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Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*: Prejudice, Retaliation, and Resistance

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Abstract:

Several literary works in India have dealt with the animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* is one of those literary works that addressed the Hindu-Muslim communal conflict. It represents a socio-cultural conflict, focusing on the controversial issue of the Babri Masjid riot that resulted in the death of many people. Tharoor brings to the fore the dark and murky side of the political events that affect the lives of many Indians and attempts to express his views regarding peace and conflict. The novel explores the reasons behind the communal conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims, which triggered riots and sectarian violence. The theme of past prejudices, present retaliation, and resistance hovers throughout the novel. Moreover, Tharoor has touched on the question of partition and the role of British colonialism in dividing India. Thus, this article seeks to examine the impact of past injustices and present retaliation and resistance on the sociocultural relations between the Hindus and the Muslims as represented in the novel and how fanaticism and religious nationalism have dislocated the harmonious coexistence between the Indians.

Keywords: communal conflict, colonialism, partition, ultranationalism, anaticism, riot.

Introduction

Shashi Tharoor is an Indian author, novelist, politician and former international diplomat. He has written several books and novels on various issues concerning violence and conflict in India, particularly the catastrophe of the partition. In *Riot*, Tharoor exhibits a socio-cultural conflict between two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, underlining the plight of the Babri Masjid riot that resulted in the death of many people. He states the thematic intention in his narrative in his book *Bookless in*

Baghdad, pointing out that the exploration of the Hindu-Muslim riot leads him “to raise fundamental questions about the nature of truth, the construction of identity, the invention and reclaiming of the past, the uses of history and the various collisions life offers” (230).

The point that Tharoor tries to make in this novel is that sociocultural conflict (the Hindu-Muslim conflict) can have disastrous repercussions on people. He attempts to convey to a message of peace that any conflict has its negative effects and that violence often leads to destruction. Bhavesh d. Parmar (2013) has stated that “Tharoor examines the reasons of communal tension between Hindus and Muslims through the post-mortem of a fictional riot ... offering in the process a balanced critique of both Hindu cultural nationalism and Muslim fundamentalism” (37). Multiple issues have been addressed in *Riot*. Nevertheless, the focus in *Riot* is on the religious and nationalistic conflict, giving readers a holistic view of the nature and type of conflicts in India to get a better understanding of the present issues and problems.

Communal Conflict in India

India has witnessed cultural and ethnic collisions and many Hindus and Muslims have struggled to protect their socio-cultural and religious identities (Mohammad & Khan 288). Doyel Ghosh (2018) explains that “The characters of Tharoor’s novels are facing problems and striving to achieve their identities as Indians and as individuals in Indian society” (186). Thus, the issue of identity is crucial in India. Two years ago, there were ongoing riots and anti-CAA protests in Delhi, in which many people died and hundreds more injured and detained. Some were wondering why the government and decision-makers introduce allegedly discriminatory citizenship laws though they know in advance that such identity laws will create a violent backlash and bring about a tense protest. It was considered as political-religious nationalism that gives citizenship rights to persecuted religious minorities and refugees of particular religions and particular countries and exempts refugees of other religions (specifically Muslims) and countries from obtaining the same. That is why it was deemed to be anti-Muslim and many people from different faiths, even Hindus, started to protest against CAA, arguing that such law is against the secular tenets of India.

Bhuban Chandra Talukdar (2013) discusses the nature of conflict and relates it to the notion of identity. To him, conflicting identities and interests of religious and

cultural communities in India have often led to the eruption of violent clashes and even riots that have marred her image of a secular democracy. He points out:

Much of the conflicts at different levels and of varying magnitude, that have torn contemporary society apart and emerged almost as a constant contemporary social reality across the nations, have their roots in the claims or clamours for exclusivity made by different religious or cultural groups. (172-3)

Tharoor explores the reasons of communal tension between the Hindus and the Muslims. He engages with this palpable tension with much insight, offering in the process a balanced critique of both Hindu cultural nationalism and Muslim fundamentalism and a convincing account of the role of the administration in controlling riots (Parmar 37).

Taking into account such riots, Tharoor refers to many issues associated with nationalism, particularly religious nationalism, which is a Hindu phenomenon (43). This phenomenon of nationhood is a man-made phenomenon, based on a “one-nation and one-culture agenda” (Froerer 17). Moreover, as India is a multi-religious and multicultural country, the issue of ethnic identity becomes controversial. The rise of nationalist movements has brought about several ethnic conflicts. Peggy Froerer (2007) sheds light on the militant Hindu nationalism. He states that since late 1980, the Hindu nationalist movement “has been one of the most pervasive and divisive political forces that have spread across Indian society” (2). Moreover, the Hindu nationalist ideology is based on the principle of protecting the Hindu nation against conversion to any religion. The Sangh Parivar’s campaigns led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and resulted in widespread violence across India (Froerer 8). However, freedom of religion in India is guaranteed under article 25 of the constitution of India. Justice H. Suresh (2005) points out that “Freedom of religion and prohibition of conversion are a contradiction in terms. If freedom of religion includes freedom of conscience and belief, there cannot be any restraint on conversion” (5).

Prejudice, Retaliation, and Resistance in *Riot*

Communal, ethnic, and cultural conflicts are some key aspects of conflict depicted in Tharoor’s *Riot*. The sectarian violence between the Hindus and the Muslims because of religious fanaticism and nationalism is dealt with in this novel. The issues associated with different types of conflicts such as injustices of previous eras, revenge, rioting, and partition are addressed as well.

