



CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIAL REALITY IN SHASHI THAROOR'S *SHOW BUSINESS* : A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Tharoor's Show Business is a novel about contemporary Indian social reality. He is an acclaimed diplomat and popular writer. He has infused the religious panorama of Indian and the picture of Indian myths. Literature has always been reflection of the society. It reflects the contemporary and everyday reality. Since the birth of the Indian novel in English, its raw material has been India.

Show Business makes a distinction between appearance and reality. It provides an ironic and satirical view of modern life. Tharoor has written pornographic novel on film industry representing unrealistic social reality in India. The imaginative reconstruction of Ashok Banjara's life. What is represented in films thus becomes a contemporary social-reality.

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business* is a novel about Indian social reality. He is an acclaimed diplomat and has become a popular writer with the publication of his unique novels that are known for their cultural record of India. The religious panorama of India and the picture of Indian myths. The paper focuses on Indian social reality in Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business*. It is a very fruitful exercise to study how the creative writers reflect and transform reality into the work of art. There is particular relationship of a creative writer the objective reality. Literature has always been a most precise reflection of the society with some contradiction; it reflects the mainstream of ordinary, contemporary and everyday reality. It has a face to face relationship with the reality that provides a basis for culture of a particular period and that culture itself becomes the reality of the artist with which he grapples truthfully. The horizon of reality changes and expands like the rainbow keeping pace with the cultural patterns. The reality of today cannot be the reality of the past. However the continuity joins in with the reality of the yesterday and the reality of tomorrows in shaping the future. Our cultural heritage embraces everything that has been through the centuries contributing in broadening man's awareness of the world of reality. It has also served to transform the social consciousness; therefore it has been the part of social reality.



Since the birth of the Indian novel in English, its raw material has been India her people and their life in the colonizer's language. A concern for the Indian cultural heritage, human values and the reverence for social reforms have been reflected in the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore and many others in regional languages. Tagore's realistic themes are the predicament of the widow in Hindu society, the caste system and the Swadeshi struggle. The Indian novelists in English have followed the nineteenth century realistic pattern of the English novel. During the 1930s and 1940s the celebrated three of the first generation, viz Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, under the spell of Gandhian humanism and Marxist ideology, strived for the classless society and social reforms. Like Charles Dickens in England, Balzac in France, Tolstoy in Russia and Zola in Germany, they blazed the trail of critical realism in India. Our contact with the west changed the notion of Indian reality hooked on spiritualism. Yet it should be taken for granted that the Indian reality cannot be interpreted by the western parameters such as imagism, anti-novel, anti-hero, expressionism, naturalism, surrealism and other experimentations.

In short the Indian novel in English in its formative stage was essentially an exploration of the relation between individual and society, national pressures and uncertainties in a realistic tradition. There is an authentic observation and description of life in the social novel. The documentary social novels depict a general way of life a particular social or working community and the sum of social experience and feelings. The novelists have tried to portray what Indian really is. In the post-independent period, the experience of isolation, alienation and self-excite has been the important segment in a realistic novel. Society is seen through the personal and social terms and thereby making a fusion of the personal and social realistic elements. In personal realistic novels, personal relationships, aspiration and feelings of characters are considered, sometimes these characters themselves become some aspects of the society and a general way of life because they are within the society writers like Salman Rashdie and Amitabh Ghosh are successful in their attempts politics, fictionalized Indian history, subversion and domination, nationalism and internationalism, urban quotidian life, family relationship and ethno-centric and religious values are the fascinating facts of pan-Indian social reality.

Show Business makes a distinction between appearance and reality, the illusory world of films and the actual world of realities. It provides an ironic and satirical view of modern life. In the words of Chelva Kanaganyakam in his article *Exile and Expatriates* describes the entire novel is devoted to "the complex relation between the carefully structured binarism of the movie world and the multiplicity of everyday life"(97.) But it is an absurd combination of fiction and fact the glamorous personality of a film hero and the hollowness of Bollywood world. Tharoor a man of talent, has written this fictitious and pornographic novel on film industry representing unrealistic social reality in India. However some serious social



concerns-morality, violence, family life the Swiss bank accounts and religion are the film scripts like Musafir, Godambo and Dil Ek Quila.

