

Shashi Tharoor's Non-Fiction: Reflections on Politics, Society and Contemporary Indian Literature.

Basavaraju N.

Assistant Professor of English, Government First Grade College, Kuvempunagar, Mysuru -570023

Abstract: This paper critically examines the non-fiction writings of Shashi Tharoor, a significant figure in Indian literature and politics. His reflections on politics, society, and contemporary Indian literature are critical. Tharoor's non-fiction works provide profound insights into the political landscape, societal dynamics, and modern Indian literature. This study analyses select non-fiction works, including "India: From Midnight to the Millennium" and "An Era of Darkness," exploring Tharoor's perspectives on governance, democracy, nationalism, secularism, and social justice. Tharoor's writings present a critical analysis of the socio-political complexities of India, drawing on his vast experience as a diplomat and politician.

Tharoor's non-fiction reflects on the intersections between politics and literature. He highlights the transformative power of literature in shaping public discourse, fostering empathy, and challenging existing power structures. Tharoor's work underscores the significant role of literature in shaping public discourse, a power that this research aims to understand and analyse. Tharoor also sheds light on the role of literary works as mirrors of society, examining their ability to reflect, critique, and inspire change.

Furthermore, this research delves into Tharoor's engagement with contemporary Indian literature. He explores the diverse voices, themes, and narratives within the Indian literary landscape while also considering the impact of globalization on literary production and reception. Tharoor's writings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex social fabric of India and emphasize the transformative potential of literature in shaping a more inclusive and equitable society.

Keywords: Shashi Tharoor, non-fiction, politics, society, contemporary Indian literature.

INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary Indian literature, few voices resonate as profoundly as Shashi Tharoor's. Renowned for his incisive commentary on politics, society, and culture, Tharoor is a beacon of intellectual rigour and empathetic insight. Central to

his non-fiction repertoire are works such as *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness*, which offer profound reflections on the trajectory of India's journey post-independence and its enduring encounter with colonialism.

Tharoor's exploration lies in a deep-seated commitment to unravelling the complexities of the Indian experience, navigating the shifting tides of politics, and interrogating the legacies of colonial rule. In *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, Tharoor embarks on a sweeping narrative journey, tracing India's evolution from the euphoria of independence to the challenges of nation-building in the modern era. Through meticulous research and poignant storytelling, he illuminates the triumphs and tribulations that have shaped the Indian nation, offering readers a panoramic view of its social, political, and cultural landscape.

Similarly, in *An Era of Darkness*, Tharoor confronts head-on the enduring impact of British colonialism on India's past, present, and future. Drawing on a wealth of historical evidence and personal insight, he exposes the myths of benevolence surrounding the British Raj, laying bare the economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and human suffering wrought by centuries of colonial rule. With searing clarity and unflinching honesty, Tharoor challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable truths of India's colonial legacy while envisioning a path towards reconciliation and empowerment.

Moreover, Tharoor's engagement with contemporary Indian literature adds depth and nuance to his non-fiction discourse. As a keen observer and passionate advocate of Indian literary traditions, he seamlessly weaves together literary analysis with sociopolitical commentary, offering readers a deeper understanding of the cultural forces at play in Indian society. Through his exploration of the works of luminaries such as R.K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, and Vikram Seth, Tharoor celebrates the diversity and vibrancy of Indian literature while underscoring

its enduring relevance in shaping national identity and discourse.

Shashi Tharoor's non-fiction is a compelling testament to the power of ideas to provoke thought, stimulate dialogue, and inspire change. With *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness* as cornerstones of his literary legacy, Tharoor invites readers on a journey of intellectual exploration and introspection, urging them to confront the complexities of India's past and present with empathy and understanding. For in the words of Tharoor himself, it is only through a deeper engagement with our history, society, and literature that we can hope to build a more inclusive, equitable, and enlightened future for India and beyond.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER ARE AS FOLLOWS

- To explore Tharoor's reflections on politics.
- To examine Tharoor's observations on society.
- To discuss Tharoor's engagement with contemporary Indian literature.

Tharoor's reflections on politics, society, and contemporary Indian literature are immensely significant. His political and former diplomat background gives him a unique perspective on Indian politics and society. Through his writings, Tharoor offers insights into the complexities and nuances of Indian political dynamics, highlighting India's challenges and opportunities as a developing nation. Furthermore, Tharoor's engagement with contemporary Indian literature showcases his understanding of the country's cultural and intellectual landscape. By exploring themes such as identity, social justice, and historical narratives, Tharoor contributes to the discourse on Indian literature and encourages critical thinking about the nation's past and present. Tharoor's works also catalyse introspection and self-reflection for Indians, prompting them to examine their history, identity, and place in the world. His thought-provoking arguments and eloquent writing style make his books accessible to a broad audience, fostering a greater awareness and understanding of India's complexities. Tharoor's non-fiction works, including *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness*, offer profound insights into India's past, present, and future. They contribute to the ongoing dialogue on politics, society, and contemporary Indian literature,

making them significant contributions to India's intellectual and cultural landscape.

