



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The twentieth century began with utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future became outmoded, while nostalgia, for better or worse, never out of fashion, remained uncannily contemporary. The present research defines nostalgia as a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. It is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame of burns on the surface.

The nostalgia discussed in this research is not merely an individual sickness but a symptom of our Indian age, a historical emotion. Hence the present research would make three crucial points. First, nostalgia is not anti-modern; it is not necessarily opposed to modernity but coeval with it. It is not merely an expression of local longing but a result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into 'local' and 'universal' possible. Second, nostalgia appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time – the time of the author's Indian experimentation, the slower rhythms of his dreams. In a broader sense, it is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to turn history into private or collective mythology, to revisit, time like space refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition. So, it could be merely better time, or slower time or time out of time, not encumbered by appointment books.

Third, nostalgia handled in this research, can be retrospective and prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of future life. The consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike, melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biographies and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory. While futuristic utopias might be out of fashion, nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension. It is no longer directed towards the future. Sometimes, it is not directed towards the past, but rather

sideways. The nostalgia makes one feel stifled within the conventional confines of time and space.

In fact, there is a tradition of critical reflection on the modern condition that incorporates nostalgia. It can be called 'off-modern.' The adverb 'off' confuses our sense of direction. It makes us explore side shadows and back alleys, rather than the straight road of progress. It allows us to take a detour from the deterministic narratives of history. Off-modernism offers a critique of both modern fascination with newness and the no-less-modern reinvention of tradition. In the off-modern tradition, reflection and longing, estrangement and affection, go together. Moreover, for some twentieth century off-modernists who came from traditions that were considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream, as well as for many displaced people from all over the world, creative rethinking of nostalgia was not merely an artistic device but a strategy for survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming.

In the postmodern new historical scenario, it is important to comprehend history and fiction as frontiers. The history fiction interface involves the recognition of history as a nostalgic construct and fiction as a product of a specific nostalgic history. It is imperative to recognise the linkage between history and fiction; since the objectivity previously granted to history involves the power of history institutionalised by the state because the new historical novel is engaged with contesting the frontiers of multiple discourses especially those of history. The novel is a genre, which involves a field of disparate discourses and in its postmodern form; the nostalgic reconstructions of the ideas which make it a suitable field for the participation in new historicist thinking.

In terms of the discourse of history, the Indian novels in English have shifted from being a mere field of mimesis to a legitimate field of contested history. It is within this reconstructive nature of the novel that Indo-nostalgia can be perceived at multiple points in the novel. This brings into focus that Indo-nostalgia is not confined to a single point but it is present in diverse areas of human activity. The postmodern novel in the light of the notion qualifies as a genre which is also transgressive in nature. However, the debate over the postmodern architecture of the novel can be perceived as a containment of this

transgression. It is this postulate that Tharoor, in his novels, subverts conventions of traditional narrative, dismantles hierarchy and exhibits the postmodern accent of Indo-nostalgic narration where meaning is constructed through an interaction of the multiple systems, discourses, ideologies and voices within the artistic entirety of the texts.

The power of fiction in the form of fragmentation is a way of telling that the whole is a sum of its parts. The novels of Tharoor are not only the products of the ideology of the present, but also by themselves produce the ideology making a transition from the immediate postcolonial condition to the contemporary reader. This becomes relevant in the fact that the writers have the experience of living through the emergency and the immediacy of the post-independence nostalgic memories.

History as a promoter of an 'acceptable' past is a resource of Indo-nostalgia. In India there has been a considerable debate over the possibility of an objective and impartial history. The government has met with many accusations over the use and abuse of history in its efforts to endorse its official version. The representation of Indian themes point out how attempts by Indo-nostalgic power, to advocate and centralise a secular view of Indian past in order to stabilise its contemporary base has met with Indo-nostalgia from other powers who attempt to inject fundamentalism through the strategy of religious ideology. The disagreement over the purpose and methodology of history writing has paved the way for disparate versions of India's past.

The concept of history as a narrative and the task of creating a coherent narrative bring the novelist and the historian into affinity. Under Indian context, the issue of an objective history has undergone various perspectives. In India, the novelist's concern with the past is stimulated as an effect of the power of history, where politics is seen as a strategy of power. Neither history nor fiction is accorded a privileged status by Tharoor; instead they are placed on a horizontal plane. The exercise is justified by the fact that a single, objective truth is not plausible since the power of history meets Indo-nostalgia from fiction and vice-versa. The writer and the historian are fighting for the same territory by adopting strategies of power of knowledge. But their knowledge is predicated upon the

basis of a 'truth' and truth is not only plural, but its power is dependent upon the interpretative imagination of the writer. Moreover, language as the medium for both makes 'truth' arbitrary. In either conforming or transgressing the socio-political codes, the writer and the historian, make exclusions by employing the power of the strategy of coherence.

