



THAROOR'S INDIA FROM MIDNIGHT TO THE MILLENNIUM AND BEYOND: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRE AND POST INDEPENDENT INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present paper is to study the comprehensive analysis Tharoor did in his book of all walks of Indian life, post-1947. It is a critical evaluation of the country's first fifty years of Independence. Very skilfully, Tharoor examined some of the greatest challenges India has faced over the past five decades as well as what lies ahead for the nation. In the chapters devoted to such diverse topics as caste, Indian democracy, the troubled legacy of Indira Gandhi, partition of India and Pakistan, sectarian violence, corruption, the author tries to define what makes India one country. He writes of these problems with a sense of optimism about the future. With a lucid and lively style he discusses India's transition from a socialist economy to a free market and expresses satisfaction at the Indian leadership's realization that economic interdependence is not incompatible with political independence. Keeping in mind the limitation of time and space, the researcher would prefer to give overview of all chapters rather than a detailed discussion.

KEYWORDS : Survey, History, Politics, Development, Democracy, Independence

PAPER

In the entire book *India from Midnight to the Millennium*, which is also a paean to India, Shashi Tharoor explores experiences and interprets every aspect of India in a highly personalized way. Here, he specifies the landmark, decisions and events during the first fifty years of independence. For some this book is a survey of Indian History alone; but 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. It's a history of post-colonial, post-independent and post-modern India. Since the author had global exposure due to his job in UN at the time of writing this book, he had better advantage of looking at India both from the inside as a citizen and from outside as the comparative observer. He is very passionate to analyse the Indian social system.

The author's observations of the developments in the field of economic, political and social upheavals compel the readers to think that he really ponders over India. He brings in to attention the sectarian violence that has ragged the country, the corruption that is rampant 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. Though there are many limitations, the author is very optimistic about the future of India. The author believes that with all its faults, democracy as it is practised in India is better than the alternatives. Secondly, he brings out in detail 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 connected virtue of tolerance and his opposition to religious fundamentalism. His views on *India from Midnight to the Millennium* are highlighted in the following excerpts quoted by Ms. Geeta Patil in her thesis from an interview 'Conversations with History Institute of International Studies',

"In India: From Midnight to the Millennium, I talk about the classic dilemmas facing the world at the end of the twentieth century: the bread versus freedom debate, of which the emergency is such an example; pluralism versus fundamentalism, which reared its ugly head in India with a new brand of religious chauvinism coming to light; Coca Colonization, the whole issue of globalization versus economic self-sufficiency; and even for a country India's Size, decentralization versus federalism. All of this makes India such an astonishingly interesting crucible for the things that matter to me intellectually, that I find myself constantly going

back to looking at the way in which in India and Indians are coping with these challenges." (p.206)

Indians celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of independence with great enthusiasm but for some, it was better not to think of it, for it reminded them of partition. The intellectual approached this event as a view point to hold the success and failures. Shashi Tharoor, on this occasion wants to make an examination of contemporary India in a highly personalized way comparing the pre-independent India with the independent India. He thinks of the past 50 years and also of the challenges that this country will face in the coming years. For this he contemplates on the forces that have formed today's India and also on those forces that are going to create a tomorrow's India. According to this author, Indians, after its completion of 50 years stand at an intersection of the four most important debates that the world is facing at the end of twenty first century. They are:

- (1) The bread versus freedom debate
- (2) The centralization versus federalism debate
- (3) The pluralism versus fundamentalism debate and
- (4) The globalization versus self-reliance debate.

Shashi Tharoor, in the first chapter talks about the fabrication of Indian society, its culture, its pluralism. The plurality in every aspect of this country poses a difficulty in the given task. In the beginning only, Tharoor argues that this is a country with an extraordinary mixture of ethnic groups, with diversity in religious and cultural practices, using many languages, residing on a land with a rich bio-diversity of topography and climate. It is this diversity in every aspect which makes it difficult to approach India. According to him any truism about India can be immediately contradicted by another truism about India. Talking about the political disunity and freedom of India, Shashi Tharoor says that the merchants from East India Company and later from Britain who came to India in search of spices found it very easy to rule the Indians. The reasons may be many but one of the important was that these Indians were not politically united. They were ruled by hundreds of kings.

