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16. Tradition and Modernity in Shashi Tharoor's Show Business: A Novel



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Abstract

Shashi Tharoor, an exceptional writer, being read eclectically and indiscriminately, with detail and novelty has hardly left any untouched subject of discovery and scrutiny in Indian cultural and social milieu. His wide range of stunning and refreshing experiences investigates into narrative and characters with his inimitable style of writing. Being lived, flourished, and blossomed in the modern India, he has successfully painted a kaleidoscopic mosaic of Indian traditions—its cultural richness, its poverty, its backwardness, diversity, and its tradition and modernity. The account of the narrative cinema based on universal mental structure and traditional aesthetic norms the notion of cinema as vernacular modernism has recently proposed by Tharoor with regard to the classical Bollywood cinema.

Keywords: tradition, modernity, beliefs, customs, multi-cultural, western, modernisation transmission.

Shashi Tharoor in *The Show Business* had highlighted certain aspects of Bollywood, which previously neglected. Its relation to contemporary modernist movements in the traditional media as well as socio-economic modernisation, its ability to offer mass audience a market based cultural horizons in which the experience of modernity including its traumatic as well as liberating effects seen in the novel *Show Business*. Tharoor's satirical novel *Show Business* lampoons the Indian film business and its superficiality. Primarily the novel deals with four major structures—cinema, human relations, politics and religion.

Show Business: A Novel written by Shashi Tharoor, published in 1992. Tharoor in his novel reinvents Bollywood and the history of a superstar Ashok Banjara. The novel does not only amuse the readers but also provokes serious thoughts about the film industry. Bollywood has been very close to the Indian masses. It is the representation of Indian society, history, culture, traditions, politics and customs. Popular Hindi cinema has invented many contemporary myths and traditions about the glamour of the Bollywood and modern Indian society. Film

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heroes treated as like God in the society and command great respect. The cinema creates a dream world for the people. Sometimes the ordinary people imagine themselves replacing the heroes of the movie.

Tharoor attacks the falsehood, artificiality and decorum of the iconic and Godlike figures of the modern Indian masses. He writes this novel to bring to light the real facts of the Hindi cinema and break the romantic notion of an ordinary modern Indian.

The main theme of the novel is Bollywood. The novel does not comment only on the life of Ashok Banjara, but also gives an insight into the social and political ills of modern India. He has used satire, humour, irony, and parody throughout the novel. The novel does not confine itself only to politics and Bollywood. It expands itself to all other important aspects of modern Indian life such as religion, mythology, culture, cricket, the social and professional relationships, the family and individual life. Tharoor debunks the myth of many of the social, political institutions as well as the professional and personal relationships of the stars. It includes almost all the aspects of modern India as well as the new challenges that the present India is facing. He displays the hypocrisy of individuals as well as institutions. He has also mocked the institutions of marriages in the novel, which Bollywood stars refuse to respect. Satire becomes instrumental to bring a kind of change in the society. Here the novelist is more of a satirist. He is dissatisfied with the hypocrisy of the social, political, religious, and cultural world presented through the cinema.

The notion of cinema is the first global and modernist vernacular complicates by suggesting the Bollywood film might have translated differently in different countries. It is not only transformed in local context of reception and existing film culture but also might have played an important role in meditating Indian tradition and modernity.

After *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) Tharoor comes to *Show Business* (1991), he replaces the framework of the epic of the Mahabharata with that of Hindi films. This look a little odd, especially as one cannot conceive of any plausible relationship between the ancient epic and the superficial world of films. If *The Great Indian Novel* works mainly through the contrast between the ancient and modern levels of experience, *Show Business* draws its plan around the similarity between the illusory world of films and the actual world of realities. Parallelism is perhaps as effective a device as contrasting, and both books try to convey a satirical yet poignant



view of modern life. Shashi Tharoor gives two reasons for his choice: The contemporary myths invented in modern Hindi cinema in order to tell his story.¹

The novel written in takes of the Bollywood style. These takes are the stories centred on the protagonist to express with all its rich cultural diversity of traditional and modern traits. The author has told the stories of Bollywood within the story of the novel. These stories are marked with a bent of Indian tradition through the Bollywood films. The author confesses his traditional Indian yearning while writing these stories for *Show Business*: (intrw.1999)

...in looking for one more metaphor to explore Indian condition, I took cinema as a natural one... the novel that intercuts extensively the stories of the formulaic films of Bollywood ...the story is about the stories, at the same time, these stories are about India ...they are about the kinds of stories that India is telling itself today.²

Show Business highlights the perverted modern outlook and attitude of the present day Indian politician affecting country's governance. He underlines the idealised Indian politics of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, only a few decades after the end of colonialism:

Just like the heroes of our national movement, the men inspired by the Mahatma.³

Tharoors explains the co-existence of lawbreakers and lawmakers in his modern debilitated motherland. Tharoor's politicians spoil the social and the legal fabric. It is clearly enunciated by him in the confessional monologue of Kulbhushan Banjara:

Even so—I want finish the point I was trying to make about your world and mine. Which is that we are both involved in pretence. Politicians make speeches in which they pretend that their actions and positions are motivated policy, principle, ideology, the interests of their constitutes, their vision of India, whatever; and they pretend that they expect people to support them, vote for them, give them money, on that basis. But of course issues and values determine little of their actual actions, and less of the support they really get: they win on the caste calculations they get money for suborning laws they have enthusiastically passed,politics is an end in itself, just like the Hindi film.⁴

Tharoor endeavours to show that the natives of the Indian subcontinent have experienced emotions of joy and victory, after the end of the British rule their country, it has not taken time for their nationalistic favour to become a more self-oriented one. The modern politicians of India are not following our traditions, they forgotten our traditional moral codes of the politics and in



process of modernisation, they have accepted the modern valueless principles. Modern politician leaves all our cultural and traditional moral values for the present day lowest politics.

The author exemplifies the modern political leaders who never hesitate to betray their own country. The unexpected inclusion of a Guru indicates how Indian politicians lack for sightedness and realism. It demonstrates how superstition is governing Indian politics.

Show Business is not only a clever treatise on the distracting entertainments produced by Hindi films industry. It used as a modern socio-political code by the author and the contemporary popular myths created by it. It is a profound study of the lives of those, who constitute this glamorous section of the society. This novel interrogates the drawbacks of the modern moral valueless principles of politician and artists and at the same time, it makes us to remember our rich heritage of the traditional moral values of politics and traditional art.

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