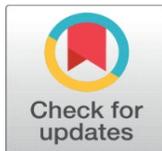
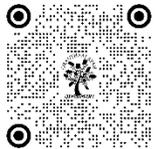


# MYTH AND POLITICS OF NATIONALISM: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL BY SHASHI THAROOR

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides a postcolonial reading of Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, exploring the complex relationship between myth and nationalism within the context of Indian history and politics. Tharoor reinterprets the Mahabharata as an allegorical narrative that mirrors the political struggles and contradictions of postcolonial India. Through a satirical and intertextual narrative, Tharoor exposes the absurdities of Indian democracy, leadership, and the persistence of colonial legacies in modern governance. By reinterpreting the Mahabharata as an allegory for modern Indian political history, he subverts traditional nationalist narratives, critiquing the flaws and contradictions in India's journey from colonial rule to independence and beyond. It highlights the novel's intertextuality, satire, and humor as postcolonial strategies that challenge colonial and neo-colonial legacies while exposing the hypocrisies of Indian democracy and leadership. Tharoor's characters as political archetypes, representing key figures and events in India's history. His depiction of Gandhi as Gangaji, humorously critiques the saintly image associated with him while questioning the human flaws underlying his leadership. The *Great Indian Novel* enriches postcolonial studies by merging myth with political critique, its dense intertextuality may challenge readers unfamiliar with Indian epics or political history.

**Keywords:** Postcolonialism, Myth, Nationalism, Indian Politics, Satire, Intertextuality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Myth and nationalism form a compelling narrative through which historical and political ideologies can be critically examined. Myths, often rooted in cultural traditions and collective memories, as powerful tools in shaping societal values and identities. In literature, they are reimagined to reflect contemporary concerns, making them a dynamic medium for political commentary. Nationalism, historically understood as a movement advocating for the sovereignty of a people or nation, often intertwines with myth to legitimize its claims. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" underscores how nations are socially constructed, drawing upon shared myths and histories (Anderson 6). Postcolonial theory, as articulated by scholars like Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, further enriches this discourse by critiquing how colonial legacies influence national identities and cultural narratives. In this context, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* emerges as a seminal postcolonial text that satirically reinterprets the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, to

critique the politics of nationalism in modern India. Tharoor's use of humor, irony, and myth deconstructs historical events and figures, exposing the fissures within India's postcolonial identity. As Vijay Mishra notes, Tharoor's work exemplifies "the postmodernist play with history and myth" (Mishra 134). This introduction sets the stage for an exploration of how myth and nationalism intersect in Tharoor's narrative, inviting a deeper understanding of the politics underpinning the Indian nation-state. Tharoor critiques the mythologization of political leaders by equating them with epic heroes, asserting that "our politicians love to be seen as inheritors of the mythical past, but they fall short of its virtues" (The Great Indian Novel 48). As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, Tharoor's portrayal "questions the seamless transition of ancient ideals into modern politics" (Mukherjee 23). In reinterpreting the Mahabharata, Tharoor writes, "History is written by victors, but mythology belongs to all who believe" (The Great Indian Novel 72). This sentiment aligns with Robert Young's view that postcolonial literature often seeks to "reclaim suppressed histories" (Young 98). The character Gangaji, modeled after Gandhi, is described as a "pragmatic idealist whose mythical stature often eclipsed his flaws" (The Great Indian Novel 121). Partha Chatterjee notes that such representations critique "the contradictions within nationalist ideology" (Chatterjee 215). Tharoor satirizes the use of myth in political rhetoric, stating, "The gods of the past have become the slogans of the present" (The Great Indian Novel 157). This echoes Salman Rushdie's observation that "myth as a double-edged sword in the postcolonial struggle" (Rushdie 14). Reflecting on the fragmentation of national unity, Tharoor writes, "The war was not just between cousins but within the soul of a divided nation" (The Great Indian Novel 234). Homi Bhabha's theory of "cultural hybridity" is pertinent here, as it highlights the contested nature of national identities (Bhabha 221).

