl" and *Show Business* are described in subtle and soft words by you. Do you have a subconscious image of the ideal woman, almost found in harmony with Nature?

S.T.: Every man will have a subconscious image of the ideal woman and I am no exception!

L.K: This is in continuation of the previous question. You have described the ideal woman – a woman whose physical beauty and attractions are not the aspects that strike a person when s/he looks at her for the first time, but a woman one would like to be with, know more of, protect and cherish, and who inspires one's respect as well as love. Have you ever met anyone like her? Perhaps you had someone in mind when you described this epitome of womanhood?

S.T: (Smiles) There can be no one who is the all–perfect epitome of Manhood or Womanhood. Even our Godly Manifestations are not without failings but we do worship them. When I described the ideal woman, I was transcribing my wishful thinking about what a perfect woman should be. I might have painted that image in my mind, drawing the shades from the goodness, grace and charm found in different women I have met and heard about in my life.

L.K: Your humour is very natural. Which work of yours do you think is the most humorous?

S.T: Once a work is written and published, there can be no control over it even from the author. So shall we not leave the decision to the Reader's taste?

L.K: Do you think looking at India with R-eyes may change your views from those you had when you looked at your country with NR–eyes? Is it likely that you will be disillusioned?

S.T: Perspectives keep changing with more observation and more intimate contact. About my being disillusioned or not, only Time can say.

L.K: You emphasize that, the singular thing about India is that you can think of her only in the plural. When did this pluralistic concept strike you first?

S.T: This concept has been in my mind since a long time. You can see its depiction in my work *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*.

L.K: Suppose it is said that rather than unity in diversity, there is more diversity seen in unity in present India, will you agree? If yes, what are the reasons?

S.T: Is it not so with the entire world or at least with the major countries? The reasons can be political, social, racial, geographical or even psychological. The best thing will be for us to accept and welcome them. But one thing we can be assured of is that, whether the Unity and Diversity are parallel or antagonistic, India will stand the test of Time and emerge a Super Power.

L.K: Sometimes, a novelist feels that certain characters who, though 100% imaginary, develop such strong personalities during the course of the novel, that they have a tremendous will power and get out of the author's creative control. Writer late Sri. Malayattoor Ramakrishnan said to me once that, his Vedaraman in "Aaraamviral" (The Sixth Finger) got obstinate, bossy and disobedient and could not be harnessed by his own creator – has any such thing happened to you? (Ved Vyas in *The Great Indian Novel* for example, in spite of the autobiographical element?)

S.T: A very relevant question especially with V.V being apparently garrulous at times. But I have justified him for being an octogenarian and therefore irrelevant. I keep a perfect control over my characters - whether it be birth, growth, death, rambling or even verbal gallivanting. They develop only in the way I want them to. I believe in the writer having absolute mastery over his creation.

L. K: In your leisure hours, or whenever you feel like indulging in reading, with which kind of book are you happy?

S.T: I am happy with any book that relaxes me or touches a soft chord somewhere in me.

L. K: I have had the good fortune to meet you a few times and thereby, intimate to you, my topic of research and the implications of the portmanteau word 'FACTION' which is a fusion of fact and fiction, in all its positiveness. May I hail you as 'The Ambassador of Faction?'

S.T: I have not introduced 'Faction' into literature. But if you feel that I am an effective spokesman for the new genre through my works, I shall be happy to be called so.

L. K: Thank you.

* *The above is an interview conducted by the researcher with the author at Mascot Hotel, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on December 22, 2006.*

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