

Quest for Self-Fulfillment in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot***M. Venkatesan***Assistant Professor of English, A.V.C. College, Mannampandal, (T.N.) India***Abstract**

In all novels of Tharoor, we are confronted with the searching sensibility of his acutely sensitive characters and witness their attempts to find a coherent rationale of existence. The search for self-fulfillment is a quest that unites the diverse characters of her numerous stories and also reflects a search common to all thinking individuals in a world where all is in a flux and the chances of finding happiness requires the individual's conscious effort and assertion. The psychological and philosophical and connotations of his protagonist's quests contribute to the richness and complexity of the novelists presentation. The main objectives of the paper is to find the identity crises and quest for self-fulfillment in the novels of Shashi Tharoor

Key Words: Quest, identity, Riot, self-fulfillment

Indian English Literature has been growing slowly and steadily in the twentieth century thereby attracting the critical attention of diligent academicians all over the world. It has gathered a tempo especially in the last two decades of the twentieth century because of the awakening of creative writers in India and abroad rightly encouraged by many national and international awards. Writers like Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry and others doing the very great social service to the modern readers i.e. they try to fuse the past with the present for the future development of our country.

Described by Stephen W. Coll as "an accomplished expatriate Indian novelist and essayist of the neo-Salman Rushdie School," (P X05) Shashi Tharoor serves the dual purpose of entertaining as well as educating his readers by his fictional commentaries on contemporary India. Hailed by the Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel as "a major voice in

contemporary literature" (www.emalayali.com/a6news.html) he has unequivocally exemplified spellbinding strategies in his works, especially fiction. Endlessly inventive, experimenting, irreverent, wise and ingenious, Tharoor evidently emerges as one of the greatest votaries of profound erudition and brilliant wit, engaging his audiences with pure elegance, colour and provocation. Replete with subtlety, grace and beauty, Tharoor's works envisage diverse themes and modes of address with multiple positions evading strong interpolations.

Tharoor is an author of nine books. They are The Reason of State (1982), The Great Indian Novel (1989), The Five Dollars Smile and other Stories (1990), Show Business (1992), India from Midnight to the Millennium (1997), Riot (2001), Kerala God's Own Country (2002), Nehru: The Invention Of India (2003), Bookless in Baghdad (2005).

In all his novels we are confronted with the searching sensibility of his acutely sensitive characters and witness their attempts to find a coherent rationale of existence. The search for self-fulfillment is a quest that unites the diverse characters of her numerous stories and also reflects a search common to all thinking individuals in a world where all is in a flux and the chances of finding happiness requires the individual's conscious effort and assertion. The psychological and philosophical and connotations of his protagonist's quests contribute to the richness and complexity of the novelists presentation. The main objective of the paper is to find the identity crises and quest for self-fulfillment in the novels of Shashi Tharoor.

Tharoor in his text, *Riot* adopts riot as a vehicle to represent the political relations within the communal sphere. *Riot* exposes the indeterminacy of history especially in the event of communal tension. Walia in "Fictional Representation" states, "*Riot* is a well researched book with a compelling hard-driving narrative." Tharoor himself states of the thematic intention in his narrative, "In *Riot*, the exploration of the build-up to, and eruption of, a Hindu-Muslim *Riot* leads me to raise fundamental questions about ... collisions between cultures, between attitudes to life, between ideologies, between religious communities and between men and women (- 230). Asghar Ali Engineer makes a similar observation:

Shashi Tharoor's third novel *Riot* ...goes beyond a usual communal riot and seeks to examine issues of complex nature such as religious

fanaticism, cultural collision and above all, the trajectory of history (P 64).

Riot recognizes the fundamental instability of the world order in a moral sense. It has been attempted in this research paper to show the brilliant experiments of Shashi Tharoor with narrative form, chronicling the mystery of Priscilla Hart's death / murder. Not only is the murderer to be unearthed, but the reason for the crime should also be exposed. The true love of an American girl for an Indian officer is set against the reciprocal yet cowardly love of the protagonist, who is an insincere and opportunistic escapist.

The novel is set against the communal riot between the Hindus and the Muslims over the territory claimed to be sacred by both groups. While the Muslims consecrate the place on account of a mosque built by Babar on these premises, the Hindus deem it the place of birth of Lord Ram, the Hindu God. Consequent struggles have stormed the fire of mutual hatred into raging flame. Gory fights and hatred emitting sentiments take away whatever holiness was attached to the beliefs of the Hindu as well as the Musalman. When considering the incident as an act of terrorism, the following words of Tharoor in

Beyond Boundaries are insightful: Terrorism is a method, not cause; there can be no 'solution,' until people stop resorting to this method in pursuit of their causes (Tharoor, www.shashi tharoor.com 2005).

Among all this turmoil, wafts in like a breath of fresh air, a sweet-tempered American journalist who amidst her social

work, falls in love with the district magistrate who is also the Collector and therefore the law enforcing officer. Partly rooted in historical incidents and partly the creation of Tharoor's imaginative genius, the novel deftly interweaves numerous narratives in the form of letters, diaries, notebooks, scrapbooks, interviews and conversations, ultimately defying all conventional expectations of form, truth and meaning.

