

Reflections Of Contemporary India In Shashi Tharoor's The Struggle For India's Soul: Nationalism And The Fate Of Democracy: A Critical Study

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Abstract

Postcolonial literature is written by authors from formerly colonised countries. It usually discusses the problems and repercussions of a country's decolonisation, in particular concerns relating to the social and political freedom of the previously oppressed people and also subjects like racism and imperialism. In addition to the aftermath of colonialism, it also focuses on cultural differentiation and transition. This paper aims to analyse Shashi Tharoor's book, *The Struggle for India's Soul: Nationalism and the Fate of Democracy*, through the lens of post colonialism and its aftermath in the Indian society. It weighs upon the dilemma of contemporary India and its reflections on the society torn between civic nationalism and ethno-religious nationalism. Consequently, this can be reflected from recent rise of the question of nationality, belongingness, language, threat on democratic principles, registry of citizenship creation of fake narratives of and distortion of history.

Keywords: nationalism, post colonialism, belongingness, democracy, language

Introduction

Shashi Tharoor is a senior Congress Leader from Kerala and a veteran international diplomat. He is currently the MP of Thiruvananthapuram. As an INC member, he has won two elections in succession in this district. Furthermore, he was ordained to the UPA government cabinet by Manmohan Singh. Dr. Tharoor, who was born in London in 1956, had his education in India and the United States before earning his PhD at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1978. He worked previously for the UN as a peacekeeper, humanitarian, worker for refugees, and bureaucrat, assisting as Under-Secretary-General during Kofi Annan's tenure as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. 18 of Tharoor's best-selling works encompass both the fiction and non-fiction genres. He is an internationally recognized author who has worked as an editor and a columnist for

numerous prestigious newspapers all over the world. An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India, his book, won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in the year 2019.

Post colonialism is a broad cultural perspective on the study of power dynamics between many groups, cultures, or individuals where translation, literature, and language have a role (Hatim & Munday 106). Discussions of postcolonial experiences includes oppression, suppression, migration, and resistance, diversity, race, gender, and region. Therefore, the paper aims to throw light in the aftermath of the Indian experience of independence, India's nationalism, the state of democracy, the sense of belonging, the question of nationality and registry, history and its changing narratives, debate of languages and the struggle for India's soul caught between civil and ethnic nationalism.

Unanticipated conflict that no one would have expected to emerge so late in our political existence is currently playing out in Indian politics. Many individuals took Indian nationalism for granted. At first, there was a nationalism rooted in the anti-colonial sentiment that aimed to drive foreigners from India. After gaining independence, it changed into what might be described as civic nationalism because the values that fuelled India's persistent struggle for independence have always been respected in India, including its longstanding traditions of inclusivity, social justice, and religious tolerance, as well as its desire to create a society where people could thrive regardless of their religion. Recently, it can be observed that it is transforming into an ethnic based nationalism.

An article published by illiberalism.org "Shashi Tharoor – The Struggle for India's Soul: Nationalism and the Fate of Democracy" observes that now there are two dominant nationalist ideologies in India: civic nationalism and ethno-religious nationalism. The brilliant ideas bestowed to the republic at Independence—pluralism, secularism, and inclusive nationhood—now risk being shattered and destroyed by this battle for India's soul. Universities are being attacked, the Constitution is under attack, institutions are being weakened, historical myths are being spread, minorities are being vilified, and worse. Tharoor demonstrates how these recent attacks pose a threat to such values. If they are successful, millions of people will lose their sense of identity, and misconceived notions regarding what it means to be Indian will spread all through the subcontinent.

Sense of belongingness

Gayatri Spivak says, "Nationalism can only ever be a crucial political agenda against oppression. All longing to the contrary, it cannot provide the absolute guarantee of identity." The notion that a nation is an autonomous group of citizens is also one of nationalism's foundations. This notion was

crucial to the political discourse in context of the American fight for independence (Breuilly⁵). The reasoning over nationalism is a reflection of the through going moral conflict between malice of acts committed in the name of nationalism and solidarity with persecuted national communities. In addition, the nationalism debate highlights a broader range of issues with how democratic polities should handle racial and cultural diversity, probably one of the most urgent issues in modern political ideology.

