

History and Political Tangles in Shashi Tharoor's "India: From Midnight to Millennium"

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India: From Midnight to the Millennium is an extraordinary piece of work that can fit into any scheme of things. It can be termed as a history, seen as a political work and also viewed as a cultural compendium. Such a work fascinates the audience with a lot of complex issues pertaining to India and its development. One defect that is glaring as far as Tharoor is concerned is the repetition that is prevalent in all his works. Certain segments get repeated again and again as his themes do not differ much from work to work. Every work that he deals with is related to the nation and naturally there are issues that need to be mentioned and discussed repeatedly. The work as such has a time limit as it begins from the midnight when India got its freedom and continues till the beginning of the new millennium. India as a nation was born on that night and it went to grow in various dimensions with lots of good and bad experiments. This study would focus much on the history and political issues of the nation as discussed by Shashi Tharoor in "India: From Midnight to Millennium". Actually, the author implies the burning issues in almost every chapter of the book.

As far as history is concerned, anything and everything that belongs to the past is history and any issue of the past that disturbs the present is a tangle. A writer is not a problem solver, but when he raises the tangle in his works, it indirectly means that he is trying to solve the issue by disseminating it. An author cannot give a onetime solution to the problems, but can suggest many types of solutions.

The book begins with the powerful touch of history and since it was written at the dawn of a new election, the author delves into the history of the Congress party and the history of the nation. In 1999, one issue that dominated the political narrative was the problem of being a foreigner. Sonia Gandhi, the Congress President was unacceptable to few Congress leaders, they are Sharad Pawar, P.A.Sangma and Tariq Anwar. It is a political tangle that caught the headlines of many newspapers. But the author implicitly informs the readers the hurdles of the tangle. The clashes of *Videshi* and *Swadeshi* are a stupid one as the very congress party was first headed by a foreigner who was none other than A.O Hulme. It was in the year 1885 that the first congress president A.O.Hulme, a liberal Scotsman determined the culture of the congress. But later, there were leaders like Annie Besant and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were also foreigners as the former was born in Ireland and the latter in Mecca. Congress as a party had always been eclectic and Mahatma Gandhi was so particular in highlighting the supporting the pluralist tradition of the party. It is ironic and unacceptable that such a congress party did come across such a paradox as dealt in the above lines. The historical and political tangle that has been dealt in the very introduction goes on to show that India as a nation of pluralistic one and Indian nationalism is based on these broadminded aspects. In an introduction of this nature, it is difficult to showcase the exclusive historical tangle from the political one. India and congress have faced such tangles in the past and the act of seeing Sonia Gandhi as a foreigner in itself is a historical tangle. Despite the support of various examples, the inability of Sonia Gandhi to become the Prime Minister is a strong proof of the political tangle that has been disturbing the nation and its prospects in the past few decades.

The author leaves not the matter, but goes instead to highlight racial distribution of the Indian society. One tangle that has been disturbing the texture of the nation is the cultural one. Since there are umpteen numbers of religions, there are clashes as they jostle with one another for domination. The author tries to suggest the diversity of the nation by mentioning that Punjabis and Bengalis have more in common with the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis than with other people of India. Likewise geographically too there are many diversities. All these diversities are tangles, but acceptance of the same is a solution. Tharoor clearly enumerates that 'India' is an idea and the idea is the acceptance of the differences. This is the reason why it is termed as a pluralist democracy.

The author tries to show few more conflicting strands by discussing the 49th anniversary of Indian independence which was presided by the then Prime minister H.D. Deva Gowda. It is the greatest political tangle as he was the first prime minister from the South India and he was also the first one to be totally ignorant

of the Hindi language which till then was considered as an indispensable one to rule India. But the prime minister spoke Hindi by writing the script in his mother tongue Kannada. Can there be a tangle than this? A ruler ruling the country knowing not the language of the ruled. These types of political tangle recurs repeatedly in history. The author leaves not the matter there, but goes on with another example where the ace singer K.J. Jesudas singing a Hindi song with Hindi lyrics written in the Malayalam script. This is India where everything is in conflict with one another, but still there is togetherness. The political and cultural tangle mentioned by the author showcases the power of Indian pluralism. The author highlights the tangles of politics, history and culture not only to solve the issues that disturb the natural unity, but also to strengthen the pluralism of the nation. He stresses about the pluralistic ideas by underlining the minority concept of the people.

The political tangle has been aggravated further by the rise of the right winged parties that are hell bent in making India, the Hindu nation. Their views were unheard to by the three fourth of Indian population as they were Pro-Hindu, Pro Hindi and anti secular which are un acceptable aspects for the Indian nationals but the author feels sorry that the rise of Sonia Gandhi has fanned the xenophobic tendencies and the opportunists have started speaking about her foreign accent. Politics has always been a conflict zones and varieties of parties actually make things even more confusing. Though there are different levels of conflict, the problem of religion and identity has dominated the scene far better than other issues. The reason is simple as religion or culture is at the heart of the people and anyone who touches or tinkers with it will be able to sway over their thoughts.

The author shows various paradoxes that exist in the nation. There are innumerable opposites and he says no one is opposite as everyone in this nation is an outsider in one or other away. For instance, he says that fair skinned Sonia Gandhi who wears saree is not foreign to his grandmother than a Punjabi lady who wears Salwar Kameez. These cultural tangles have always been there and India is a meddle of these opposites. There cannot be any exclusivism in India as everything is inclusive. Tharoor says,

To start disqualifying Indian citizens from the privileges of Indianness is not just pernicious; it is an affront to the very premier of Indian nationalism. An India that denies itself to some Indians would no longer be the India Mahatma fought to free. (*India* xxiii)

It is a strong statement from the pen of Shashi Tharoor and he tries voice out against the alleged exclusivism advocated by few political parties. His statement affirms that the key idea of India exists in the acceptance of pluralism and by practicing cultural exclusivism, few people who do not belong to the particular culture are made to feel that they are not Indians. Tharoor speaks with genuine concern and feeling.