Riot was published simultaneously by two different publishers with two different cover designs and subtitles to suit the readers of different natures and cultures. Its acceptance became universal, when leading writers and eminent personalities accepted and appreciated it. In Tharoor's own words to Mendonca and Hirani in *The Times of India*: "All my books are a self-interrogation of what I think, what I believe about India" (Mendonca and Hirani, www.shashi tharoor.com 2002).

Riot is a beatified amalgamation of all the ten elements-love, anger, hate, joy, sorrow, pity, discouragement, pride, tolerance and compassion. *Riot* reads like a political and social treatise, but the reader occasionally gets a taste of wonderful love poetry. The progress of the love of Priscilla and Laxman and their intimacy lapse into romantic verses and there are plenty of instances of eroticism, all fictional reconstructions of a factual incident. According to Tharoor:

What I wanted actually was the kind of thing that happens in the real lives of people in some insignificant town. I also tried to use difference in two ways: to bring out a certain sense of

reality of life experienced, and truth. . . where there is no omniscient narrator, ultimately there is only the reader. (qtd. in Tharoor, www .rediff.com)

The whole novel is divided into seventy-eight sections of varying length; these help to unfold the story in a two-tier system. The first strand runs through records, entries and letters, whereas the second one unwinds three interviews, conversations and interrogations. Each section brings a fresh perspective on Priscilla Hart's multidimensional personality and her universe. Many of these sections also try to explore the socio-political conditions of the time in which she lived and worked in India, and finally got trapped in a whirlpool of tumultuous emotions as well as riots leading to her death. One great merit of this novel is that each fusion in each section is independent to some extent, but also has interrelatedness. Besides, we can take the liberty of reading it in any order without missing the crux of the story. The novel begins with the resolution and then keeps on alternating between exposition and complication. Lakshman writes in his journals:

"I'd like to write a novel,' I tell her, 'that doesn't read like a novel. Novels are too easy-they tell a story, in a linear narrative, from start to finish. . . I'd do it differently'" (Riot P 135).

In short, Tharoor, through the character, has expounded his own philosophy of writing a new kind of work, rather unconventional, but interesting to the reader. He appears to have the idea of a transportation of the theme of a work to the level of making the

reader wonder about the authenticity of this story. In *Riot* Lakshman dreams of writing a novel that can be in any order but the readers will definitely enjoy a sort of interconnectedness among different sections and also will enjoy the factual descriptions with fictional decorations.

A young American lady researcher doing her doctoral degree at New York University spends ten months in a small town of Uttar Pradesh working for a female population control awareness programme. Just before she is to leave for New York, she is murdered. All the narrators try to place together what could possibly have led to her murder. In conversation with Ronald Hilton, Tharoor agrees that “the novel is about the knowability of truth, the emotional as well as the rational” (Tharoor, www.shashitharoor.com 2001). The irony of the situation is that from the local politicians to civic and public authorities including a foreign correspondent, everyone has been able to come to know the truth which is, in reality, the fictional truth. When there are several unresolved questions, there is the difficulty of telling the untold. The helplessness on the part of the narrator as regards to the untold is perhaps inevitable. A work of Fiction does not necessarily provide a readymade combination of fact and fiction. The Factional narrative, on the other hand, abrogates the legitimacy of fact and fiction and invites the reader to partake of meaning construction along the response-inviting and self-reflexive structures of the text.

After saying good-bye to her friends on 30 September, Priscilla bicycles to an abandoned fort on the Jamuna River perhaps to have a last glimpse of the sunset in India.

On 1 October she is found dead with 16 stab wounds. Hindus had organized a big procession to take the issue finally to Ayodhya site. Priscilla's separated parents plan to visit India to view the site of their daughter's death and also to talk to her friends about the circumstances leading to her death. The mother remembers her past family life especially her daughter's qualities. She meets Help-Us worker, Kadambari. She visits Priscilla's room, does not find the scrapbook which her daughter was very fond of using. She visits Zaligarh hospital with Kadambari and goes back with her divorced husband to the USA. She senses her daughter's love affair with Lakshman, but does not know the truth about her daughter's death; she knows only the official version.

Scenes of Delhi airport and features of Priscilla's parents' comments on the heat and dust of Zaligarh are given in detail. We feel we are actually in the hot climate in Zaligarh. A brief talk between Rudyard, Hart and Mr. Diggs who meets some local Hindu leaders including Ram Charan Gupta to know the politics of the riot is mentioned. Priscilla describes Professor Sanvar's perspective on the riot and writes about the SP Gurinder Singh's version of the riot and his association with the District Magistrate (DM), V. Lakshman. She writes to her friend about her first meeting with the collector of Zaligarh, his arranged marriage, his wife Rekha and daughter. She likes the DM but makes it clear that she is not in love with him. She feels obliged to the DM for his help in making her know India and also the Hindu-Muslim conflict. Priscilla feels

that she has found Mr. Right in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Priscilla writes about her love relationship with Lakshman. She writes to her friend about Fatima Bi's incident in which she had to face a tough time when she (Fatima) suggested to her husband to think about birth control as she could not cope with seven malnourished and sickly children. The feminist angle where helpless women fight for survival and their unwilling submission to their men are dealt with. She has her meeting with the SP, Gurinder Singh, at a dinner at the DM's house and describes The Independence Day and her intimacy with and longing for the District Magistrate comes out.