Similarly, in India a new narrative of nationalism and nationality has been created. Those who don't fit in with the dominant society's narrative ranging from seen as traitors. For example, supporting one's country at a cricket match or not supporting it itself questions the sense of belonging and allegiance to one's country. So, a game that is supposed to be played for entertainment now has become a parameter for nationality. On the contrary the free nationals should be free to support whichever team he likes- the way of the civic nationalism. Interestingly, the ethno-religious nationalism will consider this conduct as outrageous and "anti-national". Whereas according to almost all countries loyalty is defined in law only negatively.

All constitutional provisions and statute-books define disloyalty: treason, sedition, espionage, sabotage, and related crimes are proscribed and punishable by law. But loyalty to the nation is not itself defined, and the failure to adhere to some invisible, and indivisible, code of nationalism is not illegal (Tharoor 72).

It is to be noted that loyalty to the nation is not itself defined therefore the lack of success to abide by some invisible, indivisible code of nationalism is not illegal. For the ethno-nationalists to suggest it to be illegitimate gives

rise to a new source of tension that goes against the classic nationalist project of national unity. And as such, it is imperative for us all to criticise our government whenever it fails to deliver on its pledges and the betterment of the general public. So that the government can work even harder to achieve its goals.

Languages, tradition, history, mindset, culture, and territory are exemplars of collaborative characteristics of a nation. When all these characteristics are harnessed together, as a result, eventually, people would experience a sense of belonging therefore, a sense of nationalism. Thus, there would be a sense of solidarity and harmony among the people of the country. In this way, nationalism is capable of strengthening the citizens of the nation. Also, the dark side to nationalism cannot be omitted. However, the importance of nationalism cannot be diminished by its drawback. In order for a nation to progress it has to rise above its shortcomings.

The Fabrication of History

The significance of history was once further presented as a way of fostering a sense of nationalism. The nationalist authors exhorted their readers to be proud of India's historical accomplishments and fight to improve the deplorable conditions of living under British rule. However, unification of the people presented some challenges. People from other communities felt excluded when images out of Hindu iconography was used to celebrate the past. "The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject" (Spivak 66). The notion of pluralized "subject-effects" creates the impression that it undermines the autonomy of the mind, although it frequently serves as a covering for the area of study (Spivak 66).

The old narratives are changed, the history distorted and fabricated to suit the objectives of the current ideology of the ruling government. Such historical fabrications are the result of a larger strategy. The endeavour to define the colonial subject as Other, which was

remotely managed, far-flung, and heterogeneous, is the most glaring example of such epistemic violence that is presently available (Spivak 76). The disastrous "disappearing" of knowledge, where local or provincial information is discounted due to prioritising alternative, frequently Western, epistemic practises, is an epistemic side consequence of colonialism. Although Spivak's description of "subaltern classes" has drawn criticism, her understanding of the challenges of countering violence that aims to eradicate the knowledge held by outcasts is still relevant today. She emphasises that one way to carry out epistemic violence is to hinder a certain group's capacity for communication and hearing. The fact that individuals of oppressed groups can be muted by nature of group membership is generally acknowledged as a result of Spivak's and other philosophers' work. Likewise, the distortion of history is done; the government is aware of the stating that modern Muslims are inherently unsafe in character could get them in problems with the law. Nevertheless, they subtly insinuate that modern Muslims, who are said to be inheritors of the character and values of the medieval invaders, are similarly atrocious in nature by vilifying Muslim rulers and their purported misdeeds. In addition to dehumanizing Muslims, this serves to widen the gulf between the races and attain the necessary level of polarisation for electoral purposes.

...has devoted itself for years to reinventing history to suit its bleak narrative of India's past, in which the villains are all Muslims or liberals and heroic Hindus are victorious on the revisited pages of books even when they were not on the battlefield (Tharoor 143).

This narrative of the government promotes to notion of the inescapable Hindu-Muslim divide. The justification for aggression against people who dissent is patriotism. Hindutva's spectacular and mundane

audiovisual message dominates public conversation. Its effects include a vigilante citizenship that has imprinted on the bones of deceased victims and vigilante publics that are prepared to mobilise either in support of or opposition to ethno-cultural violence (Banaji). The present suffers from has been a legacy of the past. The deliberate divide created by British still persists. Ironically, the arch-nationalists have become complicit in what was essentially a British imperial project. The conflict of communities that bred resentment among the masses, will simply fuel even greater animosity and polarization.

