



REALM OF THE INTERTEXTUAL ALLUSIONS IN SHASHI THAROOR'S '*THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL*'

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intricate web of allusions woven by Shashi Tharoor in his work, 'The Great Indian Novel' (1989). Focusing on the interplay between history and mythology, this paper delves into Tharoor's adept use of allusions, ranging from personalities and places to texts and events. By juxtaposing fictional depictions with real counterparts in post-Independence Indian history, Tharoor employs an ironic vein to unravel the complexities of the nation's journey during and after Independence. The deliberation aims to illuminate the relevance of these allusions, not only in the context of Indian history but also in the broader tapestry of Indian mythology.

Key Words: implicit reference, collective consciousness, appropriate paradigm, radicalization, annexation of Comea. Gelabin People's Party.

INTRODUCTION

Allusions are implied references to historic or literary persons, events, places and works from other literary works; it has been one of the amazing characteristics of many literary works. For instance, the title of William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* alludes to a line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Also, in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Captain Ahab's name alludes to the wicked and idolatrous biblical character of the king Ahab, a connection that adds depth of understanding of Ahab's character to the reader. Authors resort to allusion to



impart symbolic weightage because they want to make subtle and implicit connections with other works. *The Great Indian Novel* abounds with such allusions to the number of persons, events, places and works.

Shashi Tharoor had celebrated much popularity with *the Great Indian Novel* weaving a story of Indian life with the personalities taken from *the Mahabharata* and the scenario of India's pre and post Independence Movement. Once he had expressed "Every character in the Mahabharata has human failings - perhaps barring Krishna and they address contemporary sensibilities. It makes the epic more relevant than any other Indian epic because there is this huge classical movement that exists in our collective consciousness. We deal with the same dilemmas in our normal lives that they deal with." In this pursuit, he deals with allusions and puns. The phrase "*Great Indian novel*" itself is an allusion to the long-standing idea of the *Great American Novel* and is also a pun, roughly, translating "Mahabharata" (maha "great" and Bharata "India"). The Mahabharata, which is not a novel but an epic poem, can be understood, according to Tharoor, to represent Hinduism's greatest literary achievement and it serves as an appropriate paradigm in which he sets a retelling of recent Indian history. The novel includes numerous allusions to famous works about India, such as those by Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster and Paul Scott. The organization of the sections and chapters of the novel mirrors the organization of the Mahabharata and the themes and events addressed in each allude to themes and events of the mirrored sections of the epic. The novel has 18 sections or books, as similarly as *the Mahabharata* has 18 books and also the Battle of Kurukshetra depicted in the novel continued for 18 days.

The first section of the *Twice-Born Tale* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's Book of the Beginning. When Ved Vyas (V.V.), recounts his personal history and describes as the "*Song of Modern India*" Ved Vyas, the narrator, 88 years old compelled into retirement from politics, dictating his memoir, is an allusion to Vyasa in *the Mahabharata*, son of the wandering sage Parashar and fisherman's daughter Satyavati, author of the Vedas and *the Mahabharata*, father of Dhritarashtra, Pandu, and Vidur, when Ambika and Ambalika were sent to him to be inseminated, his ugliness caused Ambika to close her eyes which had resulted in Dhritarashtra's blindness and made Ambalika turn pale. In the history, this character is an allusion to the personality of C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), close associate of Gandhi and last Governor-General of India, Sanjeeva Reddy, ex-Chief Minister, Andhra Pradesh, ex-speaker Lok Sabha, defeated by V.V. Giri in the presidential election in 1969.

Also the second section, the *Duel with the Crown* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Assembly Hall*. The title of this section alludes to Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown*. Ved Vyas compares his memoir to *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* by Nirad Chaudhuri. In the novel. Ganga Datta (Gangaji or the Mahaguru), a celibate spiritual leader who begins his career as the regent of Hastinapur is an allusion to Bhishma (Devavrata),



celibate son of Shantanu and the river Ganga in the Mahabharata. His oath of celibacy led him to reject Amba. This character is also an allusion to Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhiji or the Mahatma), spiritual leader of the independence movement, who advocated celibacy in history.