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a satirical masterpiece that reimagines the Indian epic Mahabharata in the context of modern Indian history, particularly the events leading up to and following the country's independence. The novel creatively intertwines myth with historical and political realities, offering a biting critique of nationalism, leadership, and the nation-state. Tharoor presents a parallel between the Pandavas and Kauravas of the Mahabharata and the figures in India's struggle for freedom and post-independence politics. For instance, Gangaji, a character based on Mahatma Gandhi, embodies the moral ambiguities of leadership. The story spans colonial rule, the partition of India, and the Nehruvian era, using allegory to explore themes of power, betrayal, and identity. This imaginative narrative positions *The Great Indian Novel* as a seminal work in Indian literature, engaging with postcolonial themes and redefining the epic tradition. The novel represents a significant contribution to the postcolonial literary tradition. Indian English literature has often grappled with questions of identity and history, as seen in the works of Salman Rushdie and R.K. Narayan. Tharoor's work stands out for its audacious humor and deep engagement with the political discourse of India. According to G.J.V. Prasad, Tharoor "deconstructs both the epic and the historical narrative, questioning the legitimacy of inherited myths in the formation of nationalism" (Prasad 54). This dual engagement with myth and history places *The Great Indian Novel* within a broader tradition of postcolonial critique. The narrative style and structure of the novel are equally innovative. Tharoor explains a multi-layered narrative, combining the episodic nature of the Mahabharata with a modern political allegory. The first-person narration by Ved Vyas, a character modeled after the mythical sage Vyasa, creates a bridge between the ancient and the contemporary. Tharoor's use of parody, irony, and intertextual references lends the novel a distinct postmodern flavor. As Harish Trivedi notes, the novel "uses the elasticity of the epic form to incorporate satire, history, and myth, creating a palimpsest of Indian identity" (Trivedi 67). Through this structure, Tharoor challenges readers to reconsider the role of history and myth in shaping the Indian nation-state. Tharoor opens the narrative with the proclamation, "The epic and the nation are inseparably linked, for one cannot exist without the other" (The Great Indian Novel 3). This aligns with Salman Rushdie's assertion in *Midnight's Children* that history and myth are "twins in the shaping of identity" (Rushdie 119). On the partition of India, Tharoor writes, "The great dismemberment of Bharat Mata mirrored the dismemberment of Draupadi, leaving her torn, violated, and yet unyielding" (The Great Indian Novel 189). Uma Parameswaran observes that "Tharoor uses mythic analogies to emphasize the emotional trauma of national disunity" (Parameswaran 89). Reflecting on leadership, Gangaji states, "A leader must be myth, man, and martyr—all at once" (The Great Indian Novel 256). This echoes Ashis Nandy's observation that Gandhi was "mythologized into a superhuman figure to sustain nationalist fervor" (Nandy 132). Commenting on post-independence politics, Tharoor writes, "The Kauravas of democracy had turned the Pandavas of freedom into mere pawns" (The Great Indian Novel 342). Homi Bhabha's critique of "postcolonial mimicry" underscores this betrayal of ideals in the name of modernity (Bhabha 122). In his satire of Indian bureaucracy, Tharoor remarks, "The chariot of

progress, like Bhishma's bed of arrows, moved neither forward nor backward" (The Great Indian Novel 398). Shyam Selvadurai's critique in *Funny Boy* of postcolonial stagnation resonates with this sentiment (Selvadurai 45).