In *Riot*, Tharoor traces the communal conflict between conflicting factions. He touches on the complex issue of the Babri Masjid riot that resulted in the death of many people. Amongst the Hindus and the Muslims was also found dead an American citizen, Priscilla Hart, who had come to India on a population control project. The violence took place when the enthusiastic Hindus determined to reconstruct the Ram Janmbhoomi in Ayodhya on a disputed site occupied by a deserted sixteen-century mosque, the Babri Masjid. Such a decision brought about tensions among the Muslims. The confrontation between the Hindu devotees and enraged Muslims led to a far-reaching riot. The Hindus claimed that the Mughal Emperor Babar destroyed Ram Janmabhoomi Temple and had constructed a mosque on its debris. The Muslims, on the other hand, denied this claim. However, the Hindu hotheads succeeded in organising a procession with red bricks and decided to demolish the Babri Masjid. This had led to violent conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims, particularly when the Hindu zealots determined that "the procession would wind its way past the town's Muslim quarters, where the resistance to Ram Janmabhoomi agitation was high" (Tharoor 5).

Tharoor, therefore, highlights the reasons for the riot. The first reason is the determination of the fanatics to demolish Babri Masjid and reconstruct the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in its place. He introduces the character of Ram Charan Gupta, a Hindu extremist, as a mouthpiece of Hindu fundamentalists. Gupta gives justifications for the demolition of the Babri Masjid. In contrast, Tharoor introduces the character of Mohammed Sarwar, a Muslim historian and secularist, as a representative of the Muslim minority as well as a model of culture of peace. Sarwar rejects the claims and justifications given by Gupta. Priscilla Harts, the American woman who was murdered in the riot, says that Lakshman, the District Magistrate, has told her about the Hindu-Muslim issue:

There's a lot of tension in these parts over something called the Ram Janmabhoomi, a temple that some Hindus say was destroyed by the Mughal emperor Babar in 1526. Babar ... replaced it with a mosque, apparently and these Hindus want to reverse history and put the temple back where the mosque now stands. Though Lakshman tells me there is no proof there ever was a temple there. (Tharoor 21-2)

In this regard, Tharoor touches on the long and unresolved issue of the Babri Masjid and the aftermath convulsions of its demolition. To him, the Hindu-Muslim question for which the whole community is responsible has become a controversial issue

that needs to be settled. By presenting voices from both the Hindu and the Muslim communities, Tharoor attempts to demonstrate how history is misled by personal favours (Jeyapushpa 78). Lakshman, in the quote above, states that there is no evidence of the existence of the temple and, yet, the Hindu devotees insisted to demolish Babri Masjid and reconstruct the Ram Janmabhoomi in its place. Gupta narrates the main cause of the violent conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims. He tells Randy Diggs, the American journalist associated with the investigation of Priscilla's death, about the Muslim king, the Mughal emperor Babar, who was accused of destroying the temple and building a mosque on its wrecks. He says:

Can you imagine? A mosque on our holiest site! Muslims praying to Mecca on this very spot where our divine Lord Ram was born! Naturally, our community was very much hurt by this. Is that so surprising? Would Muslims be happy if some Hindu king had gone and built a temple to Ram in Mecca? (Tharoor 52)

In the passage above, the main cause of Hindu-Muslim tension is revealed. It is the old revenge of the past when the Mughal invaded India. It shows the inability of the fundamentalists to forget the prejudices of the previous eras. They endeavour to evoke the memory of the past, awaken sleeping sedition, revive a recurring dream and retrieve an allegedly lost honour and calling for retaliation. Tharoor uses the term 'Hindu fundamentalism' in describing Hindu-Muslim violence as well as the fanatic forces of Hindu revivalism (229). Furthermore, he refers to the idea of religious strife and the resurgent pride of Indians in their own land, their own culture and their own history (230).

Hence, the partisans are searching for any thread to justify their plot and they have found that thread in the following lines: "Then a miracle occurred. Some devotees found that an idol of Ram had emerged spontaneously in the courtyard of the mosque. It was a clear sign from God. His temple had to be rebuilt on that sacred spot" (Tharoor 53). So, for Ram Gupta, the temple will be rebuilt to end the injustice. Moreover, he talks about the noble cause or as he describes it as "The holy purpose" that is eventually to be achieved after centuries of helplessness. He says, "we were about to right a great wrong ... And the bricks! They were perfect. Red like the blood we would so gladly have spilled for our Lord" (Tharoor 54).

Gupta declares that they have found the proof of their claim and he describes it as a miracle. The idol of Lord Ram is found in the courtyard of the Babri Masjid. The Hindu zealots consider it an indication from God to reconstruct his temple. So, they

organise a massive march with red bricks. They are eager to implement the long awaiting wish by ending the injustice and righting the great wrong. Hence, they are ready to do anything just to satisfy their whims in the name of holiness. To Gupta, “the Ram Janmabhoomi is not the only temple that was demolished by these marauding invaders and replaced with their filthy mosques” (Tharoor 121). This shows the excuses given by the fanatics to demolish Babri Masjid. The attempt to retaliate owing to past injustices or prejudices is utterly unjustifiable since the current generations do not bear the wrongdoings of their ancestors or as Gupta has described them ‘the invaders.’ The message of peace here is that what happened in the past should remain in the past and any attempt to revive past events would definitely lead to conflict.

Nevertheless, the hotheads make red bricks and announce that they will be happy to sacrifice themselves for their Lord. Ram Gupta declares that “The Ram Janmabhoomi will be built. No matter how many lives have to be sacrificed to ensure it. Our blood will irrigate the dusty soil, our sweat will mix the cement instead of water, but we will build the temple” (Tharoor 124). So, it is undoubtedly evident that the devotees will shed blood to build the temple even if this will cause mass killing and that it is not out of religiosity but out of thrust for victory over an old enemy, whom they call the intruders. The excerpt above reflects the ideology of the fanatics and how they are going to sacrifice everything to achieve their scheme no matter how many innocents would be killed. The most important thing to them is a victory as if they were still in a war.

However, the militants decide to make the procession go past the town's Muslim quarters. This has led to intense sectarian violence in which hundreds of Indians died. This is the role of the zealots, who try every way to create conflict instead of finding ways to avoid it. The hotheads determine to break into the Muslim quarters just to evoke the Muslim sentiments. Though they know in advance the expected outcome of such provocation, they have gone on fulfilling their whims. Consequently, the consequences were atrocious.

Apart from this, some fanatics like Gupta tend to spread extremist views in the minds of people, giving instances of violent incidents to support their claims. For instance, Gupta instigates Mukhan to take revenge. He says:

The bastard. This is the way that Lakshman treats us, after what the Muslims did to us last night? Mukhan, I am so angry about what has happened to your son Arup ... but don't worry, Mukhan. We will have our revenge on the Muslims and on the Bastard who gives them such free rein. (Tharoor 259)

In the passage above, Tharoor indicates that violence begets more violence and that is the way fanaticism regenerates and persists. It represents the notion of revenge; the wish to exterminate those who are against you or who are supporting them. It shows that retaliation is at the heart of fanaticism. In addition, the passage reveals how extremism has torn our society; how it generates hatred and malice in the heart of people and how it agitates and incites one group against the other without any reason.

So, the problem that complicates any conflict is the attempt to link the present situation to a past incident just to justify a particular movement. For instance, Gupta says to Mr Diggs, “You attack the Hindutva movement as fundamentalist, but you say nothing about the thirteen centuries of Islamic fundamentalism and oppression they are reacting to” (Tharoor 230). Here, it is clear that Gupta describes the Hindutva movement as a reaction to the prejudices of Islamic fundamentalism. He has based this reaction on the assumption that the Muslims think they are modern, sophisticated, cosmopolitan and secular. To him, “They heap contempt on ‘Hindu fanatics’ laugh at our faith and beliefs, sneer at our traditions” (Tharoor 231). Again, the problem of generalisation makes Gupta think that all Muslims are evil and that they make fun of the Hindu devotees and their faith and tradition. While in reality, not all Muslims demean or despise Hindu beliefs. Many Muslims and Hindus are friends and have been living as neighbours for centuries.

On the other hand, Sarwar refutes the claims and justifications provided by the fundamentalists. He states that “There is no evidence of any temple being built to worship Rama anywhere in India before the tenth century A.D” (Tharoor 182). He, moreover, mentions that the problem is that

There is a lot of evidence for the opposite — for the building of a temple in Ayodhya under Muslim rule, well after Babar built his masjid ... it was land that the Muslim nawab provided to a Hindu abbot that led to the construction of the Hanumagarthi, the most important Hindu temple in today’s Ayodhya. (Tharoor 183)

Here, Sarwar indicates that Muslim rulers like Safdar Jang have helped and supported the building of temples. It is a reference to the peaceful coexistence between people of opposite faiths and that Muslim nawab had given land for building the Hanumagarthi temple. So, not all Hindus are fanatics neither are all Muslims. The problem is with some fanatics who are obsessed with the idea of revenge.

In addition, Sarwar explains his viewpoints regarding the riot and its causes. He points out that the bigotry to one’s ideology and the insistence on its credibility brings about a collision with other ideologies, especially when it comes to religiosity. Thus, he

rejects the attempts made by the fanatics to attack any religious minority because of their religion. He states:

Well, the fact is that the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation is profoundly anti-historical. The bigots who spearhead it want to reinvent the past to suit their aspirations for the present. If we allow them to do it now, here, they will turn their attention to something else, and the whole orgy of hate and violence will start again. If they get away with attacking Muslims today, they will hit Christians tomorrow. (Tharoor 183)

He also expresses his attitudes towards the culture of peace. He says:

They are coming for the Muslims now, and I must speak out. But not because I am a Muslim. Only because I am an Indian, and I do not want them to come for any other Indians. No group of Indians must be allowed to attack another group of Indians because of where they come from, or who they worship, or what language they speak. (Tharoor 184)

Tharoor, here, gives a substantial message of peace that calls for unity and solidarity regardless of religion, language or ethnicity. It is the idea of one nation that excludes none, which accepts differences and diversity. It is a request for all Indians to live in harmony and peace, to accept differences and diversity and to resist any divisive debates. That is, India has been a model of a multi-religious, multilingual and multicultural country. It is a call to forget the past and live in the present since often fanaticism is a result of an unforgettable past. Sarwar gives a message of peace, "At other times the words of the old song, learned as a callow teenager, come back to me: "yesterday belongs to someone else, today belongs to us" (Tharoor 106).