The book actually begins with the mention of the fiftieth Independence Day which was very much significant and the author asks questions pertaining to the 21st century. He asks, "What does the twenty-first century hold for India?" (*India* 1) It is a same question as the author seems to be concerned about the future of India. Politically speaking, India in the past was not much in danger as there was no religion based divide amongst the Indian. There was no political as the politicians a leader were more concerned about poverty and corruption. Even if there were right winged parties, their strength was bare minimum. The majority of people were wedded to secularism, so the political issue was all about lethargy and non performance. But things changed after 1980s as a new set of political parties with new exclusivist agenda set the ball rolling in the Indian plains. The confusion is not about the emergence of policies or issues, but the public participation and the change that happened in the minds of the Majoritarian people. For the first time in the history of India, people started using the expression "us" and "they." It is a dangerous change and as an author and a word wide traveler with powerful connections, the author can gauge the change and also realize the danger associated with it. This is the reason why he seems to express concern over the twenty first century. But at the very outset, the author speaks about another meddle that happened few years back which was nothing but political emergency. Emergency was a political tangle that aggravated inflicts amongst politicians and also confused the public. India as a nation was in meddle because there were economic stagnation, poverty, political imprisonment, suppression of free speech and a sense of fear. The confusion that arose from this state of affairs sent a very bad signal to the foreign countries and it was incidental that Shashi Tharoor was in United States of America then. The political tangle of such nature arises due to various reasons, of which "power" is the main reason. The saying "power corrupts absolute power corrupts absolutely" is the best example to highlight the political tangle that happened long back. The then Prime Minister, who was ensconced in the seat after a remarkable victory in the 1971. India-Pakistan conflict faced a grave economic situation. There were lots of issues that needed to be addressed, but the frequent hustles and disturbances caused by the opposition parties created an irredeemable confusion. Everything was in a muddle and the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was literally pushed to the wall before declaring emergency in India. Emergency as such should not be viewed in a negative light; it is the political uncertainty and confusion that created such a situation. Finally, the problem got solved though democracy and in the elections a new party "Janata Party" emerged as a clear winner and for the first time in the history of India, a non-congress party became the ruler. Tharoor again laments about the emergency in the following words. He says,

Around me, newspapermen and Journalists were coloured and resentful. The freedoms for our independence struggle had been waged seemed in peril; and yet weren't we, the literate minority, disqualified by our privileged status from objecting to measures designed, as the government claimed, to benefit "the common man? (*India 1*)

It was really a troubled times for the press, the fourth pillar of the Indian democracy. The author resented it because it was against the very struggle that the freedom fights fought. But ironically, the same curbs and same restriction have been brought about by the Indian leaders.

The author reproduces the article that he wrote during the emergency period. He says that the discussion between Indian and Indian is much less compared to Indian and India. It is a potent message that speaks about the involvement of people emergency could be lifted only if the people could involve in a movement. Passivism may not help in preservation of independence. The political tangle caused by the emergency is boldly opposed by a young guy, though his safety is insured through his stay in United States of America. All the political leaders were behind the bars and only a few of them were underground. It was a complete mess and the nation was clueless about the future. The usage 'Sense of belonging' is the answer for all political mess and the author's expectation of each and every citizen taking up the responsibility as possible solution to political tangle. But the middle that India was in during 1970s is totally different from the present day problems that confront the nation. The author feels that there are many tangles in the present day India and the issues of freedom vs poverty are still alive, the tangle of Centralization vs Federalism is a likewise as well. Along with their ranges, the long debated problem of Pluralism vs Fundamentalism and Colonisation vs Globalization are also alive in all ways. These are potent issues and the conflict between the issues can throw India out of track. For instance, poverty is still a raging problem and the politicians have never allowed it to be erased from the pages of history. When Tharoor write the book, India was at the cusp of instability as coalition governments were unable to act derisively. Instability is another tangle that is difficult to solve and only an emerging leader who has a mass appeal can solve the issue of instability. The author's contention of stability on poverty is understandable. When the government is stable there is every possibility for a concerted attack on poverty. Thus the confusion caused by the political instability is an issue that needs a solution according to the author. Likewise the author also raises the problem of centralization and federalism.

From the time of independence, the issue is raging and the creation of states based on languages has always aggravated the problem of separatism. Though federalism is not in any way related to separation, it is something similar to self-assertive. In positive way, it may help in strengthening the state of economy, but negatively it makes weaken the nation and he central government. So this tangle has been an unsolved one, but the rise of coalition government at the centre has strengthened the voice of federalist principles. The advocates of federalism are more vocal than the unitary supporters. Along with this political conflict, the issue of pluralism and fundamentalism is the most important issue according to the author. The author uses the word "secularism" that is found in the Indian constitution, which in the recent past has been under threat from fundamentalists who are eager to declare India as a Hindu state. India and its constitution have always cherished pluralism and the dangers to pluralism are a poor tangle that till now remains unsolved. Thus the problems to the nation are galore and the author gives a possible solution to entangle the nation from all the problems. He says that these are not ordinary issues as these are the ones that determine the course of the nation. It decides what sort of nation is going to be inherited by the next generation of people. He envisions India as a broad, Plularist nation that has space for every citizen on equal terms.

WORKS CITED

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