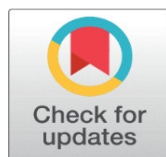


POLITICAL ALLEGORY IN THE LITERARY WORKS OF SHASHI THAROOR

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the intricacies of political allegory in Shashi Tharoor's novels, "The Great Indian Novel" and "Riot: A Love Story." Through reimagining historical events and characters, Tharoor uses political allegory to critique and reflect on socio-political issues of India. The study examines narrative structures, character representations, and thematic elements to uncover the layers of meaning in Tharoor's allegorical narratives. It demonstrates how these narratives serve as a commentary on the political and social realities of India. By analyzing Tharoor's use of political allegory, this research contributes to the broader discourse on the role of allegory in literature and highlights the relevance of Tharoor's works in understanding Indian political history and culture, enriching the field of contemporary Indian literature.

Keywords: Political Allegory, Satire, Irony, Mythology, Communal Riot, India, Culture, History

1. INTRODUCTION

Shashi Tharoor, a distinguished Indian author, diplomat, and politician, has made a significant contribution in the literary and political arena of India. Tharoor's multifaceted career spans various roles, including serving as an under-secretary-general at the United Nations, a Member of Parliament in India, and an author of several acclaimed novels and non-fiction works. His literary works reflect his deep engagement with India's history, politics, and culture, characterized by a keen sense of wit, erudition, and a unique narrative style.

Tharoor's novels are notable for their rich tapestry of political allegory, weaving together historical events and fictional narratives to critique and reflect on contemporary issues. Two of his most celebrated works, "The Great Indian Novel" (1989) and "Riot: A Love Story" (2001), exemplify his masterful use of political allegory. "The Great Indian Novel" reimagines the Indian epic Mahabharata in the context of modern Indian political history, offering a satirical and

insightful commentary on the nation's political evolution. "Riot: A Love Story," on the other hand, explores the communal tensions and political undercurrents in India through a fragmented narrative structure, providing a multi-perspective view of a small-town riot.

Political allegory is a powerful literary device that enables authors to convey complex political and social themes through symbolic representations. By using characters, events, and settings as allegorical elements, writers can critique real-world issues in a nuanced and indirect manner. Political allegory allows for a deeper engagement with the socio-political context, offering readers an opportunity to reflect on the underlying dynamics of power, governance, and societal values. In literature, political allegory has been used effectively by authors across different cultures and historical periods to address pressing issues of contemporary society.

The objectives of this research are to analyze the political allegories in Shashi Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel" and "Riot: A Love Story" and to understand their implications for Indian political history and culture. The study seeks to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in Tharoor's allegorical narratives, examining how he uses historical events, characters, and thematic elements to reflect and critique contemporary political issues. By focusing on Tharoor's works, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the role of political allegory in literature and its significance in understanding the complexities of Indian politics.

The scope of this research encompasses a detailed analysis of Tharoor's selected novels, exploring their narrative structures, character representations, and thematic elements. The study will also place Tharoor's use of political allegory within the broader context of contemporary Indian literature, comparing it with other literary traditions and authors. By examining the intersection of literature and politics in Tharoor's works, this research aims to provide insights into the ways in which literature can serve as a vehicle for political critique and reflection.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political allegory is a significant topic in literary studies. Literary scholars examine its role in various cultural and historical contexts. This narrative technique enables authors to symbolically represent political events, ideologies, and figures through characters and events, offering a critique and reflection on political systems, social issues, and historical developments.

The tradition of political allegory dates back to classical works like Plato's "Republic," which discusses political philosophy through allegorical dialogues. In medieval literature, it served as a tool for moral and political instruction, observed in works such as Dante's "Divine Comedy" and John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress." During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, writers like Jonathan Swift utilized allegory to satirize contemporary politics in "Gulliver's Travels." In modern literature, political allegory has been a powerful means for addressing contemporary political and social issues, exemplified by George Orwell's "Animal Farm" and "1984," as well as Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children."

Shashi Tharoor's literary works have received significant scholarly attention for their use of political allegory. Scholars have examined various aspects of his allegorical technique, reimagining historical narratives and critiquing political developments in India. Dhawan (2011) provides an in-depth analysis of "The Great Indian Novel," highlighting its allegorical representation of Indian political history through the Mahabharata's framework. Sen (2013) focuses on "Riot: A Love Story," examining its depiction of communal violence and political tensions in contemporary India. Other studies have explored Tharoor's engagement with post-colonial themes and critique of nationalist ideologies, as seen in Nair's (2014) analysis of the interplay between history and fiction in Tharoor's works.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present research is primarily qualitative, emphasizing in-depth analysis of selected literary works of Shashi Tharoor. Qualitative research is suitable for exploring the complex and nuanced representations of political allegory in literature. It allows for a detailed examination of the narrative structures, characterizations, and thematic elements that contribute to the allegorical depiction of political and historical contexts.