Fiction in India has been a graphic chronicle of the varied vicissitudes of the people as they pass from economic, sociological, cultural and political subjugation of various hues and shades. It expresses most immediately and intimately the social awareness of society wherein it takes birth and wherein it evolves. The evolution of fiction and the consciousness of the societal apparatus are simultaneous and interlocked. Apart from the search for roots contemporary Indian English literature makes use of mythology, folk-beliefs, fables, mythical history to represent the present day predicament. It has become all the more necessary because the status of the words like truth and reality has turned out to be problematic. Indian writers give a clear idea of the variegated Indian socio-cultural complex. It is for the reason that Indian fiction in English has been regarded as a major source for a systematic study of Indian cultural context and cultural change. Any Indian writer can be properly understood only within the widest context of Indo-nostalgia embracing India's socio-cultural, economic, political and literary processes.

Novelists like Shashi Tharoor perform the greater task of handling down things and make the nostalgic memory of the great epics in their distinct way. Writers who use myth and history purposely; literature acquires simultaneity with the present. This is done with a will to permanence. The euphoria of independence having come to an end, people have started viewing things in a different way, the end of colonial rule has led to the realisation on the part of Indian masses that they are yet to get a 'second freedom'. The forces of social justice are gathering momentum on the Indian soil, through Indo-nostalgic narration. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* caters the needs of such audience. He records his Indo-nostalgic experience in the context of contemporary socio-political conditions, exploring the mythical patterns present in epics like the *Mahabharata*. The parallelism of the ancient epic with the story of modern India provides him with an

appropriately vast Indo-nostalgic narrative framework for representing the variegated, complex cultural and political environment of Indian society. The re-vitalisation and re-telling of the epic becomes a strategy of the retrospective interrogation of the recent past; which marks many texts of the 80's. The sharp wit and satire of the novel is not reserved for the British alone but aims equally at those who allowed Gandhi's ideals to be forgotten or trivialised, at the degeneration into autocracy of the freedom won by sacrifice and idealism, at some of the traditions of ancient India as well as the ethics of the modern society. What the novel offers, is not a comforting return to an idealised past but a glimpse of complexity of modern India and ideals where the Indo-nostalgic past and the present co-exist and where the values and ideals for the present come out of a careful examination of the cultural and historical legacy.

At the social level also, the period has witnessed an unprecedented openness. The assurance of the Gandhi-Nehru doesn't leave the place; the dominant attitude is that of mockery and criticism. Social evils and individual weakness are exposed rather bluntly. In *The Great Indian Novel*, we are reminded that modern India is:

...is a land of adulteration, black marketing, corruption, communal strife, dowry killings,...not my India, where epic battles are fought for great causes, where freedom and democracy are argued over, won betrayed and lost... dishonesty is rather the most prevalent art and that power is an end in itself rather than means', where the real racy issues involve not principles but parochialism. (p. 412)

The epic device of an original narrator's dictation to a demanding amanuensis allows Tharoor to highlight the contractedness of narrative history as well as fiction. In the traditions of the epic and the oral narrative, his novel teems with ordinary mortals as well as gods. The representation of the oral account gives immediacy to the narrative and a circular, digressive, quirky, unusual quality with the narrator's self admonishments such as:

...but I am getting ahead of my story. (p. 18)

In a way, *The Great Indian Novel* exposes the wrong economic policies pursued after independence, the mismanagement of the country under Indira Gandhi and the dark days of emergency and the later failure of the Janata

politicians to provide a successful alternative, the novel becomes a document of manifest socio-political criticism on Indian condition. The novel ushers in a post-novelist revolution in Indian fiction in English. There is a postmodernism in the work in many respects: in the rendering of a multiplicity of meanings and voices, in the repudiation of the possibilities of any absolute truth, in the recognition of the basic amorphousness of reality, in the self-conscious probing into questions of the narrative art etc. But unlike western postmodernism which excels in demystification and offers more or less a negative approach, Tharoor's work, despite its persistent Indo-nostalgic irony and tone of trivialisation, reveals an underlying moral purpose and positive commitment. The historical account of India, which he presents in *The Great Indian Novel*, covers a much longer period from the pre and post-independence movement to the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. A host of imperial and Indo-nostalgic figures from the pre and post-independence eras, such as Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Patel, Indira Gandhi, Krishna Menon, Sam Manekshaw, Arun Shouries as well as major historical events such as the Salt March, Jallianwallah Baugh massacre, the assassination of Gandhi, the Emergency of the general elections of 1982, appear in his fictional recasting of the epic.

