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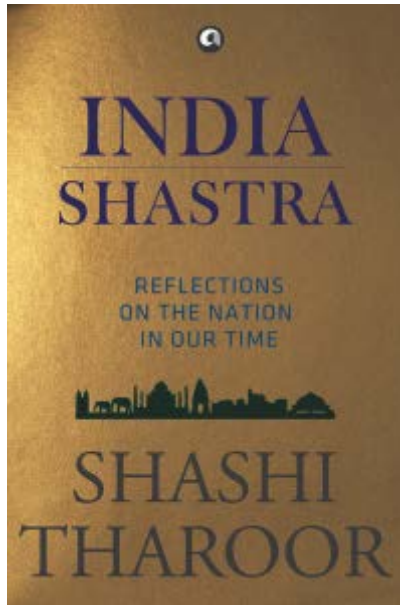
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- Title of the Book: *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in our Time*
- Genre: **Non-fiction.**
- Author: **Dr.ShashiThaoor.**
- Hardcover: **492 pages**
- Publisher: **Aleph Book Company; First edition (29 January 2015)**
- Language: **English.**
- **ISBN:9789383064892**

#### **Reviewed By:**

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Dr.ShashiTharoor, a public figure, a very insightful and an articulate eminent writer and theauthor par excellence, has brought a judicious sense of perception and his understanding of both the micro-level of Indian politics at the grassroots as well as the holistic picture at the macro-level, in his latest book *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in our Time*, the last in his trilogy on India. The Sanskrit term *Shastra* implies a treatise written to explain in detail a thought or an idea, particularly in the context of religion or philosophy in erstwhile India. He has not professed such rules in the book but has raised relevant questions and analysed pertinent topics in a simple conversational tone. It summons many subjects and issues to ponder and analyse for any Indian in present age. The body of work, moreover, important and relevant to everyone, be it in India or anywhere in the globe, to realise and examine the modifications sweeping through modern India and their effect on the present and the future. An all-embracing collection of hundred essays marks for perceptive reading, and offers an ample food for thought on contemporary India and events from its recent history that have contributed to its present state of affairs in the political, social, economic, cultural and communal arenas. Divided into eight neatly isolated sections, it talks about the events that have shaped India until May of 2014.

Section I, *India Modi-fied* analyses the first six months of the BJP government's performance chart. Interestingly, despite him being a Congress MP, Tharoor has displayed an extraordinary sense of appreciation for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's genuine accomplishments such as the Cleanliness Initiative, but is equally critical of Modi's purported

“silence” on communal voices rearing their ugly heads from time to time in myriad nooks and crannies of the country.

Section II, *Modi's India and the World* dwells on the foreign policy actions and decisions of the new government, the problems afflicting the country's foreign policy, Foreign Minister SushmaSwaraj's successful diplomatic breakthrough during her Afghanistan visit, the infamous Khobragade scandal, and other such incidents that have been colouring recent news.

The section which I found the most engaging and interesting is undoubtedly the third one on *The Legacy* which speaks on the forgotten Indian soldiers who participated in the First World War, the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, the ideals of SardarVallabhai Patel, the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, the aura of the incomparable Rabindranath Tagore and about many such great personalities, and the heritage that is a part and parcel of India's rich cultural past. About Tagore, Tharoor writes: “And yet this magnificent wielder of words spoke modestly of the value of poetry. ‘Words are barren, dismal and uninspiring by themselves,’ he said in a 1922 lecture, ‘but when they are bound together by some bond of rhythm they attain their significance as a reality which can be described as creative.’” The fact that India has inherited such great legacies in terms of thinkers, philosophers, visionaries, political leaders, authors, poets, etc. is a matter of national pride, and the author has done a remarkable job in clustering these under this evocative section.

The fourth section entitled “Ideas of India” deals with the changes in age-old ideas of Indian democracy and talks about fresh perspectives sweeping the hearts of Indians, such as the emergence of the *AamAadmi Party* after toppling established legacies, or the new-fangled definitions of development, Tharoor decodes the interesting paradoxes visible in today's India, for instance, he says that one of his most favourite images of India is from the last *KumbhMela* of a naked Sadhu, with matted hair, ash-smeared forehead, *rudraksh* mala and scraggly beard, for all the world a picture of timeless other-wordliness, chatting on a cell-phone.

The Section V entitled *The Pursuit of Excellence* comprises deals with the nation's quest to excel in various key areas of development, be it industry and manufacturing or a better quality of education, particularly higher education for the blossoming of its youth. Moreover, the section elaborates India's lunar mission Chandrayaan and its hugely successful Martian mission Mangalyaan, projecting the country to the top levels, among the many developed nations with a liberal space and research infrastructure. India's Twitter revolutions, the futuristic e-governance and the role of the web in shaping the prospect of nation's socio-political space are discussed here.

Section VI picks up *Issues of Contention* offers a source for debate and dilemma for India, such as the *Ayodhya* disaster of 1992, the role of accountable journalism, the deliberate and time-consuming visa procurement process, India's stance as an asylum provider to international refugees, rambling corruption in governing bodies, the controversial ‘bringing back of black money’ slogan of the new government and then its sluggish implementation, and so on.

The seventh section examines *A Society in Flux* which echoes the shifting times and their impact on Indian society such as issues of how dogmas pertaining to astrology, numerology, astronomy, etc. still continue to rule our decisions despite of modern developments; how colonial dress codes need to be outworn and shed; how the caste system continues to plague most towns, districts, villages and hutments of rural India; how women

continue to be violated and destroyed physically, mentally and sexually despite claims of better laws and security measures being put into place; how terrorism failed to reduce the spirits of a nation continuously ravaged by its despicable torments in different parts such as Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Bombay, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar and so on and yet India continues to tackle the menace with a mixed feeling of being overwhelmed and underwhelmed at the same time.

The final section offers a dream into *India beyond India* and explores the themes of global interest and relevant to India. He looks back at the time with the UN and explains how “the UN isn’t just a way of bureaucratizing our consciences; it makes a real difference to real human beings, a difference that only the UN can make.” He speaks of how the ISIS crisis and the Arab Spring affect India and its peace and its neighbourhood, particularly communist China. The intrusive dilemmas of cyber security, the age and times of near-absolute dependence on the World Wide Web in all spheres of contemporary life right from grocery shopping to controlling an inter-space satellite and the author’s random reflections on issues close to his heart make this section a rich tapestry of thoughts and contemplations that have been influencing his life and times in his different avatars in India and abroad. Thus, in my opinion, the book is stamp of Indo-nostalgic discourse.