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## History, Politics, Religion And Cultural Conflict In Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*



### Dr. Ambreen Safder Kharbe

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
G.M.Momin Women's College, Rais High School Campus  
Thane Road, Bhiwandi, MS, INDIA  
Email ID : [ambreenkharbe72@gmail.com](mailto:ambreenkharbe72@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT :**

*History, politics, religion and cultural conflicts has always been a hot issue from ages and is well depicted by the writers as their moral responsibilities. Shashi Tharoor's **Riot** is an intellectual, well-crafted and emotionally charged novel. The book owes the historical event of love-hate relationship of two major communities (Hindu and Muslim) of India. The paper highlights the danger of 'unity in diversity' and how the political parties for their mutual benefits turn the simple issues in communal riots. The paper in the backdrop of such a serious problem also focuses on the East-West encounter through two lovers and the cultural conflicts between two nations and two religions.*

### **Keywords :**

*History, communal riots, cultural conflicts, political influence, unity & diversity*

## Research Paper :

Shashi Tharoor is an internationally known speaker a well recognized India's recent transformation and future prospects, voice of globalisation, freedom of the press, human rights, literacy, Indian culture, and India's present and potential influence in world politics. Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* is an intellectual, well-crafted and emotionally charged novel. The book owes the historical event of love-hate relationship of two major communities (Hindu and Muslim) of India. Moreover, this novel is also concerned about the increasing rift between the Hindu and Muslim communities. While writing novel as history, Shashi Tharoor plays the role of investigative journalist. Tharoor cuts out a pathetic figure of motherland, which is experiencing a struggle of reclaiming an identity, on the contrary the world is heading towards globalization<sup>1</sup>. *Riot* is based on a true event. In 1989 Babri Masjid Mosque was targeted by the Hindu fanatics who had planned to erect a temple in that particular site. Interestingly, Congress Party was ruling India then, but it was the Bharatiya Janata Dal, who took the lead and is responsible for its demolition. The event was a turning point in the political history of India.

The narrative techniques employed in this novel are poetry, report writing, letters, newspaper articles, radio scripts, interview transcripts and journal extracts. At the heart of the novel lies the story of young American student Priscilla Hart, a Christian idealist who comes to India to volunteer in a women's healthcare programme. The story is set in 1989 in Zalilgarh, a dusty town in Uttar Pradesh, where Hart becomes victim of Hindu-Muslim riots that explodes over a Ram Shila Poojan. In the course of her work in the small town of Zalilgarh, Priscilla meets an attractive, married, government official Lakshman. An instant affinity is felt by both of them and a stifling, secret love affair is carried on. While both are conflicted by their feelings for each other, neither wants to end the relationship. Priscilla's parents and a newspaper reporter visit Zalilgarh in an attempt to find out exactly what happened to her. Through interviews with the police, government officials, and co-workers of Priscilla, we learn of the Muslim-Hindu conflict that is brewing in northern India. The conflict turns into a riot which results in the havoc death of eight people in this small town. Except Priscilla Hartrest others were Indians. The novel further traces the relationship between Hindus and Muslims and how with the feeling of brotherhood in the past, the pre-independence period, have fought for the independence of India. This pleasant harmonious relationship witnessed a poisoned seed turning to a fully fledged poisonous tree immediately after independence because of Partition. Despite a look at some dark issues and a grim portrayal of small town Zalilgarh in Uttar

Pradesh, Tharoor considers himself optimist about this book. Tharoor focuses on the threatening issues of unity, but still feels that India's Unity in Diversity will survive. The problem of communalism is partly religious, partly cultural and partly political in nature and it has proved to be a great social menace culminating in conflagration regional tensions and hate campaigns-

...Communalism is the very negation of the valued principles of tolerance, accommodation and co-operation; by its very nature it is a kind of political and religio-cultural reaction that weakens the existing social order, and though at times it may be looked upon as a movement, it is, in fact, neither revolution nor reconstruction.<sup>2</sup>

India suffered a major setback on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992, the black day when Babri Masjid was demolished by Hindu fundamentalist. The very integrity of the nation was threatened. The guiding principles and fundamental rights of Indian Constitution were violated. The view that the Hindus owned Hindustan and Pakistan for Muslims reached to the point that Muslims has no right to live in India. Such fanatics reached to the extremes on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992, converted India into Bharat and took the nation back to the dark ages. The massacre and the genocide that followed the great tragedy of Babri Masjid is captured by Tharoor in his novel *Riot*.