The third section, *the Rains Came* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Forest*. The title of this section alludes to Louis Bromfield's *The Rains Came*. Sir Richard is furious about the events of Motihari, Heaslop notes that Gangaji had never formally resigned from the regency of Hastinapur. The regent having committed sedition, Hastinapur can now be annexed by British India. (the annexation of Hastinapur is the annexation of Oudh) Dhritarashtra and Gandhari's marriage is off to a good start. The devoted young bride has resolved to forever cover her eyes with a blindfold so that she is deprived of whatever her husband is deprived of. Pandu enjoys his two sexually expert wives. While enjoying a relationship with both at once, he suffers a massive coronary thrombosis and is prohibited from ever again engaging in sexual intercourse. Pandu joins Gangaji's movement and instructs his wives to seek other sexual partners so that they may still bear him heirs. Kunti reveals that in her youth she bore Hyperion Helios's child but sent the baby boy down the river in a basket. Here, Gandhari, the Grim gives birth not to hundred sons (Kauravas), but to one daughter, Priya Duryodhani, who is to be the equivalent of a thousand sons. Here, Dhritarashtra the blind, the son of Ved Vyas and Ambika the elder heir to Vichitravirya is an allusion to Dhritarashtra, the blind king of Hastinapur in the Mahabharata and Jawaharlal Nehru in the history, India's first prime minister, who was often termed a blind idealist. Lady Georgina Drewpad, wife of the viceroy and lover of Dhritarashtra is an allusion to Edwina Mountbatten, wife of the viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who, it had been rumoured, was a paramour of Nehru.

The fourth section. *A Raj Quarter* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's Book of Virata. The title of this section alludes to Paul Scott's Raj Quartet. Hastinapur is annexed to the British Presidency of Marabar is an allusion to the Marabar Hills, which figure prominently in *A Passage to India*. The people of Hastinapur are milling in the streets, threatening revolt. There is a rumour that Gangaji will address a rally at the Bibighar Gardens (an allusion to the Bibighar, which figures prominently in 4 Jewel in the Crown). Heaslop counsels Sir Richard to let passions dissipate on their own, but Sir Richard instead calls in Colonel Rudyard and the Fifth Baluch, which starts firing on the unarmed gathering in the Bibighar Gardens. Almost 400 people are killed and more than a thousand are injured. After the Bibighar Gardens Massacre, which is a reference to the Amritsar Massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh in reality, Colonel Rudyard is retired with a half-million pound -pension. An unnamed Nobel Prize-winning poet (an allusion to Rabindranath Tagore returns his knighthood Gangaji kicks off the Quit India Movement (an allusion to the Quit India Movement started by Mahatma Gandhi). Bungling assassins kill Professor Kipling instead of Colonel Rudyard. This



Professor Kipling was the racist teacher whom a young Pandu had struck, which resulted in the end of Pandu's formal education.

Vidur Hastinapuri (Vidur Dharmaputra), the wise, the son of Ved Vyas and Ambika's maidservant in the novel alludes to Vidura, son of Vyasa and a maid in the Mahabharata, who was sent back by Ambika and Ambalika to avoid having to have physical relations with him, is prime minister to Dhritarashtra, Pandu, and Duryodhan, who saved the Pandavas' lives on multiple occasions. In history it alludes to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who forced the accession of the princely states and established the Indian Administrative Service. Kunti bears the sons of Dharma (a young magistrate), Major Vayu of the palace guard and Devendra Yogi: Yudhistir, Bhim and Arjun. Arjun alludes to Arjuna, the third Pandava and an expert archer, who served as supreme commander of the Pandava forces at Kurukshetra; son of Kunti and the warrior God Indra in *the Mahabharata*. In the history, it alludes to the Indian news media. Kunti calls a halt to the cuckolding and Madri begs to be permitted to take up the torch, She has an affair with the twins Ashvin and Ashwin and bears the twin sons Nakul and Sahadev. In *the Mahabharata*, they allude to the two youngest Pandavas, twin sons of Madri and the Ashwins, the Light of Sunrise and the Light of Sunset. In Indian history, they are allusions as the Civil Service and the Foreign Service.

The fifth section: *the Powers of Silence* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's Book of War Preparations. The title of this section alludes to Paul Scott's *The Towers of Silence*.

Also the sixth section: *Forbidden Fruit* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of Bhishma*. A rift begins to develop between Dhritarashtra and Pandu while both working within the Kaurava Party to further the cause of Indian independence. Pandu is advocating a harder line than the one pursued by Gangaji and Dhritarashtra. Gangaji joins the Round Table Conference hosted by the British Government. Mahadeva Menon, a Kaurava Party official from Palghat, tries to persuade Gangaji to do something about the tax on mangoes. Gangaji kicks off the Great Mango March, it is Gandhi's the Great Salt March in reality which prompts Pandu to leave the Kaurava Party. Mango March is an allusion to Gandhi's Great Salt March in history. Kaurava Party alludes to the Kauravas, the villains led by Duryodhan, who usurp the properties of Pandavas from the rulership of Hastinapur in the Mahabharata. It is the Congress party in history. In Chaurasta, a Kaurava protest turns violent and Gangaji calls off the mango agitation. Gangaji is called for a meeting with the viceroy and entertains an uncomfortable Sir Richard.

The seventh section: *The Son Also Rises* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's Book of Drona. The title of this section alludes to Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Ganga Shah is founder of the Muslim Group. In Indian history, this character alludes to Aga Khan III, nobleman and imam of the Ismailis and one of the founders of the All-India Muslim League.



Mohammad Ali Kama, son of Kimti and Hyperion Helios, the leader of the Muslim Group and father of Kamistan, known as Khalifa-e-Mashriq ("Caliph of the East). In the *Mahabharata*, it alludes to Kama, the elder brother of the Pandavas, who becomes an associate of Duryodhan after the Pandavas reject him and this character alludes to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan. who began his career as a colleague of Nehru and Gandhi in the Indian National Congress: known as Quaid-e-Azam ("Great Leader") in Indian history.

The eighth section: *Midnight's Parents* is a counterpart to the *Mahabharata's* Book of Karna. The title of this section alludes to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The five Pandavas and Priya Duryodhani grow up. Priya tries and fails to poison and drown her cousin Bhim. Priya Duryodhani, the autocratic villain, is a daughter of Dhritarashtra and head of the Kaurava Party. She alludes to Duryodhana, eldest of Dhritarashtra's 100 sons, leader of the Kauravas. In Indian history, it is an allusion to Indira Gandhi, daughter of Nehru, and third prime minister, who, in the early 1970s, declared an "emergency" and seized dictatorial powers. Also Ronald Heaslop, a British official who was once friends with Dronu, but when Drona asks him for assistance, Heaslop insults him. In *the Mahabharata*, he alludes to Drupada, the Raja of Panchala, who was a childhood friend of Drona, but when Drona asked for his help. Drupada insulted him. In the history, it alludes to a reference to a character (also a British official in the days of the Raj) from *A Passage to India* by E M. Forster) which led him to his mission of educating young Indians in order to facilitate the overthrow of the British. The Pandavas choose Drona to be their tutor. Here, Jayaprakash Drona, alludes to Drona, the instructor in the arts of warfare to the Pandavas and Kauravas. In history, it is an allusion to Jayaprakash Narayan, a former freedom fighter who opposed the rule of Indira Gandhi, leader of the Janata Party, which defeated Congress in the 1977 elections.

The ninth section: *Him-Or, the Far Power-Villain* is a counterpart to the *Mahabharata's* Book of Shalya. The title of this section alludes to Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and to M. M. Kaye's *the Far Pavilions*. In the novel, Pandu, the son of Ved Vyas and Ambalika, the young heir to Vichitraviryn, who is cursed with a heart condition that prevents him from enjoying sexual intercourse; he allows his two wives sexual freedom so that they may bear him sons (the five Pandavas). He dies when he finally succumbs to the charms of his second wife. In *the Mahabharata*, this character alludes to Pandu, brother of Dhritarashtra, who suffers from a curse that says he will die if he ever engages in sexual intercourse (he eventually dies when he has sex with his second wife); his two wives take advantage of a spell through which they bear the sons of the gods (allusion to the five Pandavas). In the history, it is an allusion to Shubhash Chandra Base, the freedom fighter who, in contrast with Gandhi, took up arms against the British and accepted help from the Axis powers in establishing the Indian National Army. He was last seen boarding an airplane and disappeared in flight suddenly.



The tenth section: *Darkness at Dawn* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's Book of the Sleeping Warriors. This title seems an allusion to Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Jayaprakash Drona in the novel is an allusion to Drona, the instructor in the arts of warfare to the Pandavas and Kauravas in the Mahabharata. In Indian history, it is an allusion to Jayaprakash Narayan, a former freedom fighter who opposed the rule of Indira Gandhi; leader of the Janata Party, which defeated Congress in the 1977 elections. Eklavya is an allusion to V. V. Giri in Indian history, the writer, orator, politician, labour activist, freedom fighter, who served in many offices, including as the Governor of several states, the president of India and the labour minister.

In *the Mahabharata*, it is Amba/Shikhandi (Shikhandini), who was rejected as a wife by Bhishma and was reborn as a man to get revenge; eventually instrumental in the death of Bhishma at Kurukshetra. It is an allusion to Nathuram Godse, the killer of Gandhi in Indian history.

Further, Viscount Drowpadi in the novel seems an allusion to Drupada, the Raja of Panchala, and lifelong enemy of Drona, father of Draupadi and Shikhandi in the Mahabharata. In the history, this character alludes to Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India.

