



# REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

VOLUME - 12 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2023



---

---

## CULTURAL REFLECTIONS IN SHASHI THAROOR'S SELECT WORKS

**Prof. Nagaratna Parande<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Jagadish Angadi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Dept of English, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka.

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Dept of English, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka.

### ABSTRACT:

*This present paper explores into the manifestation of cultural reflections within the literary realm of Shashi Tharoor, examining three noteworthy novels: The Great Indian Novel, Show Business, and Riot - A Love Story. Tharoor introduces a novel essence by seamlessly blending a literary tradition that resonates with Indian experiences, employing a language and literary form that serves as a conduit for readers into the vast expanse of literature. Across his body of works, there exists a discernible Indian culture, whether in the thematic elements, the exploration of thoughts, or the contemplation of ideas intrinsic to the Indian context. The majority of his literary oeuvre orbits around the rich tapestry of Indian themes.*



**KEYWORDS:** Culture, literary tradition, Indian context, Indian themes.

### INTRODUCTION :

The complex connection between culture and literature is undeniable; literature serves as both a reflection of and an influence on culture, while culture reciprocates by mirroring the diverse literary expressions of different communities. Homi Kharshedji Bhabha, the astute Indian-British scholar and critical theorist, articulates that cultural difference involves identification, and cultural diversity entails comparison and categorization. The liberation of the concept of skin/culture from racial stereotypes hinges on the potential for variance and expression. Nevertheless, stereotypes impede the free flow and expression of the 'race' signifier in any alternative manner. The theme of identity remains inseparable from culture, echoing the assertion of many critics that "Ultimately, our essence is rooted in culture." Bhabha underscores culture's "in-between" nature, emphasizing spaces within and between individuals and cultures that continually shape identities and reject fixed positions. He presents cultural differences as a compelling alternative to the notion of cultural diversity.

Shashi Tharoor unmistakably distinguishes himself among postcolonial Indian writers in English by directing attention to the cultural dimension and weaving India's rich heritage into a symbol of triumph. Over the past four decades, his works have consistently aimed to demystify the complex question surrounding India's cultural identity, dispelling the misconception that India can be reduced to a singular cultural identity.

Tharoor asserts India's rightful claim as one of the world's oldest civilizations, emphasizing its intricate socio-political-economic history. His novels abound with socio-political and socio-cultural ideologies, depicting clashes between Eastern and Western cultures. Tharoor adeptly explores a myriad

of cultures, including the Mahabharata culture, celluloid culture, political culture, and East-West culture, along with their associated issues, in both his fiction and non-fiction works. He draws inspiration from scriptures like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanishads, and the Bible.

In the current discourse, the following statement gains prominence: "When writing about Indian culture, I am acutely aware of my own subjectivity. Arguably, there are multiple Indian cultures, and certainly, there exist various perspectives on Indian culture" (HAPR). This paper endeavors to scrutinize the cultural portrayals in Shashi Tharoor's literary works. In his inaugural masterpiece, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), he conducts a parallel examination of characters from the Mahabharata and Indian political figures. In *Show Business* (1992), Tharoor satirizes the contradictions within Bollywood film culture and delivers a scathing critique of corruption in Indian public life. *Riot* (2001), his third novel, chronicles cultural activism and religious conflicts within the Indian context, scrutinizing clashes between East and West cultures against the backdrop of communal disturbances.

Tharoor's novels delve into Indian history, culture, and politics, marked by multifaceted concerns. Traditional practices serve as the bedrock of our identity, delineating our cultural heritage. In postcolonial India, culture emerged as a politically charged concept, subject to constant scrutiny whenever it deviated from established norms. Tharoor advocates for a commitment to tolerance and the practice of democratic principles to foster harmony in a multicultural society like India. He explores Indian myths to present ancient traditions and cultures from a postcolonial perspective, realigning relationships, achieving balance, and safeguarding national security.

A nuanced examination of *Riot* reveals that Tharoor seems to lead a dual life. On one level, he functions as the quintessential international civil servant, tasked with maintaining peace and quelling conflicts in global hotspots. On another level, he seeks solutions to pacify communalism and violence that significantly impact Indian consciousness. In one interview, Tharoor remarks, "I have been extraordinarily, emotionally, and intellectually captivated by the idea of India, by the forces that have shaped and defined India, and by the forces that have at times posed a threat to its existence" (Dhir, Paras 2).

The enchanting quality of Indian traditions binds all Indians through the subtle thread of Indianness. When individuals deviate from their roots, there comes a moment when they discard everything and return to the call of their origins. In "*Riot*," Lakshman, a character married with a child, becomes enamored with Priscilla due to her open and expressive approach to life, including matters of sexual desire. Their relationship deepens to the point of contemplating a physical affair. However, Lakshman is unable to act on his impulses due to the binding force of traditions and the pull of his roots. He refrains from pursuing this path and confesses to Priscilla, saying, "Forgive me, but I must terminate our relationship. I love you, but I cannot abandon my wife, my daughter, my job, my country, my entire life for my love" (*Riot*, 239).

Shashi Tharoor's inaugural novel, *The Great Indian Novel*, published in 1989, undertakes a parallel examination of characters from the Mahabharata and contemporary Indian political leaders. It assumes the form of a political satire that adeptly interweaves ancient and recent Indian history. Tharoor draws primary inspiration from the Mahabharata, a Hindu mythological epic, reimagining and contextualizing it within the framework of India's struggle for independence, encompassing the first three decades following independence. He transforms figures from India's historical past into mythological characters while narrating the history of Indian independence and subsequent events up to the 1980s.

