

**RESEARCH PAPER****Voicing the Differend: A Study of Contested Histories and Disputed Territories in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*****Rashid Masood Sadiq**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper studies the fictionalized articulations of causes of antagonistic relations between the Hindus and the Muslims of India in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*, a Novel (2001). The novel evinces a desire for peaceful syncretic and multicultural cohabitation of these two communities, a vision enshrined in Jawaharlal Nehru's idea of 'Unity in Diversity'. The longing, however, is thwarted because of the contentious claims of the Hindus and Muslims of India over Indian history and territory. The irresolvability of these contentions can be understood through Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of differend which he defines as "a case of conflict between (at least) two parties that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments". By unpacking the differend between two parties, Hindutva and the Muslims, the novel highlights the status of the Muslims of India as a threatened minority and the discrimination faced by them in multiple forms. It, however, exhibits a confidence in the ability of secular nature of Indian constitution, its resilient democracy, and absorptive syncretic Indian tradition to overcome the sense of wrong and injustice felt by the Muslims.

Keywords: Democracy, Differend, Hindutva, Secularism, Syncretism**Introduction**

Shashi Tharoor, an Indian politician, a former international diplomat at United Nations, member of Indian Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, and a former Minister of State for External Affairs, writes about Indian history, culture, films, politics, society, and foreign policy. *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), *Show Business* (1992), *Reasons of State* (1985), *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997), *Nehru: The Invention of India* (2003), *Shadows Across the Playing Field: Sixty Years of India-Pakistan Cricket* (2009), *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century* (2012), *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in our Time* (2015), *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (2017), *Why I Am A Hindu* (2018), and *The Hindu Way* (2019) give testimony to his varied interests.

Many of these writings engage with the strained relations between the Hindus and the Muslims whom he considers the essential parts of Indian reality. The traditional Indian *Thali*, a platter of different foods where each item keeps its individual value and identity and constitutes a part of the whole as well, provides Tharoor with a metaphor to project the vision of historically secular, tolerant, and syncretic India in his writing as well as interviews and speeches. *Inglorious Empire* blames the British policy of 'divide and rule' in India for inciting hatred among the different communities of India, particularly between the Hindus and the Muslims. It rounds up the Muslim League and its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah as culprits for splitting 'mother India' into two parts by playing (consciously) in the hands of the British Raj. *Riot* situates the origins of Hindu/Muslim conflict over the site of *Babri Masjid* in this historical moment of partition of India into two independent countries in 1947, a theme that figures repeatedly in much of Tharoor's fiction and non-fiction. The novel evinces a desire for a peaceful cohabitation and harmony among different communities of India by mediating among the competing versions of true nature of 'Indianness' vociferated from

heterogeneous ideological positions. Among these voices a privileging of rational and secularized enunciation of historical India undermines the objectivity of the mediating effort that Tharoor's text seeks to accomplish.

The Sanskritized iconography and terminology of the foundational epic, Mahabharata rewritten in *Great Indian Novel*, saturates the contemporary quotidian Indian reality and provides rubrics for articulations of Indian nationalism. Therefore, "[w]riting *Mahabharatas*, it seems, is by no means a 'medieval' practice but very much part of the ongoing negotiations of 'Indianness' in the postcolonial state" (Wiemann, 2014, p. 86). In the novel, Wiemann continues, Tharoor "superimpose[s] his own selective reading of the epic onto modern Indian history" and confirms "elitist historiography" in the manner employed by the nationalist elite of the freedom struggle against Britain (Wiemann, 2014, p. 87). The mantra of Hindu-inflected nationalism, couched in terminology of secularism, syncretism, and multiculturalism, redeploys the pattern of containing the Muslim difference within the compulsive discourse of Indian nationalism born out of the ethos of Sanskritized Brahmanism. Tharoor's *Riot*, like *Inglorious Empire* and *The Great Indian Novel*, envisions the Indian nation as a historically secular and syncretic polity, a version of historical reality projected by the state institutions. Seyla Benhabib (1994) states that: "Every act of foundation and every act of constitution of a polity may conceal a moment of exclusionary violence which constitutes, defines, and excludes the other" (p. 10). Although Tharoor's *Riot* exposes some of the processes of exclusions and inclusions utilized by the Rightist Hindutva in its idealization of a Hindu nation, its imagining of an all-embracing Indian identity pressurizes the Muslims to assimilate to the demands of the same Sanskritized nationalism. But identity formation "is indeed the site of the appearance of 'differend' in history" (Benhabib, 1994, p.10). This research paper investigates how *Riot* both partakes and resists the constitution and perpetuation of the Muslim differend instituted by exclusionary processes of identity formation.

Literature Review

Jean Francois Lyotard is known for his theories of postmodernism expounded in his book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). In literary studies, his critique of the meta-narratives or grand-narratives as presented in this book remains his most known philosophical idea. James Williams (2000) calls his idea of 'postmodern condition' to be Lyotard's "most famous idea" and his concept of 'differend' and 'sublime' "the most just philosophical and political testimony" (p. 2). He also terms *The Postmodern Condition* as "the most superficial and well known of his works" (Williams, 2000, p. 26). According to Sawyer (2014), the concept of differend is "his self-proclaimed most philosophical work" (p. 51). Simon Malpas (2003) terms *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* as "Lyotard's most philosophically rigorous book" (p. 57). Francois Ost (2015) corroborates Malpas' estimation in his essay, "Disputes and the Differend: Literary Strategies to Say the Unspeakable" (p. 76). In Malpas' (2003) view, critics like Geoffrey Bennington and James Williams claim that *The Postmodern Condition* and *Just Gaming*, "the two earlier texts [,] are little more than rehearsals of arguments that are fully developed in *The Differend*" (p. 58). These statements show that the notion of differend is one of the most significant of Lyotard's ideas.

While *The Postmodern Condition* is a critique of grand narratives of Western society presented in its oft quoted sentence: "Postmodern is incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv), the concept of differend deals with wrongs and injustices meted out to those whose voice is suppressed in constituting those meta-narratives. The relationship between differend and grand narratives is explained by Bill Readings in these words: "Grand narratives claim to totalize the field of narrative so as to organize the succession of historical moments in terms of the projected revelation of a meaning. They, thus, offer to suppress all differends, to translate all narratives into themselves without loss, to make everything speak their language" (Readings, 1991, p. xxv).

Dylan Sawyer's *Lyotard, Literature and the Trauma of the differend* (2014) claims that writing and reading of literature has integral connection with differend. The book studies the occurrence of differend in literary texts from Homer's *Odyssey* to twentieth century texts of Michael Ondaatje and Safran Foer and avers that the primary function of literature is to foreground the occurrence of differend in it. Therefore, "any examination of literature might prove to be an examination of differends" (Sawyer, 2014, p. 7). Bill Readings' *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (1991) deals with Lyotard's concern with the politics of representation. The book stresses the performative aspect of Lyotard's reading strategy which is an ethical practice according to Lyotard. Readings (1991) states that as the performative disrupts the teleology of the meta-narratives and instead foregrounds the contingent nature of the reading practice (literary criticism), in that sense it is an ethical practice.

François Ost's essay "Disputes and the Differend: Literary Strategies to Say the Unspeakable" (2015) distinguishes conflict in differend from that found in legal disputes and claