

ON THE THRESHOLD OF LIGHT AND  
DARKNESS:  
A READING OF SHOW BUSINESS

M.A. Lalitha Kumari “A study of fiction in the works of Shashi Tharoor”,  
Department of English, St.Thomas College Thrissur, University of Calicut,  
2007

## 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](http://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**.