

BETWEEN OBLIVION AND MEMORY: BRICOLAGE IN RIOT

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CHAPTER III

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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 Fiction 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.