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# REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL AND GLOCAL SPHERES IN SHASHI THAROOR'S *RIOT*

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#### ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to reflect and characterize both local and global considerations portrayed in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*. It further probes into the discourse of nationalism. The work has been chosen as it offers a substantial commentary on the nationalist and a glocal agenda. Tharoor is well known for his outspoken nature and uncompromising bent of mind. It is a well-known fact that Tharoor headed the second-generation of elite diplomats and was born in London, brought up in Mumbai and Calcutta, and served in America This appears to have given him an actual perspective of the world. Tharoor's concept of nationalism and glocalization are broader, based on his scholarly understanding.

**KEYWORDS**: Glocal, public sphere, communalism, discourse, nationalism.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature and nation are inextricably linked. Literary narratives and the idea of a nation are inextricably linked; according to Bhabha, the two are comparable. The main topic of Tharoor's *Riot* is the religious riots of 1992, which were one of the largest protests against religion in post-independence India following the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. These riots, which took place to "right a great wrong" of four hundred and sixty years ago, occurred between Muslims and Hindus. But political provocations were the main cause of these disturbances. Politicians use caste, location, and limited religious appeal to win over voters.

The body of work by author Tharoor is extensive, reflecting her multifaceted nature. He asserts that "Indian nationalism, is a rare animal indeed. It is not based on language... geography... ethnicity... religion. Indian nationalism is the nationalism of an idea, the idea of an ever-ever land that is greater than the sum of its contradictions" (Tharoor 31). To him, "India is a thali, a selection of sumptuous dishes in different bowls. Each tastes different, and does not necessarily mix with the next, but they belong together on the same plate, and they complement each other in making the meal a satisfying repast" (Srinivasan 11).

### **REPRESENTING A GLOCAL AND NATIONALIST AGENDA**

*Riot* has a background of the communal riots and mass unrest unleashed by the Ram Janmabhoomi – Babri Masjid controversy. It reports the murder of a 24-year-old American girl named Priscilla Hart in India. A volunteer with an NGO, Priscilla is staying in an Indian town, Zaligarh, where she is stabbed to death all of a sudden. The investigation of the case leads to nowhere and the mystery remains unsolved. As is clear in

the course of the narrative, the story is actually about a larger topic than the undoing of an innocent foreigner -- the latent fragmentation of the secular Indian republic. The novel foregrounds the concept of a plural society on the backdrop of the fanatic notion of nationhood. The focus of the novel is two-fold; it reveals an inner world of emotional complexities while presenting the violent ideological battle in the outer world. From Priscilla's letters and diary-entries, we come to know about her complex love affair with a married District Magistrate named V. Lakshman. This relationship promises to cross all barriers of region, religion and race.

However, ironically enough, their affair proves frustratingly inconclusive only because of the difference between their cultural backgrounds. Both of them have entirely dissimilar notions of love, sex and marriage, fostered by their upbringing within diverse value systems. Lakshman precisely puts it thus "She loves me, she says, and she means it. That is not love as my parents spoke of it, an emotion anchored in family ... in bonds of blood... It is instead love as... a feeling that is independent of social context or familial connections." (Tharoor, *Riot* 103)

Conditioned by an orthodox surrounding, Lakshman is incapable of surmounting the cultural barrier between the two. He too shares the prevalent assertion with his friend Gurinder, that "They are not like us" and that America is "a different country, a different culture, a different planet" (185). Consequently, a sense of modernity is ultimately defeated by cultural hegemony. Tharoor, through Prisicilla's untimely end, shows how globalization has given rise to new, unexpected issues of conflict between individuals and social groups. This mindless hostility towards foreigners is equated by the long-lasting feeling of animosity between the Hindus and Muslims who are living with each other for centuries together. The reader is indirectly warned of the evil consequences of the insider-outsider debate.

Communal violence, Tharoor asserts, is likely to obliterate all the differential marks of otherness only to hasten the emergence of a perceived homogeneous cultural identity. As Tirthankar Das Purkayastha, in his scholarly analysis of *Riot*, remarks:

"The postmodern view of history as a human construct underlies Tharoor's reference to the myth of the birthplace of Rama as the subject of an ongoing debate, to which no solution seems to be in sight.... Cultural identities are constructed around these symbols and depend on them for their own survival." (Purkayastha 56-57).