...It is based in part of real story, but not the Staines murder. I had become increasingly concerned with the communal issues bedeviling our national politics and society in the late 1990's and I wrote extensively about them in my newspaper columns and in my last book, '*India: From Midnight to Millennium*'. This was all in the nature of commentary. As a novelist, though, I sought an interesting way to explore the issue in fiction. Years ago, my old college friend Harsh Mander, an IAS officer, sent me an account he had written of a riot he dealt with as a District Magistrate in Madhya Pradesh. I was very moved by the piece and urged him to publish it, and I am very pleased that a collection of Harsh's essay about the 'forgotten people' he has dealt with in his career has just emerged from Penguin under the title 'Unheard Voices'. But his story also sparked my thinking of a riot as a vehicle for a novel about communal hatred. Since I have never managed a riot myself, I asked Harsh for permission to use the story of 'his' riot in my narrative, a request to which he graciously consented. At about the same time, I read a newspaper account of a young white American girl, Amy Biehl, who had been killed by a black

mob in violent disturbances in South Africa. The two images stayed and merged in my mind, and 'Riot' was borne. (Interview.2001)

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 communal riots. 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. Some writers were dismayed by poverty, inequality and corruption. Whereas some with the fear of politicians. On the other hand 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 uproar in politics, exposing its dirtiness and other serious issues linked with 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. A communal riot in India is considered as an assault on the image of communally harmonious secular India. 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 Love Story* has taken up the task of exploring and elucidating this wrong which manifest itself in the form of 'collective demonity'. He also reveals the East-West encounter through the tragic love story. The background of the Taj for riot also evokes images of the Moghul dynastic rule in India whereas the cover page that depicts an actual riot serves to the reading audience of the negativity of hate.<sup>3</sup>

The novel further explores – “how the British promoted divisions between Hindus and Muslims as a policy of “divide and rule” (p.21)<sup>4</sup> which has become a part and parcel for the politicians to survive.

Further, the changing relationship between these two communities who shared an equal responsibility in securing freedom is very well crafted. It is through Professor Mohammed 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 Mohammed 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)<sup>5</sup> 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 Mohammed Sarwar accuses those who motivated this two nation theory. Muslim's didn't partition the country- The English did, the Muslim League did, the Congress party did.(p.111)<sup>6</sup> 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, as they owed loyalty to a different religion. The question that haunts this intellectual Muslim, Mohammed Sarwar is- where do Indian Muslims like myself fit in? I have spent my life thinking of myself as a part of it. Now there are Indians, respectable Indians, Indians winning votes, who say that I'm really 'them'.(p.114)<sup>7</sup> It is India's destiny that many human races, culture and religion has contributed to make what today India is. Today the concept of Indianness, National Integrity and Love for Motherland is in danger. Hindus and Muslims are the two sides of the same coin. Mohammed Sarwar expresses-

...The danger is that Hindus like Ram Charan Gupta will get Muslims like me thinking differently. This is why the change in the public discourse about Indianness is so dangerous, and why the old ethos must be restored. An India that denies itself to some of us could end up being denied to all of us. This would be a second partition: and a partition in the Indian soul would be as bad as a partition in the Indian soil.(p.115)<sup>8</sup>

To overcome this problem "we have to keep reminding people that tolerance is also a tradition in India".(p.64)<sup>9</sup> What hurts Mohammed Sarwar 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)<sup>10</sup> 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 Charan 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)<sup>11</sup> 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. The hatred for Muslims further reaches to height with the words-

...Muslims are like a lemon squirted into the cream of India. They turn it sour. We have to remove the lemon, cut it up into little pieces, squeeze out the pips and throw them away....That is what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, the rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Parivar, will do one day.....they are all dictatorships, monarchies, tyrannies, military regimes....Muslims are fanatics and terrorists; they only understand the language of force.(p.57)<sup>12</sup>

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)<sup>13</sup> For Mohammed 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)<sup>14</sup> This wrath ended up into riot. The world witnessed what happened on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 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)<sup>15</sup>

