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- **Shashi Tharoor's - The great Indian novel: An epic Blunder**

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- Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel has come in for high praise in India and abroad, and is already in its fifth edition. Khushwant Singh called it one of the most significant books in recent times. Washington Post reviewed it on its front page and the Times London, called it a tour de force
- Tharoor humbly explains why he calls his novel The Great Indian Novel. He further states, his primary source of inspiration is the Mahabharata. Since Maha means Great, and Bharat means India, he calls this novel The Great Indian Novel.
- Perhaps his second source of inspiration is the recent history and politics. Shashi believes that the recent history of Indian is a replay of the Mahabharat. Therefore, he recounts both, the epic and the history of modern India simultaneously. He carries the double task in the manner and style of Salman Rushdie. The extraordinary success of Rushdie's Midnight's children had encouraged Indian writers in English to get rid of high-seriousness of the modernist writers, to abandon all the concerns for the purity of form and assert their right over English left behind by the colonists. Steeped in the spirit of the times, Tharoor starts the novel in the mock- seriousness by invoking Lord Brahma to provide him with an amanuensis to write his epic and accordingly, Lord Ganesha is made available to him. Since the Kauravas and the Pandavas had left for their heavenly abode Tharoor reinvents them and starts with his own Mahabharat. Gangaji, a brand-new version of Ganga Putra Bhishma reaches Motihari in Bihar to alleviate the suffering of badly brutalized and exploited farmers with his new weapon of satyagraha. With this start, the reader comes to know that it is going to be both Mahabharata and history.
- In the epic Dhridrastra sits in a throne of burnished gold and total darkness but in his new avatar, he is educated at Harrow and Cambridge, is glib of tongue, gifted with charming looks, super intelligence and wit but blinded by excessive idealism. He has a way with masses and elites and favoured by Gangaji in tricky situations. He became the first Prime Minister of India. His cousin Pandu is rugged, very practical, hard-headed realist but kept away because of mortal disease.
- Dhritarashtra, though he has hundred sons in the epic, has a daughter called Priya Duryodhani. Pandu, incapacitated, has five sons from extraneous sources, the eldest being called Yudhistir. Dhritrashtra, in his excessive idealism believes that the Chakkars would help him in the development of the country but they betray him and attack and defeat India. Krishna, Dhritrashtra's most trusted lieutenant, turns out to be supercilious. Dhritrashtra does not recover from the shock of Chakkar's betrayal and eventually Priya Dhuryodhani becomes the Prime Minister. Priya Dhuryodhani, unlike her father, holds power in her Iron grip and rules the country ruthlessly. When Yudhishtir puts a claim for the spoils of Independence, she invites him for a game of dice and manages to strip him of his claim even on his wife Mokراسي Draupadi. Duryodhani orders Dushasan to drag Mokراسي to the court and strip her naked. Fortunately, Mokراسي saves herself from the shame and humiliation by unfurling soft muslin sarees after sarees till Dushashan faints. After losing all at the game of dice, Pandavas take to the jungle where they meet Guru Drona. They request him to teach them the art of warfare. They also engage in good social work and when elections are declared, they emerge victorious. All are happy.

But all that does not last long. Yudhisthira was in the habit of drinking his urine. He becomes ridiculous in the eyes of foreign dignitaries and common people alike. Large graffiti appears on public urinals in large letters blazing "Yudhistir Juice Centre ". Yudhistir, known for his truthfulness, equivocates about the death of Ashwathama, who has turned a bitter critic of Yudhisthira. Yudhistir fears that if, because of Ashwathama, Drona turned against him it would mean the end of his rule. So, he equivocates that his son Ashwathama was dead. The news puts an end to Drona's life and the Pandavas disintegrate and in the next election Priya Duryodhani returns to power. Shashi is heartbroken because he thinks that there seems to be no future for India as it cannot return better men to take its care.

The reader, without being told in obvious terms, knows that stripping of Mokrasa is another way of writing about emergency and Yudhistir's equivocation is the news of a false report of Jayprakash's death in the parliament. The narrative produces a double effect very clearly.

However, the projection of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Jinnah, Indra Gandhi as Gangaji, Dhritarashtra, Pandu, Karna, Priya Duryodhani shows little understanding of the real worth and importance of these men. All of them were very deep, complex, profound and serious personalities and the issues they dealt with were very complicated, and intriguing and having far reaching effects on the future of millions of people of this continent. But they are treated in an off-hand, flippant and derisive manner. Similar treatment is meted out to the heroes of the epic Arjun and Bhim the two architects of the war of Mahabharat are assigned impersonal roles of journalist and army and are invisible in the novel. Moreover, the text of the epic is twisted beyond recognition. As such, neither the epic, nor the recent history of India, nor the merger of the two finds full and effective expression and the novel turns out to be a totally disappointing experience for the reader. Fortunately, Tharoor too realizes this bitter truth and admits that "he has told his story from a completely mistaken perspective".

