



A Study of Postmodern Elements in Shashi Tharoor's Fictional Works

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Abstract— *Shashi Tharoor occupies a distinctive position in contemporary Indian English literature through his innovative narrative techniques, intellectual engagement with history, and critical exploration of culture, politics, and identity. His fictional works challenge conventional literary forms by incorporating diverse postmodern elements, including intertextuality, historiographic metafiction, parody, satire, fragmentation, a plurality of perspectives, and the deconstruction of historical narratives. This article examines the manifestation of postmodernism in Tharoor's major fictional works, namely The Great Indian Novel (1989), Show Business (1992), Riot (2001), and selected stories from The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories (1990). Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of Jean-François Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Roland Barthes, the study analyses how Tharoor reconstructs myths, reinterprets history, and interrogates dominant political and cultural discourses through innovative literary strategies. The article argues that Tharoor employs postmodern aesthetics not merely as stylistic experimentation but as a critical instrument to expose the instability of historical truth, question nationalist grand narratives, and foreground the multiplicity of Indian identities in a postcolonial context. The study concludes that Tharoor's fiction exemplifies the convergence of postmodern literary techniques and postcolonial concerns, establishing him as one of the foremost practitioners of postmodern narrative in contemporary Indian literature.*



Keywords— *Shashi Tharoor, Postmodernism, Indian English Fiction, Historiographic Metafiction, Intertextuality, Satire, Parody, Fragmentation, Postcolonial Literature, Cultural Identity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of postmodernism in the latter half of the twentieth century transformed literary discourse by challenging fixed notions of truth, history, authorship, and representation. Rejecting universal explanations, postmodern literature embraces fragmentation, intertextuality, irony, plurality, and ambiguity, reconstructing history as a contested narrative rather than an objective record. In the Indian context, postmodernism intersects with colonial history, cultural plurality, and socio-political complexities, enabling writers to reinterpret inherited narratives, recover indigenous cultural memories,

and merge mythology with history through innovative narrative forms.

Among contemporary Indian English novelists, Shashi Tharoor stands out as a pioneering postmodern writer whose fiction combines mythology, political satire, historiographic revisionism, metafiction, and intertextuality. His narratives dissolve the boundaries between history and fiction, fact and imagination, encouraging multiple interpretations while foregrounding hybridity and cultural complexity. *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) reimagines the *Mahabharata* alongside modern Indian political history, questioning historical objectivity through allegory and parody. *Show Business* (1992)

critiques celebrity culture, media spectacle, and political performance, while *Riot* (2001) employs fragmented documents and multiple voices to challenge singular historical truth. Likewise, *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* explore irony, satire, cultural displacement, and shifting identities, reflecting Tharoor's sustained engagement with postmodern aesthetics.

This study draws upon the theoretical perspectives of Jean-François Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Roland Barthes to examine historiographic metafiction, deconstruction, simulation, intertextuality, and textual plurality in Tharoor's fiction. While existing scholarship has largely explored his works from historical, political, and postcolonial perspectives—often focusing primarily on *The Great Indian Novel*—comparatively little attention has been given to the postmodern narrative strategies that unify his fictional corpus.

Against this background, the present study investigates the major postmodern elements in *The Great Indian Novel*, *Show Business*, *Riot*, and selected stories from *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories*. It analyses Tharoor's use of historiographic metafiction, parody, satire, fragmentation, intertextuality, narrative plurality, deconstruction, and cultural hybridity to demonstrate how these strategies reimagine history, politics, nationalism, and identity. The study argues that Tharoor transforms postmodern experimentation into a distinctive Indian narrative mode that reshapes cultural memory and political consciousness, thereby contributing to contemporary Indian English literature and postcolonial literary criticism.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shashi Tharoor's fiction has attracted significant scholarly attention for its innovative engagement with history, mythology, politics, and postcolonial identity. His novels have been studied through postcolonial, historical, cultural, and political perspectives, yet comprehensive analyses of the postmodern elements that unify his fictional corpus remain relatively limited. This review surveys existing scholarship and identifies the research gap that the present study addresses.