The novel can be termed as a political allegory of selected episodes from the ancient epic the *Mahabharata* and can be inferred from the characters and situations in the Indian political, socio-economic and administrative scene in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. An epic is a work that deals with lofty themes like war, adventure, travel etc. The prevailing socio-political and economic situations in the present era give him the impetus to write an epic on the lines of the *Mahabharata*, which he feels as the right model to transcreate Indo-nostalgia fictionally in the modern context. The novel broadly deals with two main epochs in India's history – the colonial and the post-independence. The novel begins with a cryptic remark on India as an underdeveloped country. The author exposes the affluent class of the Indians who wear expensive suits, carry the most aristocratic and sleek briefcases, but do not know the first thing about their own history and heritage.

Thus, in a true sense, in *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor seeks to highlight the ancient principle of *Dharma* as advocated in the *Mahabharata*, which is considered to be the fifth *Veda* and occupies a monumental place in a *Vedic* study. The novelist justifies his chosen irreverence as acceptable in ancient Indian scriptures, which attribute certain weaknesses and feet of clay even to God. His intention is to make an explicit concept of multi-layered truth, which is inherent in Indian consciousness. The narration is devised to suit the requirements of postmodern urgency. Thus, the novel unleashes arrows from its sheath and hits at the corrupt and confused postcolonial situation in India heading towards disaster. It expresses the novelist's serious and sincere Indo-nostalgic concern at the existing political set up. Though his novel is not great, it is 'Indian' with all its texture messed in Indo-nostalgic references. It has displayed a mistrust of interpreting the past and has countered the crushing burden of tradition and history. The novelist has confessed in the 'afterword' that, he has taken too many liberties with the great epic.

Growing cultural interaction between the East and the West; the consequently changing social, cultural and political ethos after independence have given an added impetus to the writing of novels on the theme of East-West confrontation – A theme still being handled diversely. The cultural conflict between the East-West and the reaction of an Indian is recorded by the Indian novelists. Some recent postmodern novels focus on different aspects of East-West encounter theme. Tharoor goes beyond a more chronicling of scenario to probe into what conditions people politically reflex in *Riot*. An important component of their political and cultural consciousness is the awareness of the religion as a motivating force of action or otherwise. Tharoor wants to represent the novel as one of the many voices, many points of view, many perspectives and many truths. In a larger mode, the novel consists of large chunks of narrative whose primary function is quite obviously to fill in social, cultural and historical gaps that may be assumed in an average American's knowledge bank of India.

Through Priscilla Hart, the social worker and volunteer; who comes to India and is killed in a riot; Rudyard and Katherine, parents of the dead Priscilla Hart and Randy Diggs, the reporter who comes to India to draft a story on her

murder, in the context of the Ramjanmabhoomi–Babri-Masjid conflict, the present black and white stereotypes of the Hindu fundamentalist and the secularist, Tharoor makes the mockery of the Indian issues. Thus, Ram Charan Gupta, the Hindu fundamentalist shoot out the revulsion speech so annoyingly familiar to anyone in India; Lakshman and Professor Sarwar, the Hindu and the Muslim secularists respectively expound their views, that of the reproductive rights of women or as Priscilla Hart observes it, the rights of women and dignity in general.

If we look at the two American women characters in *Riot*, Katherine Hart is lightly sketched. Her daughter, Priscilla, however, is revealed in loving detail. It is reminded that women politician are strident and stout as well as the stereotypes of the oppressed Muslim women who are abused by their vicious husbands ignore the long and unimaginative account of the women burned for dowry by her in-laws, that we contend with Geetha, Lakshman's wife and Kadambari, Priscilla's co-worker, not because they are more complex but because at least they have a role in the plot.

Regrettably, Tharoor believes that 'novels tell stories in a linear narrative, from start to finish' and that this is what they have done 'for decades' even 'centuries', betrays unfathomable ignorance. He says unfathomable because his immediate reference to his own 'innovation', the 'reinvented...*Mahabharata*' points to an assumption of newness even for that endeavour. He brings back the political crutches of suspicion and divisiveness, the props that we have used for so long. With news of a remembrance in reminiscing over the murder of an idealist, Priscilla Hart, the novelist prepares us, for a novel that flows and ebbs like the tide; it is the raw plot of jealousy that keeps the story on the crest of an emotional wave. The story is set in 1989, the postcolonial flavour is created with skill and the reader is left with a neat etching of a woman volunteer, Priscilla Hart, who loses her life for no reason. It is like a glass wall breaking into a thousand threats of deadly splinters. Emotions uproar like the curd that bubbles on a hot summer's day and deep within the psyche of the Hindu-Muslim riots is a hot rage of revenge that is quite obvious but so mysteriously inexplicable. It is an indicator of a historian in Tharoor, an Indian who lives abroad, gives us the observer's penchant view of the agonising indecisions and the sparks of the hatred that we all carry within us.

