

INDIA: FROM MIDNIGHT TO THE
MILLENNIUM:
THE FACTION OF A NATION

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2007

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.