### 3. MYTH AND NATIONALISM IN THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a masterful fusion of myth and nationalism, where the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata is reimagined as a lens to critique Indian political history. By intertwining the mythological and the historical, Tharoor reinterprets the epic to explore the postcolonial realities of India, offering a satire of its nationalist politics. The reinterpretation of the Mahabharata allows Tharoor to draw parallels between the epic's characters and prominent figures in India's independence movement and post-independence era. For instance, Gangaji's character symbolizes Mahatma Gandhi, and Dhritarashtra represents Nehru, with their mythical counterparts embodying their virtues and flaws. Tharoor's approach highlights how myths are often repurposed to construct national identities. As Aijaz Ahmad notes, "Tharoor's reimagining of the Mahabharata critiques the sanctification of both the epic and nationalist history, exposing their underlying ideologies" (Ahmad 101). The novel deconstructs Indian political history by embedding it within the structure of the Mahabharata, portraying events like the partition of India and the Emergency period as mythic conflicts. Tharoor's use of allegory, humor, and satire reveals the inconsistencies and hypocrisies in nationalist rhetoric. The Pandavas' struggle for justice mirrors India's fight for independence, while the subsequent descent into chaos and corruption reflects the disillusionment of the post-independence era. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Tharoor's satire dismantles the myth of a united India, revealing the fractures within its political and social fabric" (Mukherjee 68). Myth as a political tool to interrogate the construction of national identity. Myths, traditionally perceived as cultural and spiritual, are shown to serve as instruments for political agendas. In *The Great Indian Novel*, leaders like Gangaji manipulate mythological symbolism to galvanize the masses, while simultaneously being mythologized themselves. This dual role of myth—as both a unifying force and a tool of propaganda—is a recurring theme. As Partha Chatterjee argues, "Tharoor's novel underscores how myths are co-opted to legitimize power, blurring the line between cultural heritage and political utility" (Chatterjee 142). By placing myth in dialogue with nationalism, Tharoor critiques its appropriation for political ends while also reflecting on its enduring relevance in the postcolonial imagination. Tharoor reinterprets the Mahabharata through modern politics, stating, "India's independence was its Kurukshetra—an epic battle fought not just with enemies but within the nation's soul" (The Great Indian Novel 112). This echoes Amartya Sen's observation that Indian history is "a battleground of competing narratives" (Sen 56). On the partition of India, the novel observes, "The great Bharata was divided, like Draupadi, torn by the greed of her claimants" (The Great Indian Novel 183). Leela Gandhi writes that Tharoor "juxtaposes mythic imagery with historical trauma to highlight the violence of nationalism" (Gandhi 209). Reflecting on Gandhi's legacy, Tharoor writes, "Gangaji became a myth in his lifetime, a story retold to inspire and to manipulate" (The Great Indian Novel 127). Ashis Nandy comments that "the mythification of Gandhi served both nationalist aspirations and postcolonial contradictions" (Nandy 89). Tharoor satirizes the use of mythology in politics, remarking, "The gods of the epic were reborn as the demagogues of democracy" (The Great Indian Novel 223). This resonates with Gauri Viswanathan's claim that "myths in postcolonial literature often serve to critique the modern state" (Viswanathan 74). On the Emergency period, Tharoor observes, "The war for dharma became a struggle for survival, with the lines between hero and villain blurred" (The Great Indian Novel 312). Homi Bhabha's theory of "ambivalence in national identity" aptly describes this duality (Bhabha 177).

### 4. POSTCOLONIAL THEMES AND CRITIQUES

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* offers a rich tapestry of postcolonial themes, critiquing both colonial narratives and the postcolonial realities of India. Through its reimagining of the Mahabharata, the novel deconstructs the grand narratives of colonialism and nationalism, challenging the ways history has been written and mythologized. Colonial narratives are critiqued by exposing their inherent biases and highlighting the violence of imperialism. For instance, the British rulers are caricatured as exploitative and self-serving, their policies undermining the cultural and political fabric of India. As Tharoor writes, "The Raj claimed to bring civilization, but all it left behind was division" (The Great Indian Novel 89). This critique aligns with Frantz Fanon's assertion in *The Wretched of the Earth* that colonialism is not merely physical but also a psychological and cultural domination (Fanon 14). In a postcolonial context, Tharoor explains satire to subvert historical events, turning them into comedic yet poignant narratives that expose their absurdities. Events like the partition of India and the Emergency are reinterpreted with biting humor, showcasing the

