

A Tête-à-Tête with the Author*



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

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

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

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

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

L.K: Other than your vast knowledge of the Mahabharata and your being deeply impressed and influenced by it, what gave you the tremendous courage to attempt the puranic redaction, filing away hundreds of characters into their respective parodic versions, even as early as in 1989 when you were comparatively young?

S.T: The Great Epic has had a magical attraction for me ever since my childhood. It sort of grew into me and I took up the challenge very happily when the time came. It was not an easy task but I think I have done my best. When we consider that my writing first came in print when I was only ten, I do not think that I was all that young at the time of publication of *The Great Indian Novel*.

L.K: Women in different plains and in different moods, like those in "The Boutique" and in "The Village Girl" and *Show Business* are described in subtle and soft words by you. Do you have a subconscious image of the ideal woman, almost found in harmony with Nature?

S.T.: Every man will have a subconscious image of the ideal woman and I am no exception!

L.K: This is in continuation of the previous question. You have described the ideal woman – a woman whose physical beauty and attractions are not the aspects that strike a person when s/he looks at her for the first time, but a woman one would like to be with, know more of, protect and cherish, and who inspires one’s respect as well as love. Have you ever met anyone like her? Perhaps you had someone in mind when you described this epitome of womanhood?

S.T: (Smiles) There can be no one who is the all–perfect epitome of Manhood or Womanhood. Even our Godly Manifestations are not without failings but we do worship them. When I described the ideal woman, I was transcribing my wishful thinking about what a perfect woman should be. I might have painted that image in my mind, drawing the shades from the goodness, grace and charm found in different women I have met and heard about in my life.

L.K: Your humour is very natural. Which work of yours do you think is the most humorous?

S.T: Once a work is written and published, there can be no control over it even from the author. So shall we not leave the decision to the Reader’s taste?

L.K: Do you think looking at India with R-eyes may change your views from those you had when you looked at your country with NR–eyes? Is it likely that you will be disillusioned?

S.T: Perspectives keep changing with more observation and more intimate contact. About my being disillusioned or not, only Time can say.

L.K: You emphasize that, the singular thing about India is that you can think of her only in the plural. When did this pluralistic concept strike you first?

S.T: This concept has been in my mind since a long time. You can see its depiction in my work *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*.

L.K: Suppose it is said that rather than unity in diversity, there is more diversity seen in unity in present India, will you agree? If yes, what are the reasons?

S.T: Is it not so with the entire world or at least with the major countries? The reasons can be political, social, racial, geographical or even psychological. The best thing will be for us to accept and welcome them. But one thing we can be assured of is that, whether the Unity and Diversity are parallel or antagonistic, India will stand the test of Time and emerge a Super Power.

L.K: Sometimes, a novelist feels that certain characters who, though 100% imaginary, develop such strong personalities during the course of the novel, that they have a tremendous will power and get out of the author's creative control. Writer late Sri. Malayattoor Ramakrishnan said to me once that, his Vedaraman in "Aaraamviral" (The Sixth Finger) got obstinate, bossy and disobedient and could not be harnessed by his own creator – has any such thing happened to you? (Ved Vyas in *The Great Indian Novel* for example, in spite of the autobiographical element?)

S.T: A very relevant question especially with V.V being apparently garrulous at times. But I have justified him for being an octogenarian and therefore irrelevant. I keep a perfect control over my characters - whether it be birth, growth, death, rambling or even verbal gallivanting. They develop only in the way I want them to. I believe in the writer having absolute mastery over his creation.

L. K: In your leisure hours, or whenever you feel like indulging in reading, with which kind of book are you happy?

S.T: I am happy with any book that relaxes me or touches a soft chord somewhere in me.

L. K: I have had the good fortune to meet you a few times and thereby, intimate to you, my topic of research and the implications of the portmanteau word 'FACTION' which is a fusion of fact and fiction, in all its positiveness. May I hail you as 'The Ambassador of Faction?'

S.T: I have not introduced 'Faction' into literature. But if you feel that I am an effective spokesman for the new genre through my works, I shall be happy to be called so.

L. K: Thank you.

***** *The above is an interview conducted by the researcher with the author at Mascot Hotel, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on December 22, 2006.*