The approach involves a close reading of the texts to identify and interpret allegorical elements. This includes analyzing the symbolic representations of political figures, events, and ideologies, as well as examining how these allegorical elements interact with the broader narrative. The research also incorporates a comparative study, situating

Tharoor's use of political allegory within the context of contemporary Indian literature and comparing it with other literary traditions and authors.

4. THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL: ALLEGORICAL REPRESENTATION OF INDIAN HISTORY AND POLITICS

"The Great Indian Novel" is a fiction reimagining of the Indian epic Mahabharata, set against the backdrop of modern Indian political history. Tharoor intertwines mythological and historical narratives, using characters and events from the Mahabharata to represent key figures and moments in Indian politics. The novel's allegorical structure allows for a nuanced critique of the nation's political evolution, from the struggle for independence to the post-independence era.

In the novel, Tharoor reimagines the Mahabharata's characters as modern political figures. For example, Gangaji, a character based on Mahatma Gandhi, embodies the principles of non-violence and civil disobedience. The novel portrays Gangaji's efforts to lead India to independence, paralleling Gandhi's historical role in the Indian freedom movement. Other characters, such as Dhritarashtra and Pandu, represent Indian political leaders, while the Kauravas and Pandavas symbolize rival political factions. By drawing these parallels, Tharoor critiques the power struggles and moral dilemmas that have shaped Indian politics. The novel's portrayal of the Indian independence movement, the Partition of India, and the Emergency period provides a satirical yet insightful commentary on these significant moments in Indian history. Tharoor's use of myth and history allows readers to reflect on the cyclical nature of political power and the recurring themes of ambition, betrayal, and sacrifice.

5. RIOT: A LOVE STORY: POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL THEMES IN THE BACKDROP OF A RIOT

"Riot: A Love Story" is set in the context of a communal riot in a small Indian town. The novel's fragmented narrative structure and multi-perspective approach reflect the chaotic nature of the events it depicts. Tharoor employs political allegory to explore the communal tensions and political undercurrents in contemporary India, providing a critical lens through which to understand the complexities of communal violence.

The novel revolves around the murder of Priscilla Hart, an American student, during a riot in Zalilgarh, a fictional town in Uttar Pradesh. Through the perspectives of various characters, Tharoor delves into the socio-political factors that contribute to the riot, including religious intolerance, political opportunism, and historical grievances. The character of Priscilla Hart serves as an allegorical figure representing the outsider's perspective on Indian politics, highlighting the challenges of understanding and navigating the country's complex socio-political landscape. The political allegories in "Riot: A Love Story" are evident in the portrayal of characters and events. Lakshman, a local politician, represents the opportunistic leaders who exploit communal tensions for political gain. The novel also addresses the role of the media in shaping public perceptions and the impact of political rhetoric on communal identities. By presenting multiple perspectives on the riot, Tharoor critiques the simplistic narratives that often dominate discussions of communal violence and emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of the underlying causes.

6. INTERPRETATION OF POLITICAL ALLEGORIES IN THE SELECTED LITERARY WORKS

Shashi Tharoor's use of political allegory in his novels "The Great Indian Novel" and "Riot: A Love Story" have significant implications for understanding the political landscape of India. Tharoor's adept use of allegory allows him to address complex political themes and critique the socio-political dynamics of the country in a nuanced and engaging manner. By reimagining historical events and characters through an allegorical lens, Tharoor provides readers with a deeper understanding of the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by political leaders and the cyclical nature of power struggles.

In "The Great Indian Novel," the allegorical representation of the Mahabharata serves as a powerful tool for critiquing India's political history. Tharoor's characters, modeled after historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, offer a satirical yet insightful commentary on the nation's political evolution. The novel's rich intertextuality allows Tharoor to draw parallels between mythological narratives and historical events, highlighting the recurring themes of ambition, betrayal, and sacrifice that have shaped India's political landscape. The use of allegory in this context underscores the timeless nature of these themes and their relevance to contemporary political discourse.

"Riot: A Love Story" employs political allegory to explore the communal tensions and political undercurrents in contemporary India. Tharoor's fragmented narrative structure and multi-perspective approach reflect the chaotic nature of communal violence and the complexities of identity politics. The novel's allegorical elements, such as the character of Priscilla Hart representing the outsider's perspective on Indian politics, provide a critical lens through which to view the interplay between politics, religion, and identity. Tharoor's use of allegory in this context highlights the importance of understanding the diverse factors that contribute to communal tensions and the need for a nuanced approach to addressing these issues.