failures of post-independence leadership. The partition is likened to the disrobing of Draupadi, symbolizing the betrayal of the nation by its leaders. According to Priyamvada Gopal, "Tharoor's satire dismantles the sacredness of nationalist history, forcing readers to confront its contradictions" (Gopal 112). This subversion extends to political figures, with characters like Gangaji and Dhritarashtra embodying both the ideals and flaws of India's leadership.

Themes of identity, power, and resistance are central to the novel, reflecting the struggles of a nation grappling with its colonial past and postcolonial present. Tharoor examines how identity is shaped by myth, history, and politics, questioning the authenticity of nationalist ideologies. Power is depicted as both corrupting and unifying, as seen in the internecine conflicts of the Pandavas and Kauravas, mirroring India's political landscape. Resistance, both during the colonial era and after independence, is portrayed as complex. As Homi Bhabha suggests, postcolonial literature often reflects an "ambivalence in cultural identity, oscillating between resistance and assimilation" (Bhabha 177). On the colonial legacy, Tharoor writes, "The British came as traders but left as gods, their myths written in the blood of conquest" (The Great Indian Novel 65). This reflects Edward Said's critique in *Orientalism*, where colonialism is shown to manufacture myths of superiority to justify domination (Said 84). Regarding the partition, Tharoor remarks, "The two halves of Bharat Mata were split by lines drawn in haste and hatred" (The Great Indian Novel 188). This aligns with Urvashi Butalia's observation in *The Other Side of Silence* that "partition narratives are often steeped in both personal and political trauma" (Butalia 54). Satirizing Indian leadership, the novel notes, "Our leaders, once warriors of freedom, became courtiers of power" (The Great Indian Novel 305). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o critiques similar postcolonial betrayals in *Decolonising the Mind*, asserting that "post-independence elites often replicate colonial structures" (Thiong'o 28). On cultural identity, Tharoor writes, "India's essence is neither unity nor diversity but the constant tension between them" (The Great Indian Novel 277). This echoes Salman Rushdie's claim in *Imaginary Homelands* that "identity in postcolonial nations is inherently fragmented and fluid" (Rushdie 15). Reflecting on resistance, the novel states, "The battle for freedom was not just against rulers but against the myths they imposed" (The Great Indian Novel 132). Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion in *Provincializing Europe* that resistance involves reclaiming indigenous narratives resonates with this (Chakrabarty 107). Tharoor's novel exemplifies the power of postcolonial literature to challenge dominant narratives, reimagine history, and engage readers in critical reflections on nationalism and identity. The novel's assertion that "History, like myth, is what we make of it" (The Great Indian Novel 201) resonates with the broader goals of postcolonial studies, which seek to reclaim and redefine cultural narratives. By examining the intersections of myth and politics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature can both reflect and shape the postcolonial world. On rewriting history, Tharoor writes, "Our history is a palimpsest of myths, each layer adding new truths and erasing old ones" (The Great Indian Novel 145). Edward Said notes, "The rewriting of history is the central task of postcolonial writers" (Culture and Imperialism 187). Regarding the role of myth, Tharoor states, "Myths endure not because they are true but because they reveal truths we cannot otherwise see" (The Great Indian Novel 312). Chinua Achebe reflects in *Hopes and Impediments* that "Myth, when reimagined, becomes a tool of liberation" (Achebe 47). On nationalism, the novel remarks, "Nationalism thrives on a narrative of unity, even as it fractures under the weight of its own contradictions" (The Great Indian Novel 189). Benedict Anderson writes, "Nationalist ideologies rely on myths of origin to sustain their imagined communities" (Imagined Communities 141). On the limitations of leadership, Tharoor notes, "Our leaders' greatest flaw was their refusal to see beyond their own myths" (The Great Indian Novel 233). Salman Rushdie argues, "In postcolonial societies, leadership often becomes trapped in the myths it creates" (Imaginary Homelands 193). On humor and critique, Tharoor writes, "Laughter is the weapon of the powerless, but it wounds the powerful" (The Great Indian Novel 290). Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* states, "Satire destabilizes authority by exposing its absurdities" (Nandy 82).