### **Reciprocity between Sustainable Development and Environmental Justice**

***"The environment and the economy are really both two sides of the same coin. If we cannot sustain the environment, we cannot sustain ourselves"***- Wangari Maathai

Due to the upswing in population, urbanization, industrialization, aviation, shipping and vehicular emission, the concernment for environmental quality has become the crucial issue in the present scenario. Environmental conservation has deduced even more significance in neoteric times with increased industrialization engendering not only in over withdrawal of natural resources but also triggering pollution and thereby impacting the flora & fauna.<sup>1</sup> In the developing nations, environmental issues are not constricted to the side effects of industrialization withal reflect the paucity of resources to provide infrastructural provisions to avert industrial pollution. Indeed, the breakthrough in science and technology have bestowed umpteen benefits on society in the form of finer and

<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna & Jayasheela, 'Environmental Problems and Sustainable Development: With Special Reference to India Issues and Challenges' (2010) 6(2) Journal of Global Economy <  
<https://ideas.repec.org/a/jge/journal/622.html#:~:text=In%20India%2C%20rapid%20growth%20of,an d%20hence%20cannot%20be%20ignored.>> accessed 25 September 2020

improved quality of goods at relatively reasonable costs and in proportionately substantial quantities. Nevertheless, the advent of technology has also fetched in its trajectory the impediment of pollution. Certainly, there is an interface between environment and development.<sup>2</sup> Whilst development is crucial for every economy, it is also indispensable that no irreparable damage is caused to the ecosystem.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the modus operandi would patently be that of 'sustainable development to equipoise the exigencies of industrial growth against the trade-offs in environment concerns. It is our collective responsibility to utilize the earth's resources prudently and sustainably so that we don't knock-back the benefits of our future generations. There is a necessity to amalgamate development and conservation- development to facilitate the people all around to enjoy healthful, long & fulfilling lives and conservation to keep our actions within the capacity of earth.

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- The notion of 'sustainable development' was first accentuated at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held at Stockholm in June, 1972.<sup>4</sup> Since then, several nations such as US, France, Germany, Japan, etc. besides India, have implemented legislations pertaining to the conservation of the environment and thereby incorporated strict penalties for the damages incurred due to hazardous substances, etc. The tenets of sustainable development as set out in the stratagem for sustainable living, pivot on veneration and care for the community of life, ameliorating the standard of human life, preserving the diversity and vitality of the earth, curtailing the exhaustion of non-renewable resources- keeping within the earths carrying potentialities, remoulding personal practices and attitudes, facilitating the coteries to care and manage their own environment, proffering a natural structure for consolidating development and conservation.
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- Worldwide sustainability relies upon a robust alliance amongst all the nations. Howbeit, the magnitude of development in the globe are asymmetrical and therefore, the lower income nations must be succoured to reinforce sustainability and to safeguard their environment. The ethic of care applies at the individual, national as well as international levels. No country is self-sufficient by itself. Hence, they all tend to profit from global sustainability, and all are imperilled if we fail to accomplish it.<sup>5</sup>
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- Heretofore, we used to have a glorious tradition of environment preservation which enlightened us to deference nature and to take consciousness of the verity that all the life-forms: plants, animals and humans are closely interconnected and that disruption in one

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<sup>2</sup> TWB, 'India: Green Growth- Overcoming Environment Challenges to Promote Development' (*The World Bank*, 6 March 2014) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/03/06/green-growth-overcoming-india-environment-challenges-promote-development> accessed 25 September 2020

<sup>3</sup> Hemant Sethi, 'How is India dealing with environmental risks and climate change?' *The Economic Times* (Delhi, 11 October 2019) <https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/energy-speak/how-is-india-dealing-with-environmental-risks-and-climate-change/3824> accessed 25 September 2020

<sup>4</sup> Nikolas, Loukas, Ilias & Vaios, *Environment and Development* (Elsevier 2016)

<sup>5</sup> ICSI, *Law Relating To Pollution Control and Environmental Protection* (ICSI 2012)

causes an imbalance in others. This dogma is also enshrined in the Indian Constitution under the Directive Principles. In the judicial pronouncement, the prerogative to healthy environment has been decoded as a part of the right to life under the ambit of Article 21 of the Constitution. Moreover, it is our fundamental duty to safeguard and tweak the natural environment encompassing the forests, rivers, lakes & wildlife and to have solicitude for living creatures (Article 51-A). We have majorly failed to inculcate the principles and fulfil our obligations constructively. Latterly, India had secured 168<sup>th</sup> rank out of 180 countries in the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of Environment Performance Index (EPI) 2020.<sup>6</sup> Although over the past years, the economic growth of India has upheaved the prospect of alleviating large-scale penury within a generation nevertheless, this progress has been clouded by a deteriorated physical environment and burgeoning dearth of natural resources that are indispensable for enduring further development and eradicating poverty.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Siddhi Jain, 'India ranks 168<sup>th</sup> on Environmental Performance Index' *Outlook* (New Delhi, 9 June 2020) < <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/india-ranks-168th-on-environmental-performance-index/1860519>> accessed 25 September 2020

<sup>7</sup> TWB, 'Environmental Management in India' (*The World Bank*) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2011/09/22/environmental-management-india> accessed 25 September 2020