Tharoor employs this novel to reaffirm and enrich India's cultural identity by exploring the themes of pluralism and openness within India's diverse culture. His objective is to broaden our understanding of Indian culture and its historical heritage. Tharoor describes his task as "altering and shaping these resonant characters and situations to tell a contemporary story," providing a unique opportunity to strike familiar chords with the audience while playing an unfamiliar tune. This approach, interpreting reality through myth and history, leads to the conclusion that India possesses a vast heritage from which valuable lessons can be drawn.

Tharoor also expounds on his belief that Hinduism lacks rigid fundamentals, harboring no hostility towards other religions and imposing no principles on them. Consequently, there is no room for violent clashes under the pretext of religion, particularly involving Hinduism. Tharoor underscores the unique generosity of Hinduism, highlighting the extraordinary diversity of religious practices within the faith, which lacks a single holy book or compulsory injunctions. This makes Hinduism an exceptional religion, as it does not assert itself as the sole true faith, setting it apart from major religions worldwide.

In *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, Shashi Tharoor offers a thought-provoking reflection on the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence. This work combines superb photographs with insightful commentary, merging academic analysis and personal observations on a range of issues India faces, including caste, religion, and economics. The book serves as an excellent introduction to the diversity and the blend of India's past and present, offering a captivating survey of the country's history and challenges. Tharoor's writing is insightful and thought-provoking, making it a valuable resource for anyone interested in modern India.

In *The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cell Phone: Reflections on India, the Emerging 21st-century Power*, Shashi Tharoor presents a collection of essays celebrating Indian tradition and exploring the modernization of his beloved country. He acknowledges the progress made in Kerala, particularly in raising literacy rates among women. Tharoor emphasizes the importance of educating girls as India's top priority and discusses the cultural significance of the sari, the growth of the Indian economy, and the role of call centers and cell phone usage. The book also provides biographical insights and offers a glossary titled *The A to Z of Being Indian*, which is both humorous and indispensable. *Show Business* by Shashi Tharoor critically examines a central socio-cultural aspect of common Indian life, namely, the artificiality and shallowness of the Indian film industry.

The realm of cinema encapsulates the fundamental concept of India's diversity in its organizational, staffing, and financial structure. Hindi films primarily aim to provide an escape into the realm of entertainment, as long as this escape facilitates the communication of the diversity that forms the bedrock of Indian heritage. Through this cinematic medium, they offer a shared world for us to venture into, enabling us to dream while fully conscious. This form of popular entertainment possesses the potential to unite our varied communities. It's noteworthy that modernized urban areas in India lack even a fraction of the rich and diverse traditional mass entertainment that rural regions experience throughout the year. Indian films, notwithstanding their limitations and occasional absurdities, represent a ray of hope for India's future, particularly in a nation where nearly 50 percent of the population remains illiterate. These films serve as the primary means for conveying popular cinema and consistently reflect the diversity of the pluralistic community that underpins this cinema. In the 1970s, the blockbuster film "Amar Akbar" depicted the separation of three siblings at birth, each raised by different families. The character Anthony, for instance, was part of an action-adventure film featuring three brothers—one Christian, one Hindu, and one Muslim. As they grew into adulthood, one became a smuggler and another a street-fighter. The film's massive audience turnout was due to their journey of rediscovery and their quest against the antagonists. However, the film also subtly conveyed a clear message that Christians, Hindus, and Muslims are metaphorical brothers, seemingly distinct but united in their shared pursuit of justice.

## CONCLUSION:

Tharoor extensively examines the multifaceted tapestry of India's cultural diversity, encompassing an ongoing interplay of historical narratives, cultural nuances, and power dynamics. He delves into the myriad challenges confronting the Republic of India, ranging from linguistic and religious complexities to issues of caste and class, illustrating how these factors contribute significantly to the segmentation of Indian culture into distinct components. India's cultural tapestry, shaped by its extensive history, unique geography, and diverse demographics, manifests itself through a kaleidoscope of languages, religions, dances, music, customs, and more, each exhibiting regional variations while sharing underlying commonalities. The nation's social fabric is inherently characterized by its

multicultural, multireligious, multiracial, multiethnic, and multilingual essence. However, India has grappled with various manifestations of division. Therefore, a paramount challenge for nations like India lies in safeguarding the tradition of pluralism and fostering multiculturalism to assimilate diverse communities into the mainstream fabric of society.

**REFERENCE:**

- Tharoor, Shashi. *The Great Indian Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1989. Print.
- ----- . *Riot: A Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001. Print.
- ----- . *Why I am a Hindu*. New Delhi: Aleph, 2015. Print.
- ----- . *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. New Delhi: Aleph, 2016. Print.
- ----- . *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in Our Time*. New Delhi: Aleph, 2015. Print.
- Kavidha, N., and V. Sakthivel. "Cultural Identity and Religious Hybridity in Select Works of Shashi Tharoor." *VEDA's Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 2, 28 Sep. 2014. Print.
- Dhir, Paras. Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*: Perspectives on History, Politics and Culture. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 1, 2009. Print. doi:10.21659/Rupkatha.v1n1.02.