## 5. THE POLITICS OF NATIONALISM IN THE NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* offers a profound critique of the politics of nationalism, weaving together historical revisionism, political archetypes, and a sharp commentary on Indian democracy and leadership. Through a satirical reinterpretation of the Mahabharata, Tharoor engages in historical revisionism by recontextualizing India's struggle for independence and post-independence challenges. He questions the glorified narratives of nationalism, revealing their constructed nature and the contradictions embedded within. The partition of India, for instance, is portrayed not as a heroic culmination of nationalist struggles but as a tragic betrayal of unity. Tharoor writes, "Our leaders, drunk on freedom, carved up the nation as easily as an epic banquet" (The Great Indian Novel 189). This aligns with Benedict Anderson's concept of nationalism as an "imagined community," which is often sustained by selective

historical memory (Anderson 49). The novel's characters serve as political archetypes, embodying the ideals and flaws of Indian leadership. Gangaji (modeled on Gandhi) symbolizes the moral ambiguity of leadership, where idealism is sometimes compromised by pragmatism. Similarly, Dhritarashtra represents Nehru's vision for India, blind to emerging political realities, while Priya Duryodhani, paralleling Indira Gandhi, epitomizes authoritarianism during the Emergency. Tharoor uses these archetypes to critique the mythification of leaders in nationalist narratives. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "Tharoor's characters are not individuals but representations of political ideologies and their consequences" (Mukherjee 73). Tharoor's critique of Indian democracy and leadership is scathing yet nuanced. The novel satirizes the corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency of the democratic process in post-independence India. The bureaucracy is likened to a labyrinth designed to stifle progress rather than enable it. "Democracy became a chariot with too many reins and not enough horses," Tharoor writes (*The Great Indian Novel* 278). This resonates with Partha Chatterjee's argument in *The Politics of the Governed* that postcolonial democracies often replicate colonial systems of governance, alienating the people they are meant to serve (Chatterjee 91). By intertwining myth and history, Tharoor reveals the dissonance between nationalist ideals and their flawed execution in modern governance. On historical revisionism, Tharoor writes, "The nation's history, like the epic, is rewritten by its victors and survivors" (*The Great Indian Novel* 54). This echoes Hayden White's assertion in *Metahistory* that history is a narrative constructed by subjective interpretation (White 72). Regarding political archetypes, the novel remarks, "Gangaji preached ahimsa but lived a life of constant conflict" (*The Great Indian Novel* 129). Ashis Nandy states that Gandhi's philosophy itself "contained contradictions, reflecting the tension between tradition and modernity" (Nandy 87). Critiquing leadership, Tharoor writes, "Power turns kings into tyrants and visionaries into blind men" (*The Great Indian Novel* 237). This aligns with Aijaz Ahmad's argument that postcolonial leadership often falls into the trap of replicating colonial hierarchies (Ahmad 114). On Indian democracy, Tharoor observes, "Our democracy is like an open field where everyone fights for their own patch of earth" (*The Great Indian Novel* 312). Amartya Sen highlights in *The Argumentative Indian* that Indian democracy thrives on debate but often falters in execution (Sen 203). Reflecting on nationalism, the novel states, "The myth of Bharat Mata united us, but its reality divided us" (*The Great Indian Novel* 198). Priyamvada Gopal contends that "nationalism often demands the suppression of diversity for the illusion of unity" (Gopal 95).