A Threat to Democracy

India has long earned the title of 'biggest democracy in the world.' This monument has long been a pillar of strength, constantly winning praise and respect from people around the world. But have recent events put India's status as a democracy, and hence had a major setback in its aspirations in terms of foreign policy. The independence of India also heralded a new period in which it was believed that human rights would more readily emerge in the new era of post colonialism, particularly in countries that were liberating themselves from Western imperialism. India was among the first countries to renounce Western imperialism, and as a result, the declaration of its independence coincided symbolically with the beginning of the modern era of human rights (Dwivedi et al. 2). "It is, rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (Spivak 76).

While it is indisputable how other established democracies, other than India, also face massive social, economic, political, and institutional difficulties, lingering doubts about the country's democratic degeneration cannot simply be disregarded as the projection of foreign intrusion with personal agendas. India's status as a multicultural, multi religious democracy is crucial to its national security, regional influence, and diplomatic ties. India's

participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with the ostensibly united liberal democracies of Australia, Japan, and the United States has contributed to the West's long-standing perception of India as an ideological and geopolitical deterrent to China's ascent in the Indo-Pacific.

However, the blatant suppression of civil liberties by the current administration has put some democratic partners in a difficult situation. Although the two countries have similar interests in trade and defence, U.S. President Joe Biden ran on a platform of restoring democratic norms, values, and institutions both domestically and overseas, raising concerns about how his administration might view India as a reliable strategic partner in the area. Additionally, India's sincerity in upholding human rights has been openly interrogated in international settings; last year, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet advocated against criminalizing peaceful assembly and expression in India.

While remaining devoted to the country, one can criticise the current administration. To describe dissent as anti-national is to dishonour the nationalism of a freedom struggle that was in itself founded on dissent (Tharoor 192). These objections all point to one unavoidable truth: contrary to what the Indian Government has repeatedly claimed, protesters' and dissenters' acts are not fractious to India's national cause. A considerably grave threat to India's continuing economic and strategic goals comes from the ruling party's campaign to criminalise dissent, restrict free expression, and pass over human rights. The development of an anti-democratic reputation could impede a variety of long-term plans for the nation, with obtaining a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council being the most significant. Therefore, current administration must choose before the country's democracy disintegrates beyond repair if India is to fully realise its regional and global objectives.

A Partition in the Indian Soul

A review article by Tunku Varadarajan in *The Washington Post* states that Mr. Tharoor manoeuvre apocalyptic language in "The Struggle for India's Soul" to portray the struggle between these two Indias—one tolerant and liberal, the other majoritarian and hyper nationalist. As a consequence, there is an ongoing struggle for the India's soul between the inclusive civic nationalism and the ethno-religious nationalism. The "concept of India" as a haven for diversity, which was entrusted to the land by figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and B.R. Ambedkar (the primary drafts maker of the constitution, whom Tharoor refers to as "India's James Madison,") is the driving force behind the work. Tharoor persuasively argues that the Indian democratic system is in danger. Subsequently, the fundamentalism of the ethno-nationalism has posed a challenge to the acquire knowledge for many decades after independence now has reached profoundly worrying levels. In the last few years there have been an impetuous of threats to the law of this country as well as to the civic nationalism passed on to us by our ancestors- lynching, vigilantism and mob rule.

In India, there was no contradiction between celebrating its diversity and the variety of everything of religions, of languages, of regions, of colours and so on while proudly its individuals considering itself nationals. Suddenly, this seemingly benign thought of nationalism that political scientist would call civic nationalism has been challenged by a new dominant narrative that has won elections recently that challenges basically the idea of India and which seems to thrive on an exclusionary, aggressive, sectarian spirit based on a sort of cultural identity the idea that India is for only an individual community. So, in this process the soul of India- what is it that an individual celebrates when he calls himself Indian what he feels while announcing his patriotism or his nationalism is in question and the struggle is whether one is going to speak out or show an

allegiance to an India which celebrates civic nationalism and diversity or adhere to a notion of India anchored in ethno religious identity nationalism which denounces the rest of the individuals for not subscribing to its point of view. This sums up the fundamental struggle that's going on for India's soul.