**Riot** “confirms Shashi Tharoor as a major voice in contemporary literature.” Some of the great reviewers appreciate its concern with the multiple kinds of social, political and cultural affairs in varying degrees. Shobori Ganguli finds it touching ‘a rather raw nerve of contemporary Indian Politics.’ Adam Goodheart considers it as ‘a basic parable of the modern world, with its random human encounters, clashes of cultures and garbles international communiqués.’ There are reviewers, like Renuka Narayan who has not been able to digest these collisions and so sensed it as ‘a dark elegy to India.’ Shashi Tharoor himself has confessed in many of his interviews that the novel is full of collisions of various sorts- personal, political, emotional and violent. This major voice has tried to solve different kinds of global problems as a senior official of the UN for more than two decades. Besides, he has searched the way-out of pacifying communalism and violence plaguing Indian awareness to a great extent. Naturally, this novel discusses various types of conflicts between individuals, between cultures, between ideologies and between religions. Tharoor himself says:

“The themes that concern me in this novel: love and of hate; cultural collision, in particular, in this case the Hindu/Muslim collision, the American/Indian collision, and

within India the collision between the English-educated elites of India and people in the rural heartland; and as well, issues of the unknowability of history, the way in which identities are constructed through an imagining of history; and finally, perhaps, the unknowability of the truth.”<sup>16</sup>

Tharoor's choice of a riot as a vehicle is significant since it is a resistance to strategies of the power of the nation-state. The violence ensuing out of the partition in the form of a communal riot is rocked back and forth by the multiple perspectives Tharoor invests in the story. Tharoor raises the question as to why a particular episode of Hindu-Muslim violence is perceived in the light of a riot and not as merely an incident of violence. It is in the answer to this query Tharoor reveals the power relations that institutionalize a riot. The necessity to institutionalize a riot is to achieve the visibility of power and a riot as strategy of power subverts the resistance to a unified, coherent nation-state, thereby establishing the coherence of the discursive site of the nation-state. Sometimes, the riot becomes a political strategy for the powerfully organized to deflect hostility away from themselves as the Hindu Chauvinist leader of Riot asserts, " Sometimes I suspect the so-called secularists start the violence deliberately, just in order to discredit us. Wherever Hindutva governments have come to power ... there has been no communal violence ..." (p.57)<sup>17</sup> The ruling regime articulates the communal strategy as a divisionary tool to conceal the fragility of the system. Hence, the narrative of a riot becomes a tactical strategy to shift the fault or the failure from the system of the nation-state to the perpetrators of violence.

The discourse of communalism as Tharoor implies in the novel does not voice any logical reason for the brutal killing of an American, "No one in Zalilgarh could explain why anyone would want to kill Priscilla Hart.(p.266)<sup>18</sup>. The unresolved murder in the text situates it within the larger framework of the ideological operations of communalism. The unresolved murder of the American is redirected at the power of bureaucracy that suppresses the threat of subversion as Katherine Hart ruminates, "I'll never know what happened to my poor baby. Perhaps it's just as the officials said it was, and she was surprised by criminals, or surprised them in the act ... But what was she doing there? It doesn't make sense. (p.260)<sup>19</sup>

Tharoor does not fail to reveal that power is not synonymous with a utopian reality, "On the one hand, he says, he can do good, as district magistrate he has real power here. On the other hand, he says he's frequently disillusioned with the cynicism he sees around him in government, especially corruption ..." (p.94)<sup>20</sup>. Tharoor reveals how the system of bureaucracy contains within itself the subversion (corruption) it seeks to contain, "India's so



full of rules and regulations that government officials can make a fortune from the way they exercise their power to permit- the building of a factory here, the grant of a loan there. (p.94)<sup>21</sup>. Riot reveals how power is made abstract through the institution of bureaucracy, "The Indian government has apparently become rather good at managing these riots, and people like Mr. Lakshman are trained at riot control the way a student is trained to footnote a dissertation ..."(p.21)<sup>22</sup>. Lakshman is a secular minded Indian. He believes in peace, prosperity and unity of India. He says "If the Muslims of the 1520s acted out of ignorance and fanaticism, should Hindus act the same way in the 1990s? ?By doing what you propose to do, you will hurt the feelings of the Muslims of today"(p.146)<sup>23</sup>. He understands the politics behind the Ram Sila Poojan. He negates the ideas/hatred feelings of Hindus against the Muslims to what the Muslim invaders might have done during their reign. He explains to Priscilla-

...Why should today's Muslims have to pay a price for what Muslims may have done four hundred and fifty years ago? It's just politics, Priscilla. The twentieth-century politics of deprivation has eroded the culture's confidence. Hindu chauvinism has emerged from the competition for resources in a contentious democracy. Politicians of all faiths across India seek to mobilize voters by appealing to narrow identities. By seeking votes in the name of religion, caste, and region, they have urged voters to define themselves on these lines. Indians have been made more conscious than ever before of what divides us.(p.145)<sup>24</sup>