*Riot* is an epistolary novel that combines discourses, newspaper articles, and journal entries. It displays all of the fundamental novel conventions. The narrative of an unreported riot in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh, by Tharoor's friend Harsh Mander served as the inspiration for the Zalilgarh episodes. Still, no foreigner lost their life during the Khargone riots. The plot and the remaining characters are entirely made up.

The purpose of this study is to determine how common people might become victims of communal riots without any fault of their own and how these conflicts put the nation's integrity in jeopardy. *Riot* is a reimagining of history, modern politics, and discussions about Islam and Hinduism, the division of India, as well as strong arguments in favor of building Lord Rama's Temple and demolishing the Babri Mosque. The following textual quotation can be used to determine the source of this rift:

"Not just the basics – how the British promoted divisions between Hindus and Muslims as a policy of "divide and rule," how the nationalist movement tried to involve everybody, but the Muslim League broke away and called for a state of Pakistan, how the country was partitioned in 1947 to give the Muslims a separate state, etc. etc." (Tharoor, *Riot* 21)

Under the "divide and rule" doctrine, communalism in India already had its foundations established in British India.

Accordingly, communal conflicts have occurred during the post-Independence era, including riots between Hindus and Muslims (1992, 2002) and Sikhs (1984). Babri Masjid became the scene of individuals from the Muslim and Hindu communities fighting for supremacy and power during the 1992 riots. After eight years, history repeats itself in these disturbances, similar to the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots. Anti-Sikh riots that

followed the country's independence in 1984 caused great division, and the Sikh community began preparing for the creation of a separate Sikh state as soon as they realized they were an ethnic group. In Delhi and other Northern Indian cities, the riots persisted for four days. Indian National Congress-affiliated armed mobs massacred defenceless Sikh men, women, and children; they also set fire to and pillaged Sikh establishments, schools, and residences; and they targeted Gurdwaras.

Furthermore, it may be observed that Gurinder, the District SP talks about the Sikh riots in *Riot*. He declares 1984 to be a horrific year for the violent national era. They had their origins in Operation Blue Star, which eliminated Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his supporters, who had been hiding with weapons in the Golden Temple. They want an independent Sikh state. To expatriate them, the Indian Army enters the Temple grounds. But hundreds of innocent Sikhs, pilgrims, and regular frigging worshippers who were present at the temple at the time lost their lives as a result of it.

Subsequently, it may be noted that too much destruction was done to put an end to the Bhindranwale menace. After that, enraged Sikhs swear to exact retribution on those responsible. Their main aim is Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister. She was walking out her back garden for a TV appearance one chilly morning when two of her Sikh bodyguards opened fire on her. Once more, it sows the seeds of retaliation among Mrs. Gandhi's supporters, and the outcome was massacres, looting, and arson that demolished Sikh neighborhoods and killed families. Homes were also set on fire. "Blood for Blood" was the slogan of the riots. Not even the remnants of the Sikh carnage had vanished.

The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy was the root cause of the Hindu-Muslim riots. Here, Priscilla Hart, a character who works with the non-governmental organization HELP-US, and is in India on a health mission—that is, population control—becomes a victim of these riots. Furthermore, the novel describes that on Monday, 2 October 1989, she was murdered by an aggressive mob divided along communal lines in Zalilgarh, Uttar Pradesh. Zalilgarh is depicted as a hot, dusty, filthy, and overcrowded city. In addition, kerosene lamps were lighted as the evening wore on, and mosquitoes emerged to feed on the unsuspecting. On September 30th, Priscilla Hart, then 24 years old, said her friends farewell. (5)

Following this, it may be pointed out that the novel mentions that India is renowned for its "unity in diversity" and is a multicultural nation where assimilation occurs naturally. In India, a foreign fatality raised concerns about the nation's peaceful identity. On Monday, October 2, 1989, it was reported in the American daily *The New York Journal* under the headline "American Slain in India." Moreover, "a rioting mob attacked and killed an American woman in a town east of New Delhi yesterday.... No other foreigner has died in the sectarian violence that has killed several hundred Indians in the last three weeks...." On 3 October, it said Death of an Idealist and reported, "To Priscilla Hart's family, relatives, friends and professors here in New York, the death of the idealistic 24-year-old volunteer and scholar in a riot in India was a heartbreakingly tragic event." (5)