Critical studies of *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) recognize it as a landmark in Indian English fiction for reimagining the *Mahabharata* alongside modern Indian political history. Scholars emphasize its use of parody, irony, satire, and intertextuality to challenge colonial historiography, reinterpret cultural memory, and blur the boundaries between myth, history, and fiction. Likewise, research on *Show Business* (1992) focuses on its critique of celebrity culture, media spectacle, and political performance,

highlighting its self-reflexive narration and departure from conventional realism. Studies of *Riot* (2001) examine its fragmented structure, multiple documentary voices, and treatment of communal violence, arguing that the novel questions the possibility of objective historical truth. In contrast, *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* has received comparatively less attention, with existing scholarship concentrating mainly on migration, globalization, and cultural displacement rather than its postmodern narrative experimentation.

Beyond individual texts, scholars have explored recurring themes such as cultural hybridity, nationalism, secularism, globalization, and political corruption, acknowledging Tharoor's ability to combine satire with intellectual and narrative innovation. However, these studies generally privilege thematic concerns over the formal and narrative techniques that characterize his fiction as distinctly postmodern.

The theoretical contributions of Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, and Jean Baudrillard provide the conceptual framework for interpreting Tharoor's fiction. Lyotard's critique of grand narratives, Derrida's deconstruction, Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, Jameson's analysis of postmodern culture, and Baudrillard's theories of simulation and hyperreality collectively illuminate Tharoor's reinterpretation of history, politics, media, and cultural identity. Despite substantial scholarship on Tharoor's individual novels and on postmodern literary theory, a significant research gap persists. Most studies examine either postcolonial themes or isolated narrative devices without exploring how postmodern strategies function collectively across his fictional oeuvre. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to how these techniques reinforce his critique of history, politics, culture, and identity in the Indian context.

The present study addresses this gap through a comprehensive analysis of *The Great Indian Novel*, *Show Business*, *Riot*, and selected stories from *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories*. Drawing upon the theories of Lyotard, Derrida, Hutcheon, Jameson, and Baudrillard, it examines historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, parody, satire, fragmentation, narrative plurality, deconstruction, and simulation as interconnected narrative strategies. The study argues that postmodernism is not merely a stylistic device in Tharoor's fiction but a fundamental organizing principle that reshapes history, culture, politics, and identity, thereby enriching contemporary Indian English literature and postmodern literary scholarship.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism emerged as one of the most influential intellectual and literary movements of the twentieth century, fundamentally reshaping the understanding of literature, history, culture, and identity. Rejecting the universal truths, objective realities, and fixed meanings associated with modernism and Enlightenment rationality, postmodernism celebrates plurality, ambiguity, fragmentation, intertextuality, and the instability of meaning. Rather than perceiving history as a linear progression or literature as a transparent representation of reality, postmodern thought views both as culturally constructed narratives shaped by language, ideology, and power. Consequently, postmodern literature frequently challenges conventional distinctions between history and fiction, author and reader, reality and representation, and originality and imitation.

Within literary studies, postmodernism is characterized by several defining features, including metafiction, historiographic metafiction, parody, pastiche, irony, intertextuality, fragmentation, multiple narrative perspectives, and the rejection of narrative closure. These techniques encourage readers to question the authority of texts, recognize the constructed nature of historical knowledge, and appreciate the multiplicity of interpretations that literary works generate. In postcolonial societies such as India, postmodernism takes on additional significance because it offers writers innovative narrative strategies for interrogating colonial histories, reconstructing cultural memories, and challenging dominant political ideologies.

Shashi Tharoor's fiction exemplifies this convergence of postmodern aesthetics and postcolonial concerns. His novels consistently dissolve the boundaries between mythology and history, fact and fiction, politics and literature, while employing satire, parody, intertextuality, and fragmented narration to expose the instability of historical truth and the plurality of cultural identities. The present study draws upon the theoretical contributions of Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, and Jean Baudrillard to analyse the postmodern dimensions of Tharoor's fictional works.

Incredulity toward Metanarratives

Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) remains one of the foundational texts of postmodern theory. Lyotard defines the postmodern condition as "incredulity toward metanarratives," arguing that contemporary societies increasingly distrust universal explanations that claim to provide absolute truth or historical certainty. Grand narratives such as progress, nationalism, religion, scientific rationality, and historical inevitability no longer command

unquestioned authority because they often conceal ideological interests and relations of power. Instead of privileging a single, authoritative version of reality, Lyotard advocates the coexistence of multiple "language games" and localized narratives, each reflecting particular cultural, political, and historical contexts. Knowledge, therefore, becomes plural rather than universal, fragmented rather than unified.