Show Business entertains us but it does not satisfy our curiosity and desire for insight into reality. The author contrives to make the make-believe world appear realistic as the surface social reality delineated does not widen and deepen our understanding of Indian social life and human relations. However from the imaginative reconstruction of Ashok Banajara's life we learn about his real interests, intentions strengths and weaknesses and his concept of his happiness. Ashok's ideology his attitude to life and his own experience are flippant. He has been playing roles in films, in life and in politics. But all his real life situations are illusory. This unreal cinematic image is more real to the masses. His brother Ashwin tells him that he is "a larger than life figure to millions, but the few around you, weren't quite as large as life" (Tharoor *Show Business*, 252). The six monologues of Ashok Banajara beginning with, "I can't believe I'm doing this" (3, 67, 127, 199, 259, 303). Even since the difference between the seal and celluloid world, the real and true unreal. The unreal world includes his chase for Abha Patel, his seduction by Radha Sabnis, his role as a father of triplets, his entry into politics, the back bencher in the House of Parliament and his resignation and finally the disastrous accident at the time of the shooting of the film 'Kalki'.

The novelist's concern seems to depict an artificial reality of celluloid world rather than social reality in India. Though the world of cinema is illusory, make believe, the producers create the imaginary socio-political realities thereby fulfilling dreams through the action of glamorous heroes and heroines. Bombay is the capital of Indian films. Ashok Banajara says, "Hindi films are real, much more real in India than anything we are doing" (7). There is some substance in his utterance. The film business show business. A few basic themes tackled in films are love, sex, arranged marriage, adultery, exploitation corruption, criminality and mendacity and "it's endemic, its ingrained, 't's part of reality" (218) in Hindi films. There is nothing extraordinary in Ashok's first hit film "Godamba", simply a fighting between Inspector Ashok and the villain for abduction Darker aspects of Bollywood reality are presented through Ashok-Abha Patel intrigue and Pranay-Sunita sex affair. Ashok marries Maya, a simple and good natured, "the nation's ideal bahu" (83) who gave up her film career after marriage. Mehnaz from an aristocratic Hyderabad family, so beautiful to be nicknamed as Miss Alternative Universe 1975 becomes not Ashok's "Lawfully wedded wife but awfully bedded wife" (185). This convent-educated Muslim girl from a Nawabi family is shown as Shri.Pranay's daughter and Ashok's wife in the film 'Mehnaz'. Ashok and Mehnaz oppose Pranay's move of slum demolition, send erring the slumdwellers homeless. Ashok brings out of clash between the 'haves' and have nots while addressing the mob. He says, "They tell us, the people who have been living here for twenty years that we encroachers who have no legal right to be here at all. They want to take the poor man's land to erect big building for the rich" (230). As usual, Mehnaz leaves her father's house, stays with Ashok when

bulldozers are brought these. Ashok is arrested for kidnapping Mehnaz but the judicial triumph is his and he defeats Mr. Pranay even in Assembly elections.

There is a melting of class and caste barriers in Hindi movies. But “it is an exploitative device to blur the reality of class struggle by promoting an illusion of class mobility” (225). In films, an evil is easily personified whereas in reality “evil pervades an entire social and economic system which your films do nothing to challenge” (117), says Kulbhushan. All the fantasies in the Hindi films according to Ashwin, “fly in the face of every single class, caste and social consideration of the real India” (248). Corruption, black money, the justified Swiss bank accounts and furthermore, the smugglers are justified because the laws which do not allow foreign goods into India “protect Indians industrialists” (17), who produce duplicate things and sell them at higher prices without any fear of foreign competition. Ashok’s father says that in India “even challenging a vested interest becomes a vested interest” (117) what is represented in films thus becomes a contemporary social reality in India with a light distinction between appearance and reality. But it is difficult to make distinction between appearance and reality. But it is difficult to make distinction as there is the fusion of both reality and illusion and here. Lies the success of *Show Business*. At the end of the novel the thread of reality is shown intricately woven with the cinematic illusion or Maya. The dying Ashok feels reality leaving him. He addressed the mob, “you are not real. None of you is real. This is not real. This is not real, only the pain is real. And me I am not real either, and I will never be real again.” (306). He dies at the hands of the villain. But Ashok does not accept the film-like ending. He craves for the cinematic turn for justice and vengeance.

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