In a phone interview from his home on Wednesday, October 4, 1989, her father Rudyard Hart states "We want to talk to her friends and colleagues, the people she worked with, to see where she was," It was claimed that the parents planned to travel to India to examine the scene of their daughter's death. It was published as "An American Death" in India on Monday, October 16, 1989, noting, "That Saturday, 30 September, Priscilla Hart, 24, had said goodbye to her friends, because in a few days she would be packing her bags to return to New York University." On October 10, 1989, his parents, albeit estranged due to her father's adulterous affair, arrive to India to inquire about his death. Her mother is unable to accept her loss. Further she states that "her own contribution to the future of the world". His father, who adores her, thinks back on their time together with her daughter. They went over to Zalilgardh. Here, they are brought to Priscilla's residence by the HELP-US Kadambri extension worker. The location is just as awful as they had imagined. The sights there evoke an idea of the West and the East. They were not aware that their daughter was a victim of religious violence, so they were unable to determine why their daughter was killed.

Although we learn of Laxman's passing at Kotli, where they used to meet, via Mr. Diggs' final conversation with Harts, Priscilla's parents. There, the District Police discover her body. Nonetheless, her

attackers utilized the location as a bomb storage facility. "It looks like Priscilla had the misfortune to go to that place when her assailants chose to use it. The killers probably thought she'd report them to the Police. They had to kill her to ensure her silence" (237). At the very end of the book, the mystery surrounding her death is solved. Gurinder, the SP, reveals that Ali, the municipal driver, killed her by stabbing her with a knife. She was going to depart Zalilgarh on Tuesday, but on Monday, she was killed. Priscilla's mother is suspicious and wants to ask Laxman in private about their affair, but he denies it. However, Priscilla admits in one of her letters that her daughter bears a resemblance to Laxman.

Despite India's reputation for religious tolerance, there is intolerance everywhere in India. The author also mentions that there were a lot of strong feelings about the place she was leaving behind. In addition, the Hindu extremists organized a big parade of 30,000 people to carry consecrated bricks through Zalilgarh's center and to an observation point. After that, the bricks would be moved to Ayodhya, where Hindus intended to use them to construct the Ram Janmabhoomi temple on a location that was once home to the Babri Masjid, a derelict mosque from the sixteenth century. (5) Zalilgarh is "communally hypersensitive," which indicates that individuals have a strong attachment to their faith and regard it as superior. Laxman teaches Priscilla about India and Indian society, culture, and history. He describes the five main reasons of division in India: language, area, caste, class, and religion.

Furthermore, it may be noticed that religion, on the other hand, motivates people to do good things. Because everyone believes that their suffering in this incarnation is a direct result of their faults in the previous one, Hinduism is good for creating societal peace. If they would just be quiet, behave well, and accept things as they are—including injustices—their problems in this world would be solved in the next. Hinduism is thus the most effective remedy for Marxism. Because of their inherent propensity for egalitarianism, Muslims consisted of a surprising number of the top communists before the partition. And Brahmins, who had a natural affinity for dictatorships, even those of the proletariat. (43-44) Religion is a huge source of separation in India, causing interruptions and undermining national unity.

Following that, it has been noted that Karl Marx, the propagator of Marxism, referred to religion as "the opium of the people." When the people grow overly attached to it, it becomes communalism and, as a result, community clashes. Furthermore, it may be surmised that religion, however, also fosters what India at large refers to as "communalism"—a sense of religious chauvinism that manifests as bigotry and, occasionally, violence toward adherents of other faiths. Now, with the possible exception of Shintoism, India is home to nearly every religion in the world. So, throughout India's history, the indigenous have witnessed conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, Muslims and Sikhs, and Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians. (43-44)

Religion, on the other hand, is purely a personal matter in India. There is no official religion for the Indian people. Articles 25-28 of the Indian constitution offer them religious freedom as a fundamental right. That is why it is sometimes known as a secular state. Religion, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddha, or Parsi, does not teach fanaticism. Every religion regards all humans as equal. Humanitarianism was advocated by the founders of several religions, including Muhammad, Guru Nanak, Buddha, and Mahavira. Religion was an identification with humanity for Gandhiji, the father of the nation.