In conclusion, the detailed examination of "The Great Indian Novel" and "Riot: A Love Story" reveals Tharoor's adept use of political allegory to critique and reflect on Indian political history and culture. The allegorical elements in these works provide a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on the complexities of Indian politics, challenging simplistic narratives and encouraging readers to engage with the underlying issues. By comparing Tharoor's use of allegory with other literary works, this analysis highlights the significance of political allegory as a literary device in contemporary literature.

7. CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF INDIAN POLITICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE

Tharoor's works contribute significantly to the understanding of Indian political history and culture by offering alternative perspectives on historical narratives and contemporary issues. Through his use of political allegory, Tharoor challenges dominant interpretations of historical events and encourages readers to reflect on the underlying dynamics of power, governance, and societal values.

In "The Great Indian Novel," Tharoor's reimagining of the Mahabharata in the context of modern Indian political history provides a fresh and thought-provoking perspective on the nation's political evolution. The novel's allegorical structure allows Tharoor to critique the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by political leaders, as well as the impact of their decisions on the country's trajectory. By drawing parallels between mythological narratives and historical events, Tharoor highlights the cyclical nature of power struggles and the recurring themes of ambition, betrayal, and sacrifice that have shaped India's political landscape. This approach enriches the understanding of India's political history and culture by providing a multifaceted perspective on key events and figures.

"Riot: A Love Story" offers a critical examination of communal tensions and identity politics in contemporary India. Tharoor's use of political allegory in this novel underscores the complexities of communal violence and the interplay between politics, religion, and identity. The novel's multi-perspective narrative highlights the diverse factors that contribute to communal tensions and challenges simplistic narratives that often dominate public discourse. By presenting multiple viewpoints on the riot, Tharoor encourages readers to consider the socio-political context and the historical grievances that underpin communal conflicts. This approach enhances the understanding of contemporary Indian society and the challenges of achieving reconciliation and understanding in the face of violence.

8. COMPARISON WITH OTHER LITERARY WORKS FEATURING POLITICAL ALLEGORY

Tharoor's use of political allegory can be compared with other literary works that employ similar techniques to critique and reflect on political issues. George Orwell's "Animal Farm" and "1984" are literary works that use allegory to critique totalitarian regimes and political oppression. Like Tharoor, Orwell employs symbolic characters and events to represent real-world political figures and ideologies, providing a satirical yet insightful commentary on the dangers of authoritarianism and the manipulation of truth. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" uses allegory to explore the political history of post-colonial India. Rushdie's novel blends historical events with magical realism, creating a complex tapestry of allegorical narratives that critique the political and social developments in India. Both Rushdie and Tharoor engage with post-colonial themes, using allegory to question dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives on India's political history. In the broader literary tradition, political allegory has been a powerful tool for authors across different cultures and historical periods to address pressing issues and provoke thought. Tharoor's works continue this tradition, using political allegory to engage with contemporary Indian politics and contribute to the understanding of Indian political history and culture.

9. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this research paper explores the political allegories in Shashi Tharoor's "The Great Indian Novel" and "Riot: A Love Story," examining how he critiques and reflects on Indian political history and socio-political issues. In "The Great Indian Novel," Tharoor reimagines the Mahabharata, using its characters and events to symbolize key political figures and moments, providing a multifaceted perspective on India's political landscape. The novel critiques India's political evolution from the struggle for independence to post-independence through allegorical representations like Gangaji, modeled after Mahatma Gandhi.

In "Riot: A Love Story," Tharoor employs a fragmented narrative and multi-perspective approach to explore communal violence and identity politics in contemporary India. His use of political allegory highlights the manipulation of communal tensions for political gain, with characters like Priscilla Hart representing the outsider's perspective on Indian politics. The novel emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of communal conflicts and critiques the political manipulation of identities.

The significance of political allegory in Tharoor's works lies in its ability to challenge dominant interpretations of historical events and encourage readers to reflect on moral and ethical dilemmas. By drawing parallels between mythological narratives and historical events, Tharoor highlights recurring themes of power struggles, ambition, betrayal, and sacrifice that have shaped India's political landscape. His allegorical narratives offer alternative perspectives on Indian political history and culture.

Future research could explore Tharoor's other works, compare his use of political allegory with other Indian authors, and examine his engagement with post-colonial themes. Additionally, analyzing the reception and impact of Tharoor's works and integrating interdisciplinary approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of his allegorical narratives and their relevance to contemporary Indian society. This research highlights the significance of Tharoor's use of allegory in critiquing and reflecting on Indian political history and culture, offering valuable insights into the broader discourse on political allegory in literature.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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