She writes about Fatima Bi's call and her abortion in her husband's absence. Superstition factually gives into awareness of medical facilities and seeing reality for what it is. She seeks her friend's advice as to the expected turn her relationship with the DM should take in the given situation and also informs her about the cruel treatment Fatima had to suffer at her husband's hand for aborting the unwanted pregnancy. She shares her intimate moments with the DM and wonders if the DM also is in love with her.

Lakshman's explanation of different cultural, religious and linguistic aspects of Indian society conveys Indian identity to the West. Lakshman's details to Priscilla about various aspects of Indian society reveal the heteroglot voices of India. Lakshman tells Priscilla that language, region, caste, class and religion are the five major factors of division in India. Lakshman tries to brief

Priscilla how India is divided into different caste, class as well as religious, political, communist, and Marxist groups. The author suggests that democracy is the solution of all the problems of the Indians, particularly the problems of the minorities like Muslims and Sikhs. Similar kinds of views are also presented by Amrendra K Sharma and Manju Roy:

The appalling quality of our leadership may be a matter of concern to us, but the solutions to the flaws of democracy also lie in democracy itself not outside democracy (Sharma and Manju Roy).

Tharoor also attracts attention towards the polyglot nature of the Indian society in these lines:

It's worked, Priscilla. We have given passports to a dream, a dream of an extraordinary, polyglot, polychrome, poly confessional country. Democracy will solve the problems we're having with some disaffected Sikhs in Punjab; and democracy, more of it, is the only answer for the frustrations of India's Muslims too. (*Riot*, p. 45)

In spite of loving Priscilla passionately he cannot marry her because of the very socio-ideological world he is brought up in and cannot break the rule that reminds him of one of the traditions of the East he is brought in as these lines state:

.. I think of Geetha and her parents and mine, and of little lost Rekha calling bewildered her Appa, her eyes wet with unwiped tears. These are moments, of course, when I too

fantasize about a new life with a new wife, a new honey-blond wife... and I forget momentarily, my responsibilities, the burdens of guilt and obligation that shackle me to the present. (*Riot* 104)

In the novel there are two voices of Lakshman which are presented; the voice of his conscience and his lust. Obviously they cannot be merged together. The dream sequence of Lakshman helps to expand the narrative thread of the novel:

...Or another dream, in which I am teetering at the top of a skyscraper with Geetha and Rekha trying to hold on to me, they are afraid and crying and I am shouting out to them to hold on, but somehow it is I who leans too far off the edge and then I am falling from a great height, falling falling falling with my wife's and daughter's wailing in my ears, and I always wake up before I hit the ground. Of course I can never go back to sleep. (*Riot* 104-105)

There are also instances in the novel when the characters leave many things unsaid that create a sort of suspense in the mind of the readers. For example, Priscilla leaves many things unsaid in her letters to Cindy. It might be too personal to write in a letter, but that information might give a clue to her murder. These unsaid voices contribute a lot in the polyphonic nature of the novel as Bakhtin believes what is left unsaid is more important than what is said by a character. Priscilla does not mention many of her secrets in the letter to her friend Cindy that might help resolve the mystery of Priscilla's death as these lines of Priscilla's reveal:

...Something happened that day that I don't really want to write about, but it made me realize how much I love him, how much I want to give myself to him, how much I'm sure he is the right man for me. I want to spend the rest of my life with him, Cin, and it's driving me crazy...." (*Riot* 233)

To Sum up all the characters in this novel are searching for their identity in different ways. Nobody in this world are free because they are chained by various factors like, tradition, religion, emotional barrier, culture, race, politic etc/ consciously or unconsciously we are lacking somewhere else in the social set up. In this novel Priscilla Hearth is a foreigner who came to our country for academic purpose but she fall in love with Lakshmanan, He has extended his soft corner for some times and seduced her . But he is not ready to marry her even he may not regret for his mistake. He refused her to accept as a wife because she is a westerner. She may not suitable for our culture. The moment she was abounded she is searching for her identity. At this juncture we have to remember the words of Kamala Doss in her poem 'My Grand Mother House'

There is a house now far away where once I received love.....

Behind my bedroom door like a brooding Dog...you cannot believe, darling,

Can you, that I lived in such a house and Was proud, and loved.... I who have lost

My way and beg now at strangers' doors to Receive love, at least in small change?

(My Grand Mother's House)

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