While Dhritarashtra plans to meet the new viceroy, his wife, Gandhari the Grim. She alludes to Gandhari. Dhritarashtra's long suffering wife in *the Mahabharata*. In history, it alludes to Kamala Nehru, who tolerated the many sexual infidelities of her husband, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The eleventh section: *Renunciation Mahabharata's Book of the Women Or, the Bed of Arrows* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's "*Book of the Women*". The twelfth section: *The Man Who Could Not Be King* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of Peace*. The title of this section also alludes to Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*.

Vyabhichar Singh is an allusion to Hari Singh, raja of Kashmir in 1947s, the maharaja of Manimrit, who tries to avoid joining either India or Pakistan. Mohammed Rafi urges Dhritarashtra to ensure that Manimrit remains part of India. Khushkismat Singh, the Sikh defence minister who embarrasses himself by botching a joke is an allusion to Sardar Baldev Singh, India's defence minister.

The thirteenth section, *Passages Through India* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of Bhishma's Final Instructions*. The title of this section alludes to E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. Drona decides to resign from the Government and do "constructive work" in rural areas, taking Ashwathama with him. Ashwathama, son of Drona, who supports Duryodhani cartier but joins opposition after getting mistreated by Duryodhani and later becomes deputy Prime Minister in Yudhistir's Government. In the Mahabharata, he alludes to Ashwathama, son of Drona. In history it alludes to Jagjivan Ram, defense minister in Indira Gandhi



Government, joins the opposition during emergency, and later becomes deputy prime minister, at the behest of Jai Prakash Narayan, in Morarji Desai Government. Yudhistir alludes to Yudhishtira, eldest of the five Pandava brothers, who embodies the concept of dharma, justice, honesty, virtue, the son of Kunti and the God Yama in the Mahabharata. In history it is the personality of Morarji Desai, the honest but ineffective fourth prime minister.

The fourteenth section: *The Rigged Veda* seems to be a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Horse Sacrifice*. The title of this section is an allusion to the Hindu sacred work the Rig Veda. Purochan Lal, the owner of the hotel where Kunti stays, is an agent of Priya Duryodhani. Vidur intercepts the cables and sends a coded message explaining that the house is coated with Inc and will be set on fire. The building is burnt, but Vidur arranges their escape while letting the world believe they have perished in the fire. Further, Dhritarashtra and Kanika start the "non-aligned" movement. They decide to annex the Portuguese colony of Comea Comen "come" as opposed to "go" it is Goa in reality.

Bhim saves a beautiful girl from her abusive brother, Hidimba and weds with her. The character of Bhim alludes to Bhima, the second Pandava, who embodies the concept of strength; son of Kunti and the God Vayu in the Mahabharata. In history, it alludes to the Indian Army, seen as the sole incorruptible institution in Indian society. Bhim has a baby son, Ghatotkach, who was born in the town of Ekachakra.

The fifteenth section: *The Act of Free Choice* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Hermitage*. Dhritarashtra leaves nothing in his will to Draupadi Mokras and her adoptive father worries that he will not be able to find her a suitable husband. The Kaurava Party's Working Committee appoints the "honest but limited" Shishu Pal to replace Dhritarashtra as prime minister. Shishu Pal, Dhritarashtra's short-lived successor alludes to Shalya, Madri's brother in the Mahabharata and in history, it alludes to Lal Bahadur Shastri, the second prime minister. who had directed a military victory against Pakistan, but died while attending cease-fire talks.

The sixteenth section: *The Bungle Book Or, the Reign of Error* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Maces*. The title of this section alludes to Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Dr. Mehrban Imandar, the president of India, alludes to Zakir Hussain (politician). the third president of India, whose death sparked a struggle between Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party colleagues in Indian history.

The seventeenth section: *The Drop of Honey- A Parable* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Great Journey*. Drona leads the opposition to Priya Duryodhani's rule. Priya Duryodhani is convicted of electoral misconduct. Shakuni Shankar Dey, is Shakuni, Gandhari's wily brother, who helps Duryodhan by taking advantage of Yudhishtira's gambling addiction to engineer the Pandavas' exile in the Mahabharata.

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The eighteenth section: *The Path to Salvation* is a counterpart to the Mahabharata's *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*. Ved Vyas refers to the Kama Sutra as the Great Indian Novelty. The People's Front defeats the Kaurava Party. It is an allusion to the Pandavas, the heroes led by Yudhisthir in *the Mahabharata* and the Janata Party in Indian history.

Thus, there are a large number of allusions to titles of literary works, historical characters, famous places and events in *The Great Indian novel*. In fact it is what makes this novel a really great one. However, those readers who don't have any idea of the Indian mythology and history in depth, may not perhaps enjoy this text to some extent. It requires the adequate familiarity of Indian history and mythology in order to fully interpret it.

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