Lyotard's theoretical perspective provides an important framework for interpreting Shashi Tharoor's fiction. In *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor questions the official narratives of Indian nationalism by rewriting twentieth-century political history through the framework of the *Mahabharata*. Rather than presenting history as objective truth, he demonstrates that historical narratives are selective constructions shaped by ideology and political interests. Similarly, *Riot* rejects any single explanation for communal violence by presenting multiple and often contradictory accounts of the same event. Through these narrative strategies, Tharoor exemplifies Lyotard's rejection of metanarratives and his emphasis on plurality and interpretive openness.

Deconstruction and the Instability of Meaning

Jacques Derrida revolutionized literary criticism through the theory of deconstruction, introduced in works such as *Of Grammatology* (1967). Derrida challenges the structuralist assumption that language possesses stable meanings. According to him, meaning is always deferred through an endless process of difference (*différance*), making complete textual certainty impossible. Every text contains internal contradictions that undermine its own apparent coherence. Deconstruction also interrogates hierarchical binary oppositions such as speech/writing, presence/absence, truth/fiction, history/myth, and centre/margin. Derrida argues that these oppositions are neither natural nor stable but culturally constructed and therefore open to reinterpretation.

Tharoor's fiction demonstrates many of these deconstructive principles. In *The Great Indian Novel*, the binary distinction between mythology and history is deliberately dismantled as epic characters simultaneously represent mythological figures and modern political leaders. The novel refuses to privilege either historical fact or fictional imagination, instead revealing both as narrative constructions. Likewise, *Riot* destabilizes the distinction between objective documentation and subjective memory through conflicting testimonies, diaries, interviews, and official records. Readers are therefore compelled to participate in constructing meaning rather than accepting authoritative interpretations. Derrida's theory enables the present study to analyse how Tharoor subverts fixed

meanings, destabilizes historical authority, and transforms literary narrative into an open process of interpretation.

Historiographic Metafiction

Among contemporary literary theorists, Linda Hutcheon has offered one of the most influential explanations of postmodern fiction. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), she introduces the concept of "historiographic metafiction" to describe novels that simultaneously represent historical events while questioning the possibility of objective historical knowledge. Historiographic metafiction combines historical reconstruction with self-conscious narrative techniques, emphasizing that both history and fiction are textual representations rather than transparent reflections of reality. Such novels employ parody, irony, intertextuality, and metafiction not merely for aesthetic experimentation but to expose the ideological foundations of historical discourse.

Hutcheon's framework is particularly relevant to Tharoor's fiction. *The Great Indian Novel* is a classic example of historiographic metafiction, rewriting Indian political history through the narrative structure of the *Mahabharata*. Historical personalities are transformed into epic characters, while mythological episodes are reinterpreted to illuminate modern political developments. The novel simultaneously celebrates India's cultural heritage and critiques nationalist mythology, demonstrating how history itself functions as narrative rather than objective fact. Similarly, *Riot* reconstructs communal violence through fragmented documentary materials without establishing any definitive version of events. By refusing narrative closure, Tharoor encourages readers to recognize the limitations of historical representation, thereby embodying Hutcheon's conception of historiographic metafiction.

Postmodernism and Late Capitalism

Fredric Jameson approaches postmodernism primarily as the cultural logic of late capitalism. In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), he argues that postmodern culture reflects the economic, technological, and ideological transformations associated with global capitalism. According to Jameson, contemporary society is characterized by consumerism, commodification, media saturation, and the collapse of distinctions between high culture and popular culture.

Jameson identifies several defining features of postmodern culture, including pastiche, superficiality, depthlessness, and the replacement of historical consciousness by images and spectacles. In such a cultural environment, representation increasingly becomes detached from historical reality. Jameson's theoretical insights illuminate Tharoor's critique of contemporary Indian society, particularly in *Show Business*. The novel portrays cinema,

politics, journalism, and celebrity culture as interconnected spectacles driven by commercial interests and public performance. Political leaders become entertainers, actors become politicians, and public identity itself becomes a carefully constructed performance. The commercialization of culture, media manipulation, and the commodification of personal identity closely correspond to Jameson's analysis of postmodern capitalist society.

Simulation and Hyperreality

Jean Baudrillard extends postmodern theory through his concepts of simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard argues that contemporary society increasingly experiences reality through signs, images, media representations, and simulations rather than through direct experience. As representations proliferate, the distinction between reality and imitation gradually disappears, producing what he terms "hyperreality."