Also, Sarwar extends his opinion on the idea of 'composite religiosity,' which indicates mutual respect for each other's religion and ideology. He gives an example of religious figures revered by the Muslims and the Hindus alike such as "Nizamuddin Auliya, Moinuddin Chishti, Shah Madar, Shaikh Nasiruddin" (Tharoor 64). This shows that the Muslims and the Hindus have long enjoyed ideological liberty, which allows them to worship, revere or pay tributes to any religious figure. It is a sign of comprehensive understanding that paves the way for harmonious relationships. That is why Sarwar points out that there is a need to increase the awareness for tolerance among people of opposite faiths. He states:

But it is not enough to hail composite religiosity, to applaud complacently the syncretism of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. Of course, we have to keep reminding people that tolerance is also a tradition in India, that communal crossovers are as

common as communal clashes. But we must not abdicate the field of religious conflict to the chauvinists on both sides. What we need are non-sectarian histories of sectarian strife. (Tharoor 64)

Thus, Tharoor through the character of Mohammed Sarwar could convey messages of peace, tolerance and non-violent culture. Such an approach must be fostered by leaders of conflicting communities to put an end to any sort of animosity. Sectarian clashes may occur from time to time and it is an indication of social activism, but what is important is not to let the fanatics take any part in such activities because this will certainly create chaos and hostility.

In addition, Tharoor introduces Lakshman, the District Magistrate, as a double character, as a Hindu peace model who wants the whole community to live peacefully and as a secularist. Lakshman describes the nature of conflict in India by stating that “there are five major sources of divisions in India –language, region, caste, class and religion” (Tharoor 42). These key sources of divisions have brought about different types of conflicts. Religion is in the heart of the cultural conflict and has been deployed by the extremists as a fertile ground to ignite sedition between people of different faiths or even between those who belong to the same faith. However, Lakshman tries to explain the nature and the cause of conflict. To him, religious fanaticism is the main cause of conflict. He describes religion as a great source of division (43). He explains that religion also is responsible for communalism and that “the sense of religious chauvinism that transforms itself into bigotry, and sometimes, violence against the followers of the faiths” (Tharoor 44)

On the other hand, what makes the tension even worse is the use of hate language. Tharoor presents Lakshman as a commentator on the events. Lakshman has endeavoured every possible way to prevent and control the riot. He explains the causes of communal clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims. To him, “The issues are mostly locals, such as attacks on religious processions, desecration of shrines, illicit relationships between men and women of different communities, and so on” (Tharoor 74). But apart from these causes, he has added the “belligerent processions and slogans of hate” are responsible for the communal hatred (Tharoor 76). Here, Tharoor provides another aspect of the conflict. It is the use of hate speech. He gives some instances of using hate language that brings about conflict. Very often, the use of offensive language against a specific class, caste or religious figures provokes hatred and malice towards them and vice versa. Thus, it becomes reciprocal hate, since the hostility created by hate

speech will lead to violent clashes between raging communities. Additionally, almost all rallies contain enthusiastic speeches to gather as much support as possible. However, in many cases, such pacifist processions turn into aggressive movements mostly by fanatical leaders. There are far-reaching violence and killing because of anti-Muslim slogans of hate by the zealots. Lakshman says, "It was clear from the language their fanatical leaders were using that there would be an all-out and, if necessary, violent battle to accomplish their goal" (Tharoor 71). The slogans against the Muslims were horrible and indicative of wrath and Lakshman describes them as "Slogans which were horrible in their virulence, their crudeness, their naked aggression. The Muslims huddled in their ghettos, watched with disbelief and horror, which turned quickly to cold terror and sullen anger" (Tharoor 71-2).

Lakshman expresses his sorrow over the sectarian violence. As a Hindu secularist, he is disappointed to see such bloody conflict between two communities that have long lived in harmony. He describes India as socially hypersensitive. Thus, any use of abusive language will certainly trigger chaos. This viewpoint is absolutely accurate since any trivial problem may turn into a wide-ranging conflict. There are many incidents in which a quarrel between two persons over a small problem or owing to offensive words has turned into a communal collision. The hotheads in such a situation will seize the opportunity to create turmoil, involve as many people as possible and that is how riots are developed. Gurinder Singh says, "we knew how words could inflame passions ... Hundreds of young Hindu men would gather in the Muslim parts of town and shout slogans, abusing Muslims, taunting them, and goading them" (Tharoor 128). So, this reveals that fanatics usually resort to hate speech just to provoke a reaction. Thus, Gurinder declares "don't look for rational thinking in communal riots, Randy" (Tharoor 133). Hence, the novel reveals that the extremists have plans to create conflict, but they do not have the "rational thinking" to manage it or to stop it. Once a riot occurs, it becomes out of control and there are many incidents of killing and bombings. Hotheads from both communities will deploy all possible means of attacks in the riot.

Tharoor underlines the significance of peace initiatives to create networks between the two communities using 'peace committees' to build bridges between leaders of the two religious groups to resolve disputes. The role of these committees is to settle the issue of past prejudices and injustices and prevent retaliation. Also, the role of these peace committees is to bring together leaders of both communities, to work together, sort out their problems and stop communal hatred (76). All these techniques have been

utilised to lessen the tension between the agitated communities using peace dialogues. The problem is that the fundamentalists have refuted any rapprochement and have insisted to go on fulfilling their plan.