According to Laxman, his "father exemplified the Hindu idea that religion is an intensely personal matter" (143). He also asserts that, unlike Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, Hinduism never claims to be the only authentic religion. Laxman and Priscilla, on the other hand, meet in the evening at the hidden location known as Kotli, a haunted location, and engage in love-making. He asks Hindus who claim to be secular why the act of demolition was carried out: "I understand Hindus who see a double standard at work here. Muslims say they are proud to be Muslim, Sikh say they are proud to be Sikh, Christians say they are proud to be Christian, and Hindus say they are proud to be secular." (146)

At this point, Randy Diggs is forced to seek clarification from Ram Charan Gupta, a local Hindu supremacist. He writes of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, "it was to the right a great wrong." Furthermore, he accuses Muslims of converting from their Hindu ancestors' faith. He claims that they were

responsible for the country's separation in order to create Pakistan. By restoring the Ram Janmabhoomi temple at the expense of human lives, he asserts his trust in his traditions, gods, and worth.

Following this, it might be noted that Professor Mohammed Sarwar, who teaches history at the old Delhi University, presents the Muslim perspective. His focus is on researching Syed Salar Masaud Ghazi, popularly known as Ghazi Miyan. He notes that there is no evidence to support the historical veracity of the Ram Janmabhoomi claims. In a letter to Laxman from Professor Muhammad Sarwar:

"The Hindutva brigade is busy trying to invent a new past for the nation, fabricating historical wrongs they want to the right, dredging up "evidence" of Muslim malfeasance and misappropriation of national glory.... They want to "teach" people like me "a lesson", though they have not learned many lessons themselves." (67)

Professor Sarwar is a well-intentioned supporter of Muslims' perspectives on India. Maulana Azad, the country's first minister of education, was quoted as saying that the idea of partitioning India along sectarian lines makes "every fibre of my being revolted". He further states that "I could not conceive it possible for a Musulman to tolerate this unless he has rooted out the spirit of Islam from every corner of his being" (107). He believes that without India, he is incomplete.

On the other hand, Mohammed Sarwar also lists all the Muslim elites who are backing India, like Mohammed Currim Chagla, who was the foreign minister in 1965, and editor M J Akbar. He accuses nationalistic Hindus of manipulating religion. He wonders if it is possible to change history without harming the descendants of the past. Furthermore, it may be noticed that Professor Sarwar affirms his profound affection for India "I love it because I know it, I have studied its history, I have travelled its geography, I have breathed its polluted air, and I have written words to its music. India shaped me, my mind, my tastes, my friendships, my passions" (112)

In an interview with New York Journal South Asian correspondent Randy Diggs, Lakshman said Priscilla was uninvolved in the Hindu-Muslim foolishness. According to him, most conflicts between groups take place locally and include things like assaults on religious processions, shrine vandalism, unofficial relationships between men and women from different communities, and so forth. We learn that Priscilla is having an affair with Mr. Laxman, the district magistrate, through her correspondence with her friend Cindy Valeriani. Every Tuesday and Saturday, Priscilla and Laxman get together at the well-kept location of Kotli. His spouse Geetha is still in the dark about her husband's extramarital romance with a foreign woman she has already met. He offers Priscilla a well-rounded opinion by stating, "the Hinduism that I know understands that faith is a matter of hearts and minds, not of bricks and stone. Build Ram in your heart and minds, the Hindu is enjoined; and if Ram is in your heart, it will matter little where else he is or is not." (145) Finally, Gurinder tells Geetha about Laxman's intention to divorce his wife and his romance with Priscilla. Her spouse visits Swamiji and requests that he do a unique pooja to shield her husband from the foreign woman's enchantment. Her prayers are heard, as Priscilla, a casualty of the disturbance, passes away. In addition, Laxman's buddy Gurinder Singh, the superintendent of police, is interviewed by Randy Diggs about acts of violence committed in the name of religion. He talks about how he and his crew attempted to tame the irrational Hindu mob that was chanting slogans in lengthy processions. Laxman works hard to put an end to the riot as well. However, six Hindus lost their lives as a result of the daggers and other weapons that the mob was carrying. Consequently, a curfew was put in place.