Politics in Tharoor's Non-Fiction:

Shashi Tharoor's non-fiction works, including *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness*, delve into various aspects of Indian politics and governance. Through his meticulous analysis, Tharoor critically assesses India's political landscape, highlighting its achievements and challenges. In *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, Tharoor thoroughly examines India's political journey since independence. He discusses the successes and failures of Indian democracy, focusing on critical issues such as economic development, social inequality, and regional disparities. Tharoor explores the complexities of Indian politics, including the role of political parties, coalition governments, and governance challenges in a diverse and multicultural society. Tharoor writes, "*Politics has always been in the domain of privileged elites, who regarded the people as gullible, malleable, and needing to be 'managed'.*" (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 35)

In *An Era of Darkness*, Tharoor takes a historical perspective and critically assesses the impact of British colonial rule on Indian politics. Tharoor highlights the legacy of colonialism and its influence on the functioning of Indian democracy, urging for a reevaluation of India's history under British imperialism. Tharoor exposes the exploitative nature of colonialism and its economic consequences. He states,

"The British paid themselves massive salaries and pensions and did their best to ensure that India paid for them" (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, p. 22).

This quote highlights the economic drain inflicted on India by colonial powers, leading to the impoverishment of the country and the enrichment of the colonizers.

Tharoor also discusses nationalism in the context of Indian politics. He advocates for an inclusive and pluralistic nationalism that embraces India's diversity and respects the rights and identities of all its citizens. He critiques narrow and exclusionary forms of nationalism that undermine social cohesion and promote divisiveness. Tharoor argues for a nationalism that celebrates India's rich cultural heritage while fostering a sense of unity and shared destiny.

Examination of Tharoor's critiques of colonialism and imperialism: One of the recurring themes in Tharoor's non-fiction works is his critique of colonialism and imperialism. Through books like *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness*, he meticulously examines the impact of colonial rule on India's socio-political and economic fabric. Tharoor dismantles the romanticized narratives surrounding colonialism and reveals the harsh realities of exploitation, cultural erasure, financial drain, and the systematic subjugation of the Indian people. He emphasizes the need to acknowledge and confront the historical injustices perpetuated by colonial powers while advocating for reparations and reevaluating the global power dynamics. Tharoor advocates,

"The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilisation by a trading company utterly without scruple or principle." (Tharoor, An Era of Darkness, 2016, p. 11)

Society and Social Issues in Tharoor's Non-Fiction: Shashi Tharoor explores the social dynamics and cultural shifts in contemporary India. He comprehensively analyses various aspects of Indian society, including caste, religion, language, and regional identities. Tharoor examines the complexities and transformations that have shaped Indian society since independence. He sheds light on social inequalities, communal tensions, and regional disparities, offering insights into the challenges and aspirations of the Indian people. He writes,

"India's astonishing diversity of culture and religion has defied any simple-minded homogenization." ((Tharoor, India: From Midnight to the Millennium, 1997, p. 3)

"The great theme of India is not poverty, caste, corruption, sleaze, or superstition, as the foreign media would have it believe. It is pluralism: the extraordinary coexistence of religious communities and cultures that few other countries can even conceive." ((Tharoor, India: From Midnight to the Millennium, 1997, p. 315)

In *An Era of Darkness*, Tharoor delves into the social consequences of British colonial rule in India. He critically examines how colonialism impacted Indian society, leading to economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and social divisions. Tharoor highlights colonialism's enduring effects on Indian social structures and dynamics. By exploring these issues, he contributes to a deeper understanding of

colonialism's social consequences and its lasting impact on Indian society.

Tharoor also reflects on questions of identity, emphasizing the diverse fabric of Indian society. He explores religious, linguistic, and regional identities, stressing the need for an inclusive and pluralistic understanding of identity. Tharoor promotes unity amidst diversity, celebrating India's rich cultural and social tapestry.

Social justice is another critical aspect of Tharoor's writings. He addresses issues of poverty, inequality, and marginalization. Tharoor advocates for inclusive development and equitable resource distribution. He critiques social injustices, including caste-based discrimination, and calls for policies that uplift marginalized sections of society and promote social justice.

Contemporary Indian Literature in Tharoor's Non-Fiction:

Shashi Tharoor engages with contemporary Indian literature, highlighting the works of Indian writers and their contributions to the literary landscape. He acknowledges the rich literary tradition in India and discusses the influence of Indian writers on shaping the cultural and intellectual fabric of the nation. Tharoor explores the works of authors like Rabindranath Tagore, R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and others, discussing their themes, styles, and impact on Indian literature.