According to Baudrillard, simulations no longer imitate reality; instead, they replace reality altogether. Media, advertising, political spectacle, and digital communication create representations that appear more authentic than lived experience itself. Baudrillard's theory provides an illuminating framework for analysing Tharoor's exploration of politics, media, and celebrity culture. In *Show Business*, cinematic performances shape public identities more profoundly than actual personalities. Political campaigns increasingly resemble theatrical productions, while media narratives determine public perception regardless of historical accuracy. Likewise, *Riot* demonstrates how official reports, journalistic accounts, personal memories, and public narratives produce competing versions of reality, making objective truth ultimately inaccessible. Through these representations, Tharoor illustrates Baudrillard's insight that contemporary society often experiences mediated simulations rather than stable historical realities.

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Present Study

The theories of Lyotard, Derrida, Hutcheon, Jameson, and Baudrillard collectively provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining the postmodern dimensions of Shashi Tharoor's fiction. Lyotard explains Tharoor's scepticism toward nationalist and historical metanarratives; Derrida illuminates the instability of textual meaning and the deconstruction of binary oppositions; Hutcheon offers the concept of historiographic metafiction for analysing the reconstruction of Indian history and mythology; Jameson contextualizes Tharoor's critique of consumerism, media spectacle, and globalization; and Baudrillard explains the blurred boundaries between reality and representation in his narratives.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the present study demonstrates that Tharoor's novels employ postmodern literary strategies not merely as stylistic innovations but as powerful critical instruments for interrogating history, politics, culture, and identity in postcolonial India. His fiction reveals that historical truth is contested, cultural identities are hybrid, and narratives are always shaped by ideological and linguistic processes. Consequently, Tharoor emerges as one of the foremost postmodern voices in contemporary Indian English literature, whose works exemplify the productive convergence of postmodern aesthetics and postcolonial critique.

Historiographic Metafiction and Intertextuality in *The Great Indian Novel*

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) is widely regarded as one of the most remarkable examples of historiographic metafiction in contemporary Indian English literature. By reimagining the *Mahabharata* within the framework of India's political history from the colonial period to the Emergency (1975–1977), Tharoor constructs a narrative that simultaneously recreates and interrogates historical events. This narrative strategy exemplifies Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, which describes fictional works that revisit history while exposing its textual and ideological construction. Rather than presenting history as an objective record of the past, Tharoor demonstrates that historical narratives are selective, interpretive, and shaped by political and cultural perspectives.

The novel's central postmodern technique lies in its extensive intertextual engagement with the *Mahabharata*. Tharoor reconfigures epic characters to represent prominent political figures in modern India. For instance, Gangaji symbolizes Mahatma Gandhi, Dhritarashtra parallels Jawaharlal Nehru, Priya Duryodhani evokes Indira Gandhi, and Pandu reflects the complexities of India's nationalist leadership. These correspondences are not intended as literal historical equivalents but as satirical reinterpretations that encourage readers to examine the continuities and contradictions between mythological narratives and modern political realities. By juxtaposing sacred epic traditions with contemporary politics, Tharoor dissolves the boundaries between myth and history, illustrating Jacques Derrida's notion that meanings are never fixed but are continually reconstructed through textual relationships.

Intertextuality functions as the novel's organizing principle. Beyond the *Mahabharata*, Tharoor incorporates references to Indian history, colonial discourse, parliamentary debates, constitutional developments, and nationalist rhetoric. These multiple textual layers create what Roland Barthes

describes as a "tissue of quotations," in which meaning emerges through the interaction of diverse cultural and historical texts rather than from a single authoritative source. Consequently, readers become active participants in interpreting the novel's complex network of allusions and political satire.

The novel also reflects Jean-François Lyotard's critique of grand narratives by questioning the official historiography of the Indian nation-state. Instead of endorsing a singular nationalist account of independence and political development, Tharoor presents history as a contested discourse comprising competing interpretations and marginalized voices. His satirical rewriting of national history challenges the authority of political myths and exposes the ideological foundations of historical representation. Thus, *The Great Indian Novel* transforms mythology into a critical instrument for re-evaluating India's past while affirming the postmodern conviction that both history and literature are constructed narratives open to continual reinterpretation.

Through its sophisticated use of historiographic metafiction and intertextuality, *The Great Indian Novel* transcends conventional historical fiction and exemplifies the productive convergence of postmodern narrative experimentation and postcolonial critique. Tharoor demonstrates that revisiting the past through myth, parody, and satire not only destabilizes official histories but also invites readers to engage critically with the processes through which nations remember, narrate, and legitimize their cultural identities.