Moreover, Lakshman has tried everything to defend the minorities. He is against the use of violence which is unnecessary. Tharoor reveals that Lakshman has tried a variety of approaches to stop any violent clash between the two communities. Nevertheless, Lakshman expresses his opinion of Hinduism, stating that he has nothing to do with Hindu fundamentalists. To him, “it is a bit odd to speak of Hindu fundamentalism because Hinduism is a religion without fundamentals: no organised church, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, no single sacred book” (Tharoor 143). Hence, Lakshman gives a message of peace to all those fundamentalists who are creating sedition, indicating that Hinduism has no fundamentals and, thus, it has nothing to do with fundamentalists. He criticises the role of Hindu fanatics in agitating Muslims. He says:

How can such a religion lend itself to “fundamentalism?” That devotees of this essentially tolerant faith want to desecrate a shrine that they are going around assaulting Muslims for its name, is to me a source of shame and sorrow ... Muslim invaders may indeed have destroyed Hindu temples, putting mosques in their place, but this did not_ could not_ destroy the Indian dream. Nor did Hinduism suffer a fatal blow ... that faith is a matter of hearts and minds, not bricks and stone “build Ram in your heart” ... Why should today’s Muslims have to pay a price for what Muslims may have done four hundred and fifty years ago? It is just politics, Priscilla ... Hindu chauvinism ... And so, these fanatics in Zailgarh want to tear down Babri masjid and construct Ram Janmabhoomi temple in its place ... If the Muslims of the 1520s acted out of ignorance and fanaticism, should Hindus act the same way in the 1980s? (Tharoor 144-6)

The passage above is an appeal to those bigots who endeavour to make a peaceful society aflame by spreading their extremist views and thoughts. At the same time, it is a request for conflicting parties to end any sort of animosity between them. To him, such behaviour is an assault on the political values and secular tenets of India. He states, “They proclaimed their secularism but did nothing to maintain it” (Tharoor72). So, the matter here is that the secularisation of religion in India means religious pluralism rather than religious absence (Kavidha & Sakthive 57). Also, it is an invitation to forget the prejudices of the past and to start a new reign as one community or more precisely as

one nation, which cherishes multiculturalism and secularism. Therefore, the quote above is at the heart of the novel's peace message.

Besides, Tharoor highlights the religiously inspired nationalist movements and the repercussions that took place throughout India. He, furthermore, points out that the two-nation theory, which divided India, has led to more conflicts rather than stability. So, dividing the nation on the basis of religion has destroyed the country's diversity and peaceful coexistence. Religious nationalism can be defined as creating national identities on the basis of religion. It is an integration between nationalism and religious ideology. This integration has affected the secular tenets of India and, more noticeably, the state's politics such as the politicisation of religion and the influence of religion on politics.

Nonetheless, religious politics is often subject to majoritarian nationalism, which seeks to redefine the basis of national identity in a manner that excludes or marginalises religious minorities. Therefore, Tharoor gives a message of peace through Lakshman who declares that democracy is the best resolution for all Indians. He says to Mr Diggs:

Let everyone feel they are as much Indian as everyone else. That is the secret. Ensure that democracy protects the multiple identities of Indians, that you can be a good Muslim and a good Bihari and a good Indian all at once ... Democracy will solve the problem we are having with some disaffected Sikhs in Punjab, and democracy, more of it, is the only answer for the frustrations of Indian's Muslims too. But who, in all of this, allowed for militant Hinduism to arise, challenging the very basis of Indianness I have just described to you? (44-45)

In this passage, democracy is presented as the only way to ensure diversity and multiple identities of all Indians regardless of their caste, class, religion, language or ethnicity. Furthermore, it is condemnation for using military forces to persecute a specific sect or ethnicity. Extreme nationalism legalises the use of force to suppress people. That is why he points out that "Skulls have been broken over each of these issues" (Tharoor 44), i.e., religion, caste and language (ethnicity). According to Thomas Menamparampil (2014):

Struggles in the name of culture, ethnicity, minority status, gender, colour, go even to the point of violence ... those who feel that they are unjustly treated take to violence in response. There are also enough people to foster anger against every perceived injustice. (6)

Concerning religious nationalism, Anna Grzymala-Busse (2019) discusses the issue of religious nationalism and its impact on nation-state and nation-building. She also points out that current politics are influenced by religion. To her, “Yet religious nationalism is also powerful: it has shaped the very definition of legitimate citizenship, delineating the nation and privileging some political actors and visions in making public policy, obtaining electoral support, and building states” (1). She also argues:

Religious nationalism, or the fusion of religious and national identities and goals, is an increasingly salient aspect of nationalism. Rather than secular nationalism simply replacing religious identities and allegiances, religious and national identities coexist and even reinforce each other. Such religious nationalism becomes a powerful force in buttressing popular religiosity and attitudes, empowers religious organisations in influencing policy across a wide range of domains, and shapes the patterns of inter- and intra-state violence. (1)

In *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Peter Van der Veer writes:

The temple-mosque controversy in Ayodhya has thus become a symbolic focus of Hindu and Muslim identities within the Indian nation-state. Hindu nationalism demands that the state be the instrument of the political will of its Hindu majority, and its choice of actions gives Muslims a justified feeling of being an endangered minority. It does not seem exceptional that it is the control over religious centres as material embodiments of beliefs and practices that is so crucial in religious nationalism. (10-11)

So, Tharoor, through the character of Mohammed Sarwar, gives a brief explanation about the rise of nationalism and how the jingoists resort to the grievances of the past to support their nationalistic zeal. He says:

The whole point is that historians like myself, who haven't sold our souls to either side in this wretched ongoing communal argument, have a duty to dig into the myths that divide and unite our people. The Hindutva brigade is busy trying to invent a new past for the nation, fabricating historical wrongs they want to right, degrading up “evidence” of Muslim malfeasance and misappropriation of national glory. They are making us into large-scale Pakistan; they are vindicating the two-nation theory. (Tharoor 67)