Tharoor highlights economic asymmetries to produce stark cultural discontinuities through the critical and interpretative eyes of Indo-nostalgia.

Moreover, in *Show Business*, the notion of cinema as a representative of Indo-nostalgia has been proposed to classical Bollywood cinema, challenging the account of a type of narrative based on universal mental structures and trans-historical aesthetic norms. The modernism highlights certain aspects of Bollywood previously neglected; its relation to contemporary modernist movements in the traditional media as well as social and economic modernisation; its ability to offer mass audience of modernity including its traumatic as well as liberating effects, could be reflected and articulated, rejected or assimilated, confronted and negotiated. Thus, the concept of Indo-nostalgia might provide a more historically and aesthetically specific approach to re-examining, not only the centrality of classical cinema in Indian culture, but also the vexed issue of the cinema's worldwide hegemony, above and beyond its well known economic and political interventions. Traditionally historians have critiqued Bollywood hegemony, its transnational circulation as the most powerful universalising imperial and Indo-nostalgic discourse, a visual-acoustic idiom alternative to and sarcastic of both official and diverse cultural heritages. The notion of cinema is the first global and modernist vernacular complicates by suggesting the Bollywood film might have translated differently in different countries. It is not only transformed in local contexts of reception and existing film cultures but also might have played a significant role in meditating Indo-nostalgia on modernity. In a nostalgic sense, Indians have cinema under their membrane. Indian cinema stars enjoy massive celebrity status, which can be known to rise into mighty Indo-nostalgic power. The typical Bollywood films enable viewers to escape traumatic experiences of everyday life especially for the sub-continent dwellers. The immensely popular films, with their predictable plots made especially for Indian masses, transport the audience into an illusionary and nostalgic universe. Tharoor's satirical novel *Show Business* parodies the Indian film industry and its superficiality. It is the best example of Bollywood fantasy infused with the elements of Indo-nostalgia. Through Ashok Banjara, a prototype of Amitabh Bachchan, a superstar of Bollywood, a hero of *Godambo*, *Judai*, *Dil Ek Qila* and *Mechanic* and his last

unfinished movie *Kalki*, Tharoor crafts a plot on Bollywood to project Indo-nostalgia.

With these multi-cultured and multi-lingual voices, Tharoor takes us to the film sets of each one of Ashok's stars and from these various points of view, we know Ashok. Tharoor explores the Bombay movie industry as well as the culture of the industry. It is a satirical story of Ashok's hits and misses in the world of politics and cinema. Tharoor allows the complexity of Indian social fabric, economic realities and the political exigencies of an enormous entrenched system built equally out of corruption and necessity to arrange itself around his protagonist. The over arching drama concerns nothing less than free will and Tharoor handles the big topic, the role of *dharma*, the belief in predestination, that he suggests might also be a cosmic cop-out without crushing his delicate characters. Tharoor asks whether a society that has such a deep affection for fantasy, will not ultimately suffer for it. He also makes us eager to find out what happens in the end. Arriving at its apex of irony is one of the book's great joys, though it hurts. As in the larger than life-movies, it both ridicules and celebrates pain and pleasure mixed; until the final fade out.

Thus, Shashi Tharoor has done an innovative experimentation in fiction writing to explore Indian ethos with all its multi-verse diversity not only to Indians but also the readers of the world. His conscious desire, to express India through his works makes him Indo-nostalgic and India-centered. The research tends to prove that, Indo-nostalgia is the sole touchstone method to determine his literary worth and vocation. It is a sort of his innovative fictional operation; wherein at every line, paragraph and page of his fictions, he expresses his indebted and conscious patriotic and nostalgic feeling for India. Being India's leading writer, his works won the gamut from history, the satire, rich traditions and cultures of his native land. His fictions grapple with reality and ideals of modern India. To conclude in Tharoor's own words (tharoor.in) it would be appropriate to contend that:

As India matters to me; I too would like to matter to India and
I want to be a part of India's narrative in the world.

With this thematic analysis, it can be said that, the author always thinks of his past memories which fill him with joy and enthusiasm, the author's comparison between his past life and present life is highly admirable. He wants to

bring out the idea that memories of past push us to fill enthusiasm in present. The image of India soaring into the author's Indo-nostalgic memories is beautifully designed and created. So, it would be appropriate to conclude in the words of Shashi Tharoor (2001:95):

I am Indian, with friends where friends should be;
Wide are the branches of my extensive family tree;
Big businessmen and bureaucrats all went to school with me.
I'm the best kind of Indian, you see.