In the second chapter 'Two Assassinations and a Funeral', Shashi Tharoor gives a comprehensive survey of the Prime Ministers of India and also brings in to focus the legacy of the Nehru / Gandhi dynasty of being at the leadership of the Congress party. It is because of this dynasty only that Sonia Gandhi, Italian wife of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, was offered the chair of Prime Minister. Being the sole adult survivor of the Nehru/Gandhi dynasty, the Congress party

men offered Sonia the chair of Prime Minister and also voted her unanimously the Party President. Here only, he discusses Emergency declared by the then Prime Minister, India Indira Gandhi in 1975. She arrested all the opponents and postponed the sixth general elections. The press suffered censorship. She launches the '20 point program' for the common man.

In the third chapter 'Unity, Diversity and other Contradictions', Shashi Tharoor expressed his ideas about India, about Hinduism, about secularism and about his Keralite origin. Talking about secularism in India, Shashi Tharoor says that in Indian context secularism doesn't mean absence of religion but "Indian secularism meant a profusion of religions, none of which was privileged by the State." (p.52) The Independent India was a secular country, a country not devoid of religion, but a country for everyone, for every religion. Talking about Kerala, he says that it is a state that has practised openness and tolerance from time immemorial; which has made religious and ethnic diversity a part of its daily life rather than a source of division; which has overcome caste discrimination and class oppression through education, land reforms and political democracy; which has honoured its women and enabled them to lead productive, fulfilling and empowered lives. Kerala's working men and women enjoy greater rights and a higher minimum wages than anywhere else in India. Malayalam is the only language in the world with a palindromic name in English. The literacy rate is high. Kerala has, in short, all the demographic indicators commonly associated with developed countries at a small fraction of the cost. Tharoor feels sorry to note that India even after fifty years of Independence has not got rid of this caste system.

In the chapter 'Of Indians and Other Minorities', Tharoor's rumination on India is seen when he discusses in detail the minority issue. He asserts that in India there is no majority as such. Everything is in minorities only. The scattered presence of all communities everywhere throughout the country provides the cause of becoming minority. Religion, language too cannot become the criteria of declaring majority. If a religion guarantees a person majority, then his caste places him in the minority group. After discussing the issues of caste, religion, and communal politics at length, Tharoor draws our attention towards NRI: Non-Resident Indian. For him this term also means 'Never Relinquished India' or 'Not Really Indian'. They have got name, fame and wealth in the foreign lands; they are financially very strong now and can help their motherland to overcome the financial crisis. A NRI is basically an 'overseas Indian' who has travelled a long distance for his better prospects, but still yearns for his roots lying deep down in his motherland. In broader terms it means a person of Indian origin irrespective of their current nationality. Today's NRIs are expected for some obligations towards their country.

In the next chapter 'Better Fed than Free', Shashi Tharoor shifts his attention to the Indian democracy and tries to examine the actual working of Indian politics in the democratic system. According to Tharoor, democracy is that engine which powers the vehicle named state. However this vehicle stopped for a while in the Emergency of 1975-77. Shashi Tharoor discusses at large the state of emergency, the reason behind proclaiming it, the effects of emergency and the role of press, intellectual, judiciary during this period. Mrs. Gandhi defended the action by declaring that the democracy was temporarily suspended and it was essential because it was weakening the capacity of the national government to act decisively within the country. This in a way was affecting the production and the prospects of economic development. Though she was trying to justify her action, for the western world it was an end of a great experiment, the development of India within a pluralist's democratic frame work. Mrs. Gandhi suspended the civil liberties, banned a free and critical press, arrested the opposition leaders, and postponed elections.

Shashi Tharoor assesses the role of Indian bureaucracy for it plays a vital role in the implementation of developmental policy.

Shashi Tharoor in the chapter, 'India at Forty Nine' talks about 'the new India' where appearance is the only reality. He talks about the aspirations of middle class people who have accepted corruption as a natural phenomenon. They are also indifferent to the economic reforms. According to him in the Indian society there is a constant struggle between two distinct attitudes or opposite tendencies in everything especially in food, clothing and much more. India is a land where people of different religions and cultures live in harmony. This harmony is seen in the celebration of festivals. The message of love and brotherhood is expressed by all the religions and cultures of India. Whether it is the gathering of the faithful, bowing in prayer in the courtyard of a mosque, or the gathering of lamps that light up houses at Diwali, the good cheer of Christmas or the brotherhood of Baisakhi, the religions of India are celebrations of shared emotion that bring people together. People from the different religions and cultures of India, unite in a common chord of brotherhood and amity in this fascinating and diverse land. In India there is a tradition of celebrating almost everything. Whether it is birth, death, victory, marriage, the New Year, new months, harvests, initiations, marriages or anniversaries, they all are celebrated in India. Shashi Tharoor ends this survey of India conducted on the eve of fiftieth anniversary by answering the questions he has raised in the initial chapters.

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