The quote above is a message of peace by Sarwar to learn from the lessons of the past and not to deploy them to disturb the present. He states that the bigots are asserting the two-nation theory that divided India. They are unable to forget the past,

unable to build the present. Similarly, Tharoor gives a message of peace through Gurinder's father, when he declares that the real duty of all Indians is to build a country for all based on tolerance and acceptance of each other; a country that treats everybody equally:

Since the days of Gandhi, we have tried to build a country that is everyone's and no one's, a country that excludes nobody, a country that no one group can claim is exclusively theirs ... the whole point about India is that this is a country for everybody, and everybody has the duty, the obligation, to work and keep it that way. To fight to keep it that way. (197)

In the case of inter-and intra-state violence, Tharoor highlights the issue of partition and the problems and disasters that have resulted from the partition. The novel, moreover, explores how religious and nationalist extremism has led to the partition of India. There have been lots of violent conflicts after the partition, particularly along the borderlines. It is indicated that the British promoted divisions between the Hindus and the Muslims and that the nationalist movement tried to involve everybody but the Muslim league broke away and called for a state of Pakistan. This led to the partition in 1947. So, since the partition, religious nationalism has increased and the tension between the Hindus and the Muslims has been escalating and intensifying. Howard Ryan (2002) points out:

Although the ensuing conflict between Hindu and Muslim leaders was essentially a power struggle between competing branches of the Indian elite, it often affected communal feelings in the country generally, and it eventually brought calamitous results in terms of the partition of India. (81)

So, the nationalist movements and processions have brought about disparity and collisions between various ethnic minorities. The bigots tend to enthusiastic slogans and mottos to provoke one group against the other. Priscilla states points out that "12% of India's eight hundred million people are Muslim, against 82% who are Hindu" (Tharoor 21).

Thus, the Muslims are a minority compared to the Hindus, who form the majority of the Indian population. However, any communal conflict will be followed by an ethnic conflict and in any ethnic conflict, the persecuted minority will be the first prey. This also will cause lots of disputes over identity and the sense of belonging. Gupta points out that "Tensions were high, we said our Ram Sila poojan program had awakened the fears of the minority community. They are afraid, anxious, easy prey for extremists and

hotheads ... a small spark could ignite a conflagration. Did we want that?" (Tharoor 61). Here, Tharoor describes the situation of the minorities at the time of sectarian violence. They are helpless and afraid as they know nobody will help them from the attacks of the hardliners. Lakshman reveals his views on Hinduism and communalism. He uses the word 'chauvinism' instead of fanaticism as if he alludes to religious nationalism. The problem is that when the nationalist talks in the name of religion. Gupta accused the courts of being atheists and communists in power and that they had lost their roots. He says, "They said no, neither Hindus nor Muslims could worship there. Do we Hindus have no rights in our own country" (Tharoor 53)? Here, Gupta accuses those in power or decision-makers as atheists and communists just because they propose a resolution over the disputed site of Babri masjid, claiming that the decision-makers have denied their ancestor and showed "a predilection to minorities" (106).

However, after the riot, the Muslims had felt as if they were a threatened minority. The ultra-nationalists started attacking the Muslims, and the riot police faced many difficulties to control the rioting mobs. Thus, Paras Dhir (2009) discusses another aspect of conflict; it is the Muslim struggle for their identity and existence in India. He indicates that "it is about the majority community, the Hindus, trying to establish and reinforce their identity and the minority community, the Muslims, maintaining theirs" (38). Similarly, Ambreen Safder Kharbe (2016) has dealt with this aspect of the conflict. She opines that the issue of communalism has been somewhat religious, cultural, and political and it is proved to form a social threat resulting in increasing tensions and hatred movements. To her, 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. She explains that "The Mandir-Masjid issue triggered 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" (117).

Moreover, the role of nationalistic ideology and policy in creating enemies or considering the 'other' as the absolute opponent has caused animosity and segregation. It is the jingoistic ideology of demonising the other. For example, Gupta says:

But these Muslims are evil people. They are more loyal to a foreign religion, Islam, than to India. They are all converts from the Hindu faith of their ancestors, but they refuse to acknowledge this, pretending instead that they are all descended from conquerors from Arabia 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. (Tharoor 54)

This is a reference to the notion of homeland and the concept of nativism, which state that every ethnic group with different religion, language or culture should go back to their country of origin, say for example the Indians from Arab origins must return to their countries and the Indians from Persian origins have to return to Persia and so on. Gupta indicates that this ideology is described by the Americans as 'the Ghetto mentality' (Tharoor 55). This jingoistic mentality promotes the principle of dividing the Indians based on their religion, ethnic roots and language. This ideology has caused the partition because every faction or party is extremely zealot about their national identity. Besides, every sect accusing each other as responsible for partition. For example, Ram Gupta accuses the Muslims of dividing India. He says, "Now these Muslims have already divided our country once, to create their accursed Pakistan on the sacred soil of our civilization. Some of the greatest sites of Hindu civilisation ... are all now in a foreign country" (Tharoor 55).