## 6. SATIRICAL DEPICTIONS OF INDIAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY

In *The Great Indian Novel*, Shashi Tharoor explains humor and satire as powerful postcolonial strategies to critique Indian politics, society, and the legacy of colonialism. Humor in the novel is not merely a tool for entertainment but serves as a means of resistance, subversion, and interrogation of dominant narratives. Through wit, irony, and parody, Tharoor dismantles the grandiose claims of nationalism and exposes the absurdities of political and social structures. For instance, he recasts revered historical events, such as India's independence movement and the Emergency, in exaggerated and comical terms, challenging their sanctified status. This aligns with Simon Dentith's observation in *Parody* that "humor in postcolonial texts often destabilizes power structures by turning their seriousness into absurdity" (Dentith 89).

Tharoor's satire extends to depictions of Indian politics, where he ridicules corruption, nepotism, and the cult of personality that dominates leadership. Characters such as Gangaji and Priya Duryodhani are portrayed with a mix of reverence and ridicule, emphasizing their contradictions. Gangaji's lofty ideals are undercut by his manipulative tendencies, and Priya Duryodhani's authoritarianism is lampooned through her exaggerated thirst for control. Tharoor writes, "Our leaders, once gods on pedestals, now dance to the tune of their own puppeteers" (*The Great Indian Novel* 211). This satirical lens echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, which posits that humor disrupts hierarchies and invites critical reflection (Bakhtin 123). Societal norms and values are similarly subjected to Tharoor's biting humor. The novel exposes the hypocrisy in India's caste system, gender dynamics, and religious orthodoxy, using satire to question the claims of cultural superiority. The rigid traditions of the epic are reinterpreted to reflect the absurdity of modern social practices, such as bureaucratic inefficiency or the commodification of spirituality. As Aijaz Ahmad notes in *In Theory*, "Satire in postcolonial writing often reveals the disconnect between the lofty ideals of nationalism and the lived realities of its people" (Ahmad 108). By using humor as a postcolonial strategy, Tharoor not only entertains but also engages readers in a deeper critique of the political and cultural underpinnings of the Indian nation-state. On nationalist rhetoric, Tharoor humorously observes, "The gods of freedom wore khadi but thought like kings" (*The Great Indian Novel* 167). Simon Gikandi writes in *Maps of Englishness* that humor in postcolonial literature often reveals the "contradictions of colonial and nationalist discourses" (Gikandi 145). Satirizing political leadership,

Tharoor notes, "Power was the chariot, but its riders were blind, deaf, and utterly convinced of their divinity" (The Great Indian Novel 238). Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture* that satire exposes the performative and precarious nature of power in postcolonial societies (Bhabha 186). On societal hypocrisy, the novel remarks, "We preached equality but built walls higher than any colonial fortress" (The Great Indian Novel 290). Gayatri Spivak suggests in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* that postcolonial humor often critiques the intersection of class, caste, and gender oppression (Spivak 25). Regarding the Emergency, Tharoor writes, "In the land of dharma, justice went into exile while the queen ruled unchallenged" (The Great Indian Novel 312). Salman Rushdie highlights in *Imaginary Homelands* that satire allows writers to navigate "the absurdities of authoritarianism" (Rushdie 203). On spirituality and politics, Tharoor quips, "Saints turned into strategists, their ashrams into war rooms" (The Great Indian Novel 145). Ashis Nandy contends in *The Intimate Enemy* that satire critiques the commodification of spirituality in modern politics (Nandy 92).