Media, Consumerism, and Hyperreality in *Show Business*

Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business* (1992) presents a compelling critique of the interrelationship between cinema, politics, media, and consumer culture in contemporary India. Through the life of Ashok Banjara, a celebrated film star whose career intersects with political ambition, the novel exposes the performative nature of public life in an increasingly media-driven society. Tharoor employs satire, metafiction, and irony to reveal how images and spectacles often supersede reality, making *Show Business* a significant example of postmodern fiction. The novel reflects Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and hyperreality, wherein representations no longer merely depict reality but gradually replace it, creating a world dominated by appearances and mediated experiences.

Baudrillard argues that modern societies are governed by simulacra, copies without originals, where media-generated images become more influential than actual events. This theoretical perspective is vividly illustrated in *Show Business*, where Ashok Banjara's cinematic persona

overshadows his authentic identity. His popularity is not grounded in his personal qualities but in the carefully manufactured image projected through films, interviews, publicity campaigns, and the mass media. Consequently, the distinction between the actor and the characters he portrays becomes increasingly blurred, demonstrating how celebrity culture constructs identities that are consumed as commodities rather than experienced as genuine human realities.

The novel also examines the commodification of politics, illustrating Fredric Jameson's argument that postmodern culture is shaped by the logic of late capitalism. Political leaders in *Show Business* adopt the techniques of film stars, relying on spectacle, publicity, and emotional appeal instead of ideological conviction or policy-based governance. Elections resemble theatrical performances, while political campaigns function as media events designed to maximize public visibility. Through this convergence of entertainment and politics, Tharoor critiques a culture in which democratic participation is increasingly mediated by commercial interests and public image rather than substantive political engagement.

Consumerism constitutes another significant postmodern element in the novel. Characters inhabit a world driven by glamour, advertising, luxury, and material success, where social status is measured by public recognition and commercial value. The film industry itself becomes a metaphor for a consumer society in which identities, emotions, and relationships are transformed into marketable products. Tharoor satirizes this commercialization by exposing the superficiality and instability underlying the glamorous façade of celebrity life.

Furthermore, the novel's self-reflexive narrative style reinforces its postmodern character. Ashok's autobiographical narration frequently blurs the boundaries between performance and confession, fiction and reality, compelling readers to question the authenticity of his account. This metafictional strategy highlights the constructed nature of narrative itself, emphasizing that both personal identity and public history are shaped through acts of storytelling.

Through its incisive portrayal of media spectacle, consumerism, and hyperreality, *Show Business* extends beyond a satire of the Indian film industry to offer a broader commentary on contemporary culture. By integrating Baudrillard's theory of simulation with Jameson's critique of consumer capitalism, Tharoor demonstrates how media representations increasingly define political authority, social identity, and cultural values. The novel thus exemplifies the postmodern condition in which reality is continually reconstructed through spectacle,

commodification, and the pervasive influence of mass media.

Fragmentation, Multiple Narratives, and the Deconstruction of Truth in *Riot*

Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* (2001) is one of the most innovative experiments in contemporary Indian English fiction, abandoning linear narration in favour of a collage of interviews, letters, diary entries, newspaper reports, official documents, and personal testimonies. By reconstructing the death of Priscilla Hart during a communal riot through fragmented documents, the novel rejects the notion of a single, coherent historical narrative and presents truth as provisional, contested, and shaped by perspective.

The novel closely reflects Jean-François Lyotard's critique of grand narratives by privileging multiple localized accounts over universal explanations. No narrator possesses absolute authority, and conflicting testimonies prevent any definitive interpretation of either the riot or Priscilla Hart's death. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction further illuminates this strategy, as official records, personal memories, and journalistic reports continually undermine one another, destabilizing binaries such as truth and fiction, history and memory, and public and private. Meaning thus remains fluid rather than fixed.

Riot also exemplifies Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction by foregrounding the textual construction of history. Instead of presenting communal violence as objective fact, Tharoor exposes how historical knowledge is mediated through language, institutional authority, and personal bias. Readers must actively assemble the narrative, recognizing history as an interpretive process rather than a completed record.