Therefore, Sarwar argues that nationalism divides the Indians instead of uniting them under one united nation. He says, "What leads some of my fellow Muslims into a sort of self-inflicted second-class citizenship, a result of our guilt by association with the original sin of Partition" (Tharoor 110). Hence, the ultranationalists argue that "if don't like it here in India," say the crassest of the Hindu bigots, "why don't you go to Pakistan?" to them, the homeland of Indian Muslims is really a foreign country called Pakistan (Tharoor 110). Here, the concept of nativism is promoted. This is because of the other issue of Kashmir. In addition to the division of India, Ram Gupta alludes to the issue of Kashmir and how the Hindus are deprived of buying lands in Kashmir though it is India's administered region. He states, "Do you know a Hindu from anywhere else in the country cannot buy a piece of land in Kashmir?" (Tharoor 55). This shows that the division of India was religious.

It is worth noting that the ultra-nationalists assume that the population of other minorities is increasing and this drastic growth forms a threat to the national identity. Ram Gupta points out, "And worst of all, these Muslims are outbreeding the Hindus. They claim the right to four wives, and they keep them constantly pregnant" (Tharoor 55). He also adds, "It will not be long before they produce enough Muslims to outnumber us Hindus in our country ... That is the grave danger we are facing" (Tharoor 56). Here, Gupta talks about the threat that endangers Hindu nationalism– the increasing

population of Indian Muslims. To him, if the Muslims become the majority, they will form a threat to Hindu nationalism. This reflects the mentality of the hardliners, which is based on would-be assumptions and threats. Denying the other, thinking of the other as an enemy or as a rival who will threaten the national security, though this 'other' has the same national identity and is proud of his / her homeland, are some examples of such baseless assumptions. Christophe Jaffrelot (2009) states:

Indeed, Hindu nationalism crystallised as an ideology and as a movement exactly at the time when the Congress became imbued with Gandhi's principles and grew into a mass movement ... This ideology assumed that India's national identity was summarised by Hinduism, the dominant creed which, according to the British census, represented about 70 per cent of the population. (3-5)

On the other hand, Tharoor provides a culture of peace approach by giving a plethora of instances concerning the Muslim sense of belonging and homeland and how they too have resisted Jinnah's two-nation theory. He also mentions that many Muslims are against the partition. He introduces the example of Maulana Azad, who was a religious scholar. Sarwar points out that Maulana Azad strived a lot to resist Jinnah's scheme to divide India. He says, "Jinnah claimed to speak for India's Muslims, asserting their claims of being a separate nation, while the Maulana worked in the secular (Jinnah said Hindu-dominated) Indian National Congress to remind his fellow Muslims where their homeland really was" (Tharoor 107).

Tharoor, through Sarwar, argues that Azad was "a far more authentic representative of Indian Islam than Jinnah, and it is part of the great tragedy of this country's Muslims that it was Jinnah who triumphed and not Azad (109). Again, Tharoor introduces Sarwar and Lakshmana as two Indian secularists, who believe in united India. Sarwar says, "There is no greater testament of the faith of a religious Muslim in a united India ... every fibre of my being revolted against the thought of dividing India on communal lines" (Tharoor 107). This proves that not all Indian Muslims want to be part of a new country and that there have been Muslim scholars like Azad who resisted Jinnah's plan. The problem remains in the generalisation of the Hindu nationalists and hardliners for accusing all the Muslims of dividing India (Tharoor 111). This generalisation creates hatred towards Indian Muslims even towards those who are against the partition. Sarwar declares:

I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of that indivisible unity that is Indian nationality ... this is the key part ... I am indispensable to this noble edifice. Without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete... You can understand why some Indian Muslims are more viscerally anti-Pakistan than many Hindus, especially North Indian Hindus with their romanticised nostalgia for the good days before Partition. Indian Muslims know what they lost, what burdens they have to bear as the result of the Jinnah defection, the conversion of brothers into foreigners. (Tharoor 108-9)

This passage represents the real sense of belonging of most Indian Muslims and how they are proud of being Indian. It, further, shows that a nation is not only religion and language or caste, race and ethnicity, but it is all of that. Thus, it includes all people and their faiths, cultures and history.

Sarwar also describes the disappointment of many Indian Muslims after the partition. He says, "Pakistanis will never understand the depth of the disservice Jinnah did us, Indian Muslims as a whole, when he made some of us into non-Indians" (Tharoor 111). He also reveals the impact of partition on the national sense of belonging and nationhood. He says, "The national mind has been afflicted with the intellectual cancer of thinking of 'us' and 'them'" (Tharoor 114). Moreover, Sarwar tells Mr Diggs the nature of the conflict in India and that it may appear as a conflict between minority and majority whereas it is not like that. He expresses the need to resist the concept of a minority. He states:

But I am determined to resist this minority complex that the Hindu chauvinists want to impose upon me and others like me. What makes me a minority? ... Brahmins are only ten per cent of the population of India today_ do they see themselves a minority? (Tharoor 114-5)

Similarly, Sarwar highlights the problem that endangers the Indian nation, especially with the wide-scale public discourse about Indianness. The anxieties, the non-belongingness to the country and the troubles of Indian Muslims are explored in the arguments of Mohammed Sarwar (Waghela 110). He points out that bigots like Gupta and his fellow jingoists form a menace to national security. He says:

The danger that Hindus like Ram Charan Gupta will get Muslims like me think 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. (Tharoor 115-6)

Here, Tharoor gives the core of the long-debated issue of nationhood — the national identity for all Indians. No Indian will be deprived of his/her rights or citizenship, no Indian will be marginalised, no Indian will be discriminated against and no Indian will be excluded from participating in political, cultural or religious activism. All Indians are equal in front of the law. This is the core of peaceful coexistence and a cosmopolitan country. Such a culture of peace will ensure equity as well as equality for all people no matter the religion they follow, no matter the language they speak and no matter their caste or ethnic root is. He also adds:

You and your tribe will write of attacks on minorities in India, especially Christians, but you will not mention that minorities_ Jews, Parsis, Christians, and even Muslims_ have found refuge in this country for two thousand years and have been allowed to practice their own faith without hindrance by Hindu rules. (Tharoor 229)

This is also a message of peace to the ultranationalists that India has been a model for the culture of peace and has been home for refugees from various ideological backgrounds and diverse ethnicities. They used to seek refuge in India and are allowed to practice their religion without any restrictions. So, what happened? Why do the ultranationalists want to create disparity and divide the people on the basis of their identity, religion or language? Sarwar answers this when he declares that the zealots consider themselves in a competition of national identities and they want to take revenge from the invaders. He points out that ultranationalists, like Gupta, are “speaking of Hinduism as a label of identity, not a set of humane beliefs” (Tharoor 147). He, adds:

The rage of the Hindu mobs being stoked by the bigots is the rage of those who feel themselves supplanted in this competition of identities, who think that they are taking their country back from usurpers of long ago. They want revenge against history, but they do not realise that history is its own revenge. (Tharoor 147)

So, from the passages and quotes discussed above, it becomes vivid that nationalism as an ideology does not seek to strengthen the sense of belonging and homeland. But it turns into ultra-nationalism or religious nationalism. It is believed that people tend to distinguish themselves accordingly and become more sensitive regarding who has the right of acquiring a national identity and official citizenship. This categorisation of identity on the basis of religion or language or ethnicity has caused many ethnic conflicts. Besides, the growing zealotry of nationalists makes them act

violently towards minorities, more noticeably if these minorities are of different ideologies. Furthermore, jingoism considers some ethnic groups as invaders or foreigners who should be expelled. This act leads to distress migration and those who once have recognised identity are rendered stateless. This, too, had made such marginalised minorities struggle for recognition and peaceful coexistence. Ben Fowkes (2002) notes that “The outbreak of large-scale ethnic conflicts in the 1990s is a temporary setback to the processes of homogenisation and integration which have been taking place ever since different peoples came into contact with each other” (viii).

Apart from this, Tharoor indicates the repression that most of the Hindus experienced as a result of the successive ruling of the Mughals and then of the British. Lakshman says, “I guess we are repressed after centuries of Muslim rule followed by the bloody Victorian. And of course, there is a lot of hypocrisy involved” (Tharoor 83). Similarly, Gupta tells Mr Diggs, “You see Mr Diggs, it was very simple. Hindu temples were destroyed and replaced by mosques quite deliberately, as a part of a conscious imperial strategy by the Muslim rulers to demoralise the local population and humiliate them” (Tharoor 123). Here, Gupta describes the Muslim rule as an imperial policy.

However, one of the major outcomes of British colonialism is the partition of India. The partition of India is the most tragic result of British colonialism. The Indians still suffer from this devastating consequence of division and the problem is that each party or sect accuses the other as responsible for the partition. Gurinder's father says that the British are responsible for the partition, “Thirty-seven years earlier, he had lost everything in the massacres of the partition: his home, his ancestral lands in what had become, by the scratching of a careless British pen, the foreign country of Pakistan” (Tharoor 197). Here, it is indicated that the partition was planned by the imperial map-maker, the British judge, Cyril Radcliffe, who carried out the task of drawing the borders. So, after about two centuries of imperial rule in India, the reformation of two nation-states was declared. Thus, “Independence and Partition were mutually entwined” (Khan 2-3).

But to Gupta, the Muslims are responsible for the partition. Devendra Panigrahi (2004) has argued that Jinnah worked as a collaborator of British imperialism (153). He states, ‘In the name of God and the nation, he would not refuse to be an ally of imperialism if it helped the Muslim cause or suited his leadership’ (Panigrahi 121). That is why Gupta contradicts with himself and declares that the British had divided India and accused the Indians of dividing their country.

However, Tharoor implies that the absence of strict policies and law makes it possible for some hardliners, most of them uneducated, to create turmoil by triggering the mass to foster, on behalf of them, opposite movements characterised by new notions of ultra-nationalism and extremism. Therefore, ultra-nationalism has become a hegemonic ideology to achieve socio-cultural and socio-political agendas.

Conclusion

Riot is about communal violence and partition. It traces the riot that took place between two conflicting communities, the Muslims and the Hindus. Tharoor touches on the ethnic conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims and how fanaticism and nationalism have divided India in the name of religion and nationhood. This article has dealt with the aspects of conflict in India as reflected in Tharoor's *Riot*. It showed that fanaticism and religious nationalism had brought about different types of conflicts associated with revenge culture, partition and communal violence. Also, the article shows that the use of hate speech had inflamed different types of conflicts. Besides, discrimination on the basis of religion or language or ethnicity caused many ethnic conflicts.

Tharoor has highlighted the nature of conflict and created a conspicuous picture of the factors behind different types of conflict. Factors such as religious fanaticism, ultra-nationalism, and colonialism are addressed in the novel from different points of view. Each of the characters in the novel represents an aspect of conflict or resistance or a representative of a specific culture or attitude. Tharoor depicts the diversity of Indian society: its cultures, problems, and challenges. He presents several problems from the reality in India and implies several messages of peace. Of course, there are caste, class, ethnic, and cultural conflicts in India. Yet, the novel underlines the problem of past injustices and contemporary retaliation and resistance that has disturbed the peaceful and harmonious coexistence between divergent communities in India.

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