The Mandirs and Masjids have become pathways to parliament and assemblies. The unconscionable use of religion as a tool of exploitation has made India virtually a wounded civilization. It has dismantled the long ages strength of Indian unity and integrity and created innumerable ugly divisions, cleavages and fissures in place of rich and variegated diversities and pluralities. But, we, like fools instead of learning lessons from the past repeat them with more intensity. Hence, chaos, disorder, violence and riots have taken permanent place in our society. To rebuild and establish 'Ram Rajya' is impossible. There is no sign of any progress. But the thousands of people have become the victim of the soil of Ayodhya. Lakshman's poem *How to Sleep at Night – Advice to the World's Politicians* bitterly attacks the contemporary politicians. He writes:

Try to think of nothing.

That's the secret.

Try to think of nothing.  
Do not think of work not done,  
of promises unkept, calls to return,  
or the agendas you have failed to prepare for meetings  
yet unheld.

.....  
.....  
No, do not think  
of the solitary tear, the broken limb,  
The rubble-strewn home, the chocking scream;  
never think  
of piled –up bodies, blazing flames  
shattered lives, or sundered souls.  
Do not think of the triumph of the torture  
the wails of the hungry,  
the screams of the mutilated,  
or the indifferent smirk  
of the sleek.  
Think of nothing.  
Then you will be able  
to sleep. (p.92)<sup>25</sup>

One factor that really keeps us glued to the book is the presentation of Priscilla-Lakshman relationship. It highlights contrasting features of two cultures—Western and Eastern, Occident and Orient. They represent the attitudes of two different cultures towards love, sex, and marriage in concrete terms. When Lakshman asks Priscilla: “These guys (her past lovers) you went out with, did you sleep with them”(p.83)<sup>26</sup>, evokes a casual response from her. “Some of them” (p.83)<sup>27</sup> replied Priscilla without any sense of guilt and shame. Further, she says, “Lucky, I’m twenty four.... You didn’t expect me to be a virgin, did you?(p.83) <sup>28</sup>. But in India it is considered to be a sin, if a girl establishes any relation with a man before her marriage. He tells Priscilla “...Zalilgarh is not America. Not America. In America you are doing such and such and so and so, but here it is different”(p.83)<sup>29</sup>. Gita, Lakshman’s wife presents the virginity and virtuosity of an Indian woman. Lakshman tells Priscilla: “Of course she was a virgin. Forget sex, she hadn’t kissed a boy, she hadn’t even held hands with

one. That's how it is in India. That's what's expected (p.83)<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, he explains the nature, significance, and sanctity of marriage in Indian context: "In India we know that marriage leads to love, which is why divorce is almost unknown here, and love lives on even when marital partner dies, because it is rooted in something fundamental in our society as well as our psyche."(p.83)<sup>31</sup> The conflict between Lakshman and Priscilla is the conflict between the Victorian ideals of duty, responsibility and respectability, and the Romantic credo of freedom, love and individual fulfillment. Or to put it in another way, it is the conflict between the East and the West. It is the Westernized image of Lakshman that appeals to Priscilla who talks, writes, reads, thinks in a way she does. Their love develops against all odds. It is through their regular meet at Kotli on every Tuesday and Saturday they create their own world, which can be a reality for an American girl but proves to be an illusion to an Indian man. This love rather than providing pleasure creates fear, tension, and insecurity. Stuck in a loveless marriage but deeply attached to his young daughter, Lakshman vacillates between sacrificing his career and family for Hart and giving up the only woman who has ever truly made him happy. It is Rekha, Lakshman's daughter, who holds her father from forsaking his family. The name Rekha, which means a line, symbolically becomes a line of control. When Priscilla urges Lakshman to leave his family and accompany her to America, he is caught in the role of Indian culture and identity. He writes –

...How can I explain to her that I'm not even sure I have the right to do that to Geetha, to abdicate my husbandhood? I didn't choose to start my marriage in the first place; how can I choose to end it? My role as a husband and father is central to who I am; it concerns my rootedness in the world; it is inextricably bound up with my sense of my place in the cosmos. I have been brought up to believe that such things-marriage, family – are beyond individual will, that they transcend an individual's freedom of action. Priscilla'll never understand that. (p.201-202)<sup>32</sup>

Thus as a man who gives a lot of importance to family responsibilities and filial obligations, he is already equipped with a moral armour against adultery. Priscilla has a more immediately personal and less simple attitude to adultery. What she carries with her is not the practical consequences of a broken marriage but the intensely emotional disgust of a daughter who could never forgive her father for his ugly affair with Nandini his secretary. It is heavily ironic that Lakshman finds himself in a situation, which is emotionally satisfying but morally repulsive, and Priscilla finds herself entangled with a man who in conceding to her wishes will be re-enacting the ugly drama of her father's.