Tharoor reflects on the power of literature to shape public discourse and challenge societal norms. He emphasizes the role of literature in raising awareness, fostering empathy, and addressing social issues. Tharoor recognizes that literature can provoke thought, spark conversations, and inspire social change. He discusses how literature can challenge established narratives, confront prejudices, and promote inclusivity. Tharoor acknowledges the transformative potential of literature in influencing society and shaping collective consciousness. Tharoor speaks,

"The richness and variety of Indian literature is both humbling and inspiring; our writers have produced a body of work that makes us one of the world's great literary cultures." ((Tharoor, India: From Midnight to the Millennium, 1997, p. 293)

"Indian literature today is written in many languages, each with its rich tradition and heritage." ((Tharoor, India: From Midnight to the Millennium, 1997, p. 294)

Tharoor also explores the impact of globalization on Indian literature and offers observations on this aspect. He examines how globalization has influenced the themes, styles, and content of Indian literature. Tharoor discusses how global interconnectedness and the spread of ideas have opened up new avenues for Indian writers to explore and engage with diverse perspectives. He analyzes how globalization has shaped the literary landscape, including the emergence of diasporic literature, cross-cultural influences, and the challenges of balancing local and global identities in literature. Tharoor expresses,

"Literature can challenge and change prevailing ideas and prejudices." (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 296)

"Good literature has the power to touch us, to move us, and to shake us out of our complacency." ((Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 296)

Tharoor's non-fiction works, such as *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness*, demonstrate his engagement with contemporary Indian literature. He discusses the works of Indian writers, their contributions to the literary landscape, and their ability to shape public discourse. Tharoor also reflects on the impact of globalization on Indian literature, offering observations on the evolving nature of literary themes, styles, and identities in the globalized world. His opinions,

"Globalization has brought Indian writing in English to the world's attention and, in the process, has helped Indian writing gain greater visibility." ((Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 301)

"Globalization has introduced a multiplicity of influences into Indian literature, often producing exciting new styles and themes." (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 2016, p. 289)

CONCLUSION

In the tapestry of Shashi Tharoor's non-fiction, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness* stand as pillars of intellectual inquiry, offering profound reflections on the intersections of politics, society, and literature in contemporary India. Through these works, Tharoor not only elucidates the complexities of India's journey from independence to the present day but also confronts the enduring legacies of colonialism with clarity and empathy.

In *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, Tharoor weaves a narrative tapestry that spans the breadth of India's post-independence evolution, illuminating the triumphs and tribulations that have shaped the nation's identity. With meticulous research and evocative storytelling, he invites readers on a journey through India's social, political, and cultural landscape, challenging them to confront the complexities of nation-building in a rapidly changing world.

Similarly, in *An Era of Darkness*, Tharoor confronts the myths and misconceptions surrounding British colonialism in India, laying bare the economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and human suffering inflicted upon the Indian subcontinent. Through a nuanced analysis of historical evidence and personal insight, he compels readers to reckon with the enduring impact of colonial rule while also envisioning a path towards reconciliation and empowerment.

Tharoor's engagement with contemporary Indian literature adds a layer of richness and depth to his non-fiction discourse, underscoring the enduring relevance of literature in shaping national identity and discourse. By exploring the works of Indian literary luminaries, he celebrates the diversity and vibrancy of Indian literature while highlighting its profound influence on society and culture.

Shashi Tharoor's non-fiction serves as a beacon of intellectual inquiry and introspection, urging readers to confront the complexities of politics, society, and literature with empathy and understanding. Through *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *An Era of Darkness*, Tharoor invites us to interrogate our past, confront our present, and envision a more inclusive and equitable future for India and beyond. In Tharoor's words, we can chart a course toward a brighter tomorrow through a deeper engagement with our history, society, and literature.

Primary Sources:

- [1] Tharoor, Shashi. *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*. Penguin Books, 1997.
- [2] Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness*. Aleph Book Company, 2016.

Work Cited:

- [1] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 35)
- [2] (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, p. 22)
- [3] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 32)

- [4] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 167)
- [5] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 319)
- [6] (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 2016, p. 11)
- [7] (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 2016, p. 14)
- [8] (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 2016, p. 258)
- [9] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 3)
- [10] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 315)
- [11] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 131)
- [12] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 144)
- [13] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 287)
- [14] (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 2016, p. 305)
- [15] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 293)
- [16] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 294)
- [17] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 296)
- [18] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 296)
- [19] (Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997, p. 301)
- [20] (Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 2016, p. 289)

Secondary Sources:

- [1] Dalrymple, William. *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.
- [2] Ghosh, Amitav. *In an Antique Land*. Vintage, 1992.
- [3] Guha, Ramachandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. Harper Perennial, 2007.
- [4] Mishra, Pankaj. *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia*. Picador, 2012.
- [5] Mehta, Suketu. *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*. Knopf, 2004.
- [6] Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Harper Perennial, 1997.
- [7] Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity*. Allen Lane, 1999.