In the light of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* by Gayatri Spivak, while it may be imprudent to describe to a literary work as "what it refuses to say," the legalising practise of imperialism can be defined as a collective intellectual refusal. This would create space for a trans disciplinary, political, economic, and philosophical re inscription of the landscape. Similarly, hailing ethno religious nationalism will lead to a change in the contemporary landscape of its society. It is cause of the wordling of the world a concept of rejection here becomes viable since this is a secondary level of abstraction " The task of "measuring silences" is certainly what this archival, historiographic, disciplinary-critical, and necessarily interventionist endeavour entails. 'Investigating, measuring and identifying the divergence' from an inherently different standard can be described in this way (Spivak 82). This complexity is said to be either insurmountable or unfathomable in nature. In this way, various mechanisms are embedded in both the frameworks of our social systems and the structure of our knowledge. Any attempt to synchronise or unite them in the name of reason and logic is prone to error. This is a refutation of the epistemological fallacy that demands that our perceptions and deeds be supported by unquestionable reason (Mishra and Kumar).

Sectarianism and violence against minority have emerged from the competitiveness for resources in a negotiable democracy. Politicians all over India, from different faiths seek to influence the voters by alluring them to the former's limited identity. The community is increasingly becoming more powerful than the individual. "As religion, caste, and region have come to dominate public discourse, to some it has become more important to be a Muslim, a Bodo or a Yadav

than to be an Indian” (Tharoor 164). Therefore, politicians do not hesitate in exhorting religion, region and caste politics. This somewhere generates a difference between people of different faiths and communities.

The Question of the National Language

According to the constitution, Hindi and English are both regarded as India's official languages; there is no national language. Hindi written in Devanagari is the nation's official language, according to Article 343 of the Indian Constitution. 14 languages were first listed in the Indian constitution upon the country's independence. India does not have a national language, as was already mentioned. There are currently 22 officially recognised languages in India. State authority to designate any language as its official tongue. Right now, well over 30 languages are pressing to be included to the eighth schedule of the constitution. Hindi is envisioned and institutionalised in India as the national tongue that unites the country's diverse population under a common sense of national identity (Chand). It has been a long-term policy plank of a particular ideology that Hindi, the language of the northern and central Indian states, where the party has sunk its deepest roots, should be the “national language” of India (Tharoor 197).

One can observe that India's multilingualism strikes a delicate equilibrium. The ethno-religious nationalism has had its differences with the conviction of Indian multilingualism, which it sees as a clamour that weaken the national unification comparatively than the proud display of variance that civic nationalism celebrates. “We are now constantly confronted with a multitude of ways in which we can define ourselves, and categorize others” (Mishra and Kumar). Mother tongues or regional languages are also rendered relevant by local state governments, institutions, and cultural identity, whereas English and languages like Hindi are thought necessary for interaction with national and worldwide communities outside state and national borders.

In this regard, India's cultivation and practise of multilingualism contributes to more than simply the preservation of distinctive regional identities; it also has a significant influence on how Indians interact with other Indians and a large portion of the rest of the world. In terms of international and domestic networks and communities for business, education, and the media, India is defined by its multilingualism. Given the significance of language in our daily interactions, India's multilingualism and linguistic diversity have influenced the nation and its distinctive cultural practices and policies.