In America, marriage is a bond between two lovers but in India, marriage is an arrangement between families, one of the means for perpetuating the social order. There are other details about Indian ways of life that give a multidimensional picture of India as something exotic to the foreign readers and observers. Priscilla Hart wrote to her friend Cindy Vateriani about some aspects of Indian social life that she considers striking and strange. These aspects of Indian social life make her consider India “so complex a land.” She feels that women in India do not enjoy a respectable position. They are considered to be secondary and are marginalized- a plaything in the hands of their husbands, protectors or lord beings. Fatima Bi is caught in the cruel clutches of Ali Mohammad. He tortures and beats her regularly. She is mother of seven children and leading a very poor and miserable life, still Ali forces her to give birth to his eighth child. Perhaps it shows poor people in India believe that children will contribute to family income and share the burden and responsibilities. He clearly tells Priscilla “I decide how my wife conducts her life.” Pointing out the deplorable condition of Indian women in her poem entitled *Christmas in Zalilgarh*, Priscilla writes:

They go back to their little huts  
Roll out the chapattis for dinner  
Pour the children drink of sewer water  
Serve their men first, eat what is left  
If they are lucky, and then submit unprotected  
To the heaving thrusts of their protectors.(p.15)<sup>33</sup>

Indians are superstitious. A typical Hindu believes in myths, stars and astrology. Geeta, Lakshman’s wife is an emblematic representative of such types of people. She is very religious as well as superstitious. When she comes to know that her husband has decided to move away with Priscilla to USA. She goes to swamiji in the temple of Lord Shiva. She prays, undergoes fasts and seeks blessings from divine world to save her relationship. She asks swamiji to conduct a special pooja for her to help her keep her husband. She says: “...use tantra, do the tandva, use anyone and anything you want, swamiji, but please don’t let this foreign devil woman run away with my husband...” (p.227)<sup>34</sup>

Much like the myriad voices shouting in a riot, the novel offers perspectives of many characters, from Hart's mother to Lakshman's wife and daughter. However, quite unlike the chaos of a riot, these voices coalesce to solve the mystery of Hart's murder--and, in Tharoorian fashion, there's a stunning twist at the end.

On the other hand, in *Riot* there are also voices such as that of Gurinder Singh who has suffered from personal loss. His past discussed with Randy Diggs, reminds us of the tragic slaughter, looting and bloody revenge against the Sikh community in the Delhi after Indira Gandhi's assassination. He actually wanted to be a peasant, but opted for IAS according to his parent's wish as the job could give him decent salary and social status. An incident changed his attitude towards the job, his community was held responsible for the Prime Minister's death. This set ablaze a wave of anger, revenge against this community in the capital. It was a well-organized riot with the mob having a list of shops and houses owned by the Sikhs- "There was an orgy of slaughter, of arson, of looting. Sikh neighborhoods were destroyed, families butchered, homes torched"(p.194)<sup>35</sup> In this bloody murderous revenge Gurinder lost his 10 year old nephew Nowjyot and his brother-in-law. They both were burned alive in their Ambassador car by a mob crying in anger "Khoon ka badla khoon."(p.194)<sup>36</sup> Gurinder played a significant role along with District Magistrate Lakshman in trying to ban the procession of Ram Sila Poojan and in controlling the riot when it broke out.

To conclude in *Riot* Tharoor seeks to examine some of the most vital issues of our day on a small canvas. It is dedicated to all those people who feel ashamed to be Indian and have grudges against Indian cultural and social values. Tharoor has taken pains in doing his best at pointing out the situation and the history of unrest existing between two-religions and a love story of cross- cultural beings.

Shashi Tharoor affirms and enhances Indian cultural identity through his novel by reflecting on pluralism and openness in India's kaleidoscopic culture. He also aims to broaden the understanding of Indian culture and historical heritage in the postcolonial era. Tharoor in *Riot* has tried to build with zeal a peaceful society. The novel *Riot* has also successfully depicted Tharoor's love for his homeland being a responsible citizen of India.

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