

## Research Paper

**TRACING UPHEAVALS IN HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONSHIP**

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHASHI THAROOR'S RIOT A NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

*Shashi Tharoor's Riot A Novel traces the development of the relationship between the major communities residing in India: the Hindus and the Muslims. The novel traces this relationship from the past, the pre-independence period, where together they fought for the independence of India. This cordial harmonious relationship witnessed a breach of trust immediately after independence because of Partition.*

This age old cause has been kept alive and it is only because of this that India every now and then experiences communal riots. Tharoor's novel moves deep down to the cause and then explores the various implications that India has experienced in the past fifty years because of it. This novel carries within it a historical, a social, a political, literary aspect which truly makes it an Indian English Novel giving us a thorough insight and understanding of India and the communal problems it is facing.

Exploring India has always been an obsession for many writers right from the past to the present. All these writers were struck by the distinctiveness and also the uniqueness which they experienced in this country. The desire to perceive India is still persistent due to various reasons. Some writers were dismayed by poverty, inequality and corruption. A number of writers were concerned about the effects of colonization or partition where as some were busy describing the miseries of the lower strata. The intricacies of diversifying cultures and traditions too have attracted the writers. The contemporary writers are more concerned with the turbulence in politics, the obnoxious dirtiness and other bedeviling issues like baseless inefficient edifice of the Government and the politically motivated communal riots. Their thematic concern runs close to the living nerve and rather than becoming platitudinous documentaries, they try to accomplish something new by peeling off the layers of history and the ongoing social systems.

The insurgence of communal riots in India is considered as an assault on the image of communally harmonious secular India. Riot is a hostile outburst of the crowd in which members of one group indiscriminately attack the person or property of the members of another group. The reverberations of the riot are clearly visible in the society affecting it to an irredeemable extent. Riot when deliberately inflicted on a particular community makes it more visible and distinct in a society where previously they were not noticed. These occasional outbursts clearly indicate that something somewhere is going wrong in the society.

Shashi Tharoor, a United Nation's official in his novel Riot A Novel has taken up the task of exploring and elucidating this wrong which manifest itself in the form of 'collective demonity'. Riot A Novel is a love story which develops in Zalilgarha, a town in U.P. where an American lady Priscilla Hart, a volunteer involved in population control awareness program falls in love with the District Collector Laxman. Against this love story develops the story of hatred, a communal hatred between two major sects: the Hindus and the Muslims. Ironically this love story ends with the murder of Priscilla Hart where as the story of hatred culminates into a riot.

If Riot A Novel would have been devoid of characters, it would have ended up as a document drafting the disastrous upheaval in the Hindu Muslim relationship. The span that Tharoor prefers to trace this relationship starts with pre-independence Hindu-Muslim unity and ends up with riots related to the Ramjanmbhoomi Babri Masjid issue, widening the rift between these two communities.

The tenor of my comment here will only be on the changing relationship between these two communities who shared an equal responsibility in securing freedom.

It is through Md. Sarwar, a historian, that Tharoor expresses the views of Muslim community and their dream image of a secular India. Amidst the Mandir Masjid communal tempo Md. Sarwar recites the speech of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad which he had delivered as the President of the Indian National Congress at Ramgarh in 1940. He considers this speech as the greatest testament of the faith of a religious Muslim in a united India. Through this speech he had voiced the sentiments of every Muslim and asserted India as their homeland.

I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of that indivisible unity that is Indian nationality; I am indispensable to this noble edifice. Without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. (p.108)

The freedom struggle, which asserted the feeling of 'Indianness', was taken in terms of a national entity without imagining the formation of Pakistan. But along

with freedom came the partition which shattered this national entity. The entire Muslim community was held responsible for this. With his entire defense Md. Sarwar accuses those who motivated this two nation theory. Muslim's didn't partition the country- The British did, the Muslim League did, the Congress party did. (p.111)

The Muslims who affirmed Islam's claim on this soil and had been residing in India from the past eleven centuries spreading the message of human equality now after partition suffered discrimination. They were now strangers who owed loyalty to a different religion. Once which was an indispensable part, was now a part people were very much eager to dispense. The question that haunts this intellectual Muslim, Md.Sarwar is,

Where do Indian Muslims like myself fit in? I have spent my life thinking of myself as a part of 'us'. Now there are Indians, respectable Indians, Indians winning votes, who say that I am really 'them'. (p.114)

What hurts him more is that he is forced to suffer for what he has not done. It is the revenge taken on him for what his ancestors had done in the past. The humiliation of being thrown away from the mainstream gives rise to insecurity. Now he visualizes a change in the dominant ethos of the country and in the attitude towards them. With the ongoing agitations on the Ramjanmbhoomi Babri Masjid issue, it appears to him, as if history is going to repeat itself.