Following this, it may be noticed that one Hindu was killed at the spot when Muslims launched a bomb in retaliation. However, the eighth one is neither Muslim nor Hindu. It is Priscilla's. Laxman is depressed since he hasn't slept for three nights and is considering quitting his job, but Gurinder gives him encouragement and helps him transform his mentality. Saeed Akhtar Mirza's 1995 Hindi film Naseem (The Morning Breeze) was based on the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Anand Patwardhan directed the 1992 documentary Ram Ke Naam, which translates to "In the Name of God." The film explores the religious strife that resulted from the Hindu-nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad's attempt to build a Ram temple on

the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Violence increased in 1992 when VHP activists destroyed the Babri Masjid a few months after the release of "Ram ke Naam".

The ongoing focus on caste and religious identities has often impeded the growth of the national imagination, as Nandan Nilekani eloquently notes in his book *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation*. People start to see themselves as belonging to their caste or religion first, and country second, which is a dangerous theme in a country so diverse. The reason for this is that our reservation policies and vote-bank politics encouraged Indians to fence themselves in within their own communities. (Nilekani 162) There was colonial rule over the diversely religious, cultural, and linguistic nation of India. Unlike the European model of nationalism, which assumed that the existence of one religion, one language, or one ethnicity was inevitable, this approach was doomed to failure. Through their fictional and poetic works, Indian writers who felt an affinity for or identified with the Indian nation began to imagine a united cultural heritage.

Consequently, one can observe that literature assumed a pivotal part in the Indian nationalist movement by the 1920s and 1930s. Literary works and Indian film depicted and mirrored every development to every upheaval of Indian history up to the current day, even after independence, as the country encountered numerous "disruptive interventions" from the 1947 Indian Partition to the 2014 riots in Meerut and Saharanpur. Literary narratives also portray the nation as it moves, with the writer's imagination serving as the plot. The novel *Riot* also portrays the remaking of the Indian country after the 1992 Hindu-Muslim riots that broke out in the Indian subcontinent. Despite the fact that the Indian nation is diverse, with many different ethnic identities, many nevertheless believe they belong there because they have an imagined version of the country. Additionally, national symbols are crucial to envisioning a nation.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In a same spirit, it is possible to notice that Indians, whether they be Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian, experience a sense of belonging while they are sitting in India and watching their flag fly overseas during an Olympic or cricket match. The experience of warriors defending their nation is comparable. They defend their territory regardless of caste, religion, or social class. They prioritize the country. Fundamentalist forces occasionally sabotage this common sentiment by interfering disruptively with the nation's increasingly rapid progress. "To be Indian is to be part of an elusive dream we all share, a dream that fills our minds with sounds, words, flavours from many sources that we cannot easily identify." (Tharoor 145)

Without a question, the post-Independence Indian nation is young, fresh, and contemporary. Gandhian nationalism, which places a strong emphasis on nonviolence, was absorbed into the anti-colonial nationalism that gave rise to Indian independence. The two best examples are Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. Great human principles have been bestowed upon us Indians by our liberation fighters, yet in the name of small disagreements, the people who make up this country have resorted to violence. It is not appropriate to respond to an injustice from 460 years ago with acts of violence and the destruction of a place of worship. As "if the Muslims of the 1520s acted out of ignorance and fanaticism, should Hindus act the same way in 1980s" (146). If it is, "an eye for an eye" should not be the remedy for any wrong. They do not understand that history is their retribution, so they seek vengeance against it. (147)

Since the early 1960s, no American executive has been assigned full-time by Coca-Cola to India due to the country's rich cultural heritage. As Priscilla Hart's father Rudyard Hart reveals in one of his letters to American News reporter Randy Diggs, "No American executive had been assigned full-time by Coca-Cola to India..." (29) Even he praises India, saying "By the time I was born they had moved to China, but my parents were still so nostalgic for India that they were dreaming Bengal Lancers in the land of Pearl Buck." (29-30) Love for humanity is the sole remedy for violence. Forgiving and moving on are the only ways to deal with "distracting interventions", "Muslim invaders may indeed have destroyed Hindu temples, putting mosques in their place, but this did not-could not destroy the Indian dream" (145). India was a nation before 1947, it

is a nation today, and given the current circumstances, it can be predicted that it will continue to exist as a nation in spite of the 'disruptive interventions.'

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