Question of Citizenship and national registry of citizens

According to N. Ram, a renowned journalist and Director of THG Publishing Pvt. Limited, the Citizenship Amendment Act raised an undeviating threat to India's secular and democratic sovereignty alongside its political stability. According to Mr. Ram, who gave the Benjamin Bailey Chair lecture on “The Future of Citizenship in India,” rejecting and undermining the uniform rights of citizens dependent on their theological identities is at the core of chauvinism since it bid to expose countless of individuals to risk. The harsh repression of the democratic protestation averse to the citizenship establishment changes solely served to highlight the project's authoritarian and anti-constitutional origins. (CAA poses direct challenge to India's polity: N. Ram)

“By excluding members of just one community, the new law is antithetical to India's secular and pluralist tradition” (Tharoor 203). This exclusion of Muslims from a redefining of citizenship rights is not only unconstitutional because it marks religion for the very first time in Indian history as a marker of citizenship, but it is also surrounded by predictions of an apocalyptic future for Muslims, lower castes (Dalits), indigenous people (Adivasis), migrant workers, and the poor and landless as a result of the NRC. (Misra et al.) Both the bill's application to all

neighbours and its protection of all religious minority are exceptions. The measure violates both the idea of secularism entrenched in the constitution's preamble and Art. 14 of the constitution, which provides the right to equality to both citizens and foreigners.

The sixth schedule of the Constitution, that concerns with freestanding tribal territories in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, won't apply to those domains. Additionally, the legislation won't be applicable in states with an inner-line permit system (Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram). There are a lot of tribal people living in a few of the less populated states in this area. Thus, there was concern that an influx of immigrants—religious affiliation aside—would change the culture, sway voting behaviour, and jeopardize cultural customs. Moreover, the administration finds it challenging to distinguish between unauthorised immigrants and those facing persecution. In addition to that, our bilateral relationships with neighbouring nations where religious oppression have occurred may worsen as a result of the conduct.

Finally, it should be stressed that the CAA is in favour of granting citizenship to marginalised people from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in accordance with our tradition of 'Vasudev Kutumbakam' and is not robbing anyone of their Indian citizenship. Fear-mongering will not be tolerated; instead, we must protect the minorities who are being persecuted in these nations. Others can still access the Citizenship Act of 1955's provisions if necessary. Regarding the NPR, it is compliant with the Citizenship Act, which was previously put into effect, and the data is necessary for the issuance of identity cards. The NRC serves all Indians, regardless of their faith or other characteristics. It is a matter of national security, and as a responsible nation, it is absolutely necessary and must be done as quickly as possible. I have made the case that Foucault's engagement can frequently be attributed to his genuine concern for the politics of the oppressed, but this concern can conceal a privileging of the intellectual and of the

'concrete' subject of oppression, which in reality strengthens the appeal (Spivak 87).

In the sake of the wider nation, political parties must unite. Only when every citizen of India thinks like an Indian can the country's greatest strength, "unity in diversity," be retained. Only when we all work to enhance our core principles of kindness and bonhomie can Bharat/Hindustan/goodwill, India's harmony, and well-being improve. India has a bright future and is resilient enough to survive such aberrations that are intended to sow political fear when none is needed. "The reduction of any group of Indians to second-class status in their homeland is unthinkable. It would be a second partition: and a partition in the Indian soul would be as bad as a partition in the Indian soil" (Tharoor 165).

Conclusion

Post colonialism is the most undeniable and evident phrase used to describe the nations that had previously been colonised reverted from colonialism to self-determination. As writing about post-colonialism, one should follow the society's transformation as well as the changes that take place along the way. Therefore, important analytical concept that attempts to analyse both the effects of colonisation and the fight for freedom is post-colonialism. The aftermath and reflections of the contemporary society have been navigated in the work *The Struggle for India's Soul*. Given the social and cultural changes that have taken place, the subject of cultural differentiation and its transition state has been investigated through the paper in the light of postcolonial aftermath. The question of sense of belonging, the fabrication of history, the threat to democracy, the very struggle for India's soul torn between the civic and ethno-religious nationalism, the question of a national language and the dilemma and registry for citizenship concludes the discussion.

It is essentially un-Indian to divide our people into majority and minority, nationalist and anti-national, as this does not accurately

reflect the real composition of our nation. In the respective work, critics have noted the ardent appeal for an ideal of India an India that has been taken for granted by generations and at the present moment apparently vulnerable by obvious sand concealed ideas and ideologies that seek to fragment it on fabricated convention of one community vs the “other”. The idea that a person can only be truly Indian if they practise a particular religion offends Indian nationalism at its core. The quest of uniformity comes at the expense of unity; the need for consensus is destroyed by the emphasis on conformity. An India that withholds itself from some of us risked withholding itself from all of us.

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