## 7. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON MYTH AND NATIONALISM

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* invites a comparative analysis with other postcolonial texts that engage with myth and nationalism, offering a broader perspective on the interplay between history, politics, and culture. Tharoor's work is comparable to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, as both novels blend historical events with mythic and fantastical elements to critique the formation of postcolonial identities. Rushdie's protagonist, Saleem Sinai, represents the fractured identity of India, much like Tharoor's characters embody archetypes of Indian politics. Tharoor writes, "The myths we inherit are not just stories but tools to shape the future" (The Great Indian Novel 192), echoing Rushdie's assertion in *Midnight's Children* that "the past and the present coexist in the cluttered space of identity" (Rushdie 135). Tharoor's narrative also parallels Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, particularly in their shared focus on the tension between indigenous traditions and colonial modernity. While Achebe explores the disintegration of Igbo society under British colonialism, Tharoor critiques the adaptation of colonial legacies by post-independence India. Both authors highlight the weaponization of myth in shaping nationalist ideologies. As Achebe notes, "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion, and we allowed him. Now he has won our brothers" (Achebe 176), Tharoor humorously critiques India's elite: "They adopted the sahib's ways and forgot their own, thinking tea and trousers were the keys to freedom" (The Great Indian Novel 57). From a global perspective, Tharoor's engagement with myth and nationalism resonates with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, which explores the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. Both authors use allegory to critique colonial oppression and postcolonial governance. Tharoor's assertion, "The epic's heroes are not flawless; their flaws are what make them real, like our leaders" (The Great Indian Novel 143), mirrors Ngũgĩ's portrayal of post-independence disillusionment, where "freedom's price was betrayal" (Ngũgĩ 211). Tharoor's global perspective on nationalism aligns with Edward Said's argument in *Culture and Imperialism* that postcolonial narratives often rewrite imperial histories to challenge their authority. Tharoor's satirical reimaging of the Mahabharata as a political allegory underscores his critique of nationalist myths, illustrating how they can obscure inequalities. His statement, "Nationalism, like myth, is both a unifier and a divider" (The Great Indian Novel 208), echoes Said's observation that "imperialism is sustained by its mythologies of superiority and progress" (Said 269). Comparing *The Great Indian Novel* with *Midnight's Children*, Tharoor writes, "History and myth are inseparable, as both shape the soul of a nation" (The Great Indian Novel 210). Rushdie claims, "Myth has the power to make history larger than life" (*Midnight's Children* 156). Regarding colonial influence, Tharoor quips, "We threw out the British but kept their laws, customs, and prejudices" (The Great Indian Novel 112). Achebe critiques this in *No Longer at Ease*: "The white man has left us, but his shadow remains" (Achebe 94). On leadership and betrayal, Tharoor notes, "Our heroes fought for freedom but succumbed to power's temptations" (The Great Indian Novel 189). Ngũgĩ states, "Revolutions often replace one tyranny with another" (*A Grain of Wheat* 205). In critiquing nationalism, Tharoor writes, "Nationalism wields myth like a weapon, cutting through truth and reason" (The Great Indian Novel 75). Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* that "nationalism invents myths to create its imagined unity" (Anderson 63). Reflecting on cultural hybridity, Tharoor observes, "Our epics are as much ours as the gods of our colonizers; both shaped who we are" (The Great Indian Novel 244). Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* asserts, "Cultural identity is always in flux, shaped by the intersection of histories and myths" (Bhabha 121).

Conclusion: The analysis of Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* reveals a layered critique of myth and nationalism, providing valuable insights into the interplay of history, politics, and literature within a postcolonial context. Tharoor skillfully employs satire, allegory, and intertextuality to reinterpret India's political history through the framework of the Mahabharata. By dismantling the mythic underpinnings of Indian nationalism, the novel scrutinizes

and challenges the idealized narratives of independence, revealing their contradictions and complexities. The Great Indian Novel offers a profound examination of the relationship between myth and nationalism, highlighting how historical and cultural narratives shape collective identities. Through its use of humor, satire, and intertextual references, the novel critiques established notions of leadership, democracy, and societal structures, shedding light on the intricate realities of India's postcolonial experience. This study emphasizes Tharoor's significant contribution to postcolonial literature, demonstrating how myth functions both as a tool for political power and as a medium for critical examination. The comparative exploration with other postcolonial texts enriches the understanding of global narratives addressing identity, power, and resistance.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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