The Hindutva brigade is busy trying to invent a new past for the nation, fabricating historical wrongs they want to right, dredging up evidence of Muslim malfeasance and misappropriation of national glory. They are making us in to a large scale Pakistan; they are vindicating the two-nation theory. (p.67)

The intensity of this insecurity, fear, increased when the Bhartiya Janta Party and its Hindutva allies raised the Mandir-Masjid issue. It was a communal movement which was motivated politically to reap the benefits of the Hindu vote bank. Provoking the Hindus, by reminding them of the humiliation they suffered in the past, this movement tried to ignite a spark which they thought had been stamped.

Ram Sharan Gupta, the Hindu protagonist, with his Hindu ideology makes us familiar with the intense zeal of Hindutva. For him the awakening of the Hindus was essential to illuminate India, which had been continuously invaded and destroyed by the Muslim rulers of the past. Gupta considers that the demolition of temples in the past was a deliberately adapted imperial strategy to demoralize and humiliate the Hindus. He also holds this sect responsible for the partition of 'his motherland'. For him this is 'his motherland' whereas the Muslims are intruders not owing their loyalty to this land.

They are more loyal to a foreign religion, Islam, than to India... pretending instead that they all descended from conquerors from Arabic or Persia or Samarkand-Fine- if that is so, let them go back to these places. Why do they stay here if they will not assimilate into our country? (p.54)

Gupta gets disturbed with the pampering of this community when privileges are bestowed by providing financial aid to visit Haj and the Government subsidies to Muslim educational institutions. But what troubles him most is that,

They have even managed special status for the only Muslim- majority state we have, Kashmir. Do you know a Hindu from anywhere else in the country cannot buy a piece of land in Kashmir? And worst of all these Muslims are out breeding the Hindus. (p.55)

The Mandir-Masjid issue triggered of the suppressed hatred against each other. The resistance that the Hindus faced for the construction of Mandir challenged their tolerance whereas the Muslims considered this as an attempt to wipe off their existence from this land.

The platitudinous slogan of 'unity in diversity' was now replaces by venomous slogans against each other. To bolster the courage of Hindus come the provocation "jis Hindu ka khoon na khaule/ khoon nahi hai pani hai". The Muslims were abused, taunted and goaded by the slogan "Musalman ke do hi sthan/ Pakistan ya kabrasthan". With the same gust came the reply "has ke liya tha Pakistan/ ladke lenge Hindustan"

It was crystal clear from the virulence, naked aggression of the BJP and its Hindutva allies that they were out to accomplish their goal. For them it was a matter of faith,

It has been known for thousands of years that, that is the Ramjanmsthan the exact place of birth of our Lord Ram. (p.120)

For Md. Sarwar, a historian, this was simply ridiculous.

Your Hindutva types are presuming to know the exact place of birth of a man whose birth date is historically unverifiable. There is no evidence for the historicity of the Ramjanmbhoomi claims. (p.181)

From warmth to waging words and from waging words to weapons, this ended up into riot. The world witnessed what happened on Dec.6, 1992. It also saw and heard that thousands, both Hindus and Muslims, were killed, massacred in the riots that followed across the country. It was the worst outburst of communal violence in India since partition. Before the wounds of Partition were healed completely, a new scar was inflicted.

Amidst these struggles for imposing supremacy the rising smokes, hues and cries, Tharoor impeccably reminds us of a secular India when he writes,

Since the days of Gandhi, we have tried to build a country that is every ones and no ones, a country that excludes nobody, a country that no one group can claim is exclusively theirs. (p.197)

#### REFERENCE

All quotes are taken from-  
Tharoor, Shashi. Riot A Novel, Penguin.2003.