The novel further reflects the complexities of postcolonial India, where religion, politics, gender, and cultural identity intersect in conflicting ways. Its polyphonic structure resists ideological simplification and portrays communal conflict as an open-ended dialogue shaped by memory, power, and perspective. Through fragmentation, documentary techniques, and multiple narrative voices, *Riot* demonstrates that history is a contested textual construct, affirming the postmodern view that meaning is plural, truth is interpretive, and historical understanding emerges from the interaction of diverse and often contradictory voices.

Identity, Irony, and Cultural Hybridity in *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories*

Shashi Tharoor's *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* (1990) extends his engagement with postmodern aesthetics through narratives that explore identity, cultural displacement, globalization, and human relationships. Despite their thematic diversity, the stories are unified by

irony, shifting perspectives, and the rejection of fixed identities. Rather than treating identity as stable, Tharoor presents it as fluid and continually reconstructed through cultural interaction, reflecting a central postmodern concern with multiplicity and instability.

A defining feature of the collection is its portrayal of cultural hybridity. Characters negotiate the intersections of Eastern and Western traditions, demonstrating that identity emerges through adaptation rather than cultural inheritance. This challenges essentialist notions of culture and presents globalization as a condition that generates hybrid identities transcending conventional national boundaries. Irony further reinforces this perspective, as humour and subtle satire expose contradictions in social conventions and interpersonal relationships, inviting multiple interpretations rather than fixed moral conclusions.

The collection also reflects Jacques Derrida's concept of the instability of meaning and Jean-François Lyotard's critique of grand narratives. Characters experience shifting perceptions and conflicting interpretations, illustrating that identity is constructed through language and social interaction rather than existing as an immutable essence. By privileging individual experiences over universal explanations, Tharoor foregrounds plurality and resists cultural generalization. Intertextual references to Indian traditions, Western literature, history, and contemporary politics further create multilayered narratives in which meaning emerges through dialogue among diverse cultural texts.

Equally significant is the collection's exploration of globalization, migration, and cross-cultural encounters. Characters confront questions of belonging, alienation, and self-definition in culturally fluid environments, while the frequent use of open-ended conclusions reflects the postmodern rejection of narrative closure. Through its treatment of identity, irony, cultural hybridity, and narrative plurality, *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* demonstrates that postmodernism is not merely a narrative technique but a broader exploration of cultural belonging and human experience. The collection complements Tharoor's novels by revealing how postmodern strategies illuminate the complexities of individual and collective identities in an increasingly interconnected world.

III. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the major postmodern elements in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, *Show Business*, *Riot*, and *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* through the theoretical perspectives of Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, and Jean Baudrillard. The analysis demonstrates that Tharoor

integrates postmodern narrative strategies with postcolonial concerns to interrogate history, politics, culture, media, and identity. Rather than functioning merely as formal experimentation, these techniques become critical instruments for exposing the ideological construction of historical memory and cultural discourse.

The Great Indian Novel exemplifies Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction by reimagining modern Indian political history through the *Mahabharata*, challenging official historiography with parody, intertextuality, and satire. *Show Business* critiques celebrity culture, media spectacle, and consumerism, reflecting Jameson's analysis of postmodern capitalism and Baudrillard's theory of simulation. In *Riot*, fragmented narration, multiple voices, and documentary forms reject objective historical truth, illustrating Lyotard's scepticism toward grand narratives and Derrida's textual indeterminacy. Likewise, *The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories* explores identity, cultural hybridity, and globalization through irony, narrative plurality, and cross-cultural encounters, presenting identity as fluid and continually negotiated.

A comparative reading reveals a coherent postmodern aesthetic across Tharoor's fiction, characterized by historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, fragmentation, satire, simulation, and cultural hybridity. These strategies dissolve binaries such as history and fiction, reality and representation, and tradition and modernity, emphasizing the plurality of meaning while reinterpreting India's historical and cultural memory.

The study concludes that Tharoor successfully localizes postmodern aesthetics within the Indian context, transforming them into a powerful mode of postcolonial cultural critique. Through mythic revision, irony, parody, and narrative innovation, he offers fresh perspectives on nationalism, democracy, secularism, globalization, and cultural identity. Consequently, Tharoor occupies a distinctive place in contemporary Indian English literature, demonstrating that history is contested, identity is continually reconstructed, and meaning remains open to reinterpretation. His fiction thus makes a significant contribution to both postmodern and postcolonial literary studies. Future research may extend this inquiry through comparative studies with other Indian postmodern writers or by exploring the intersections of postmodernism with gender, memory, globalization, and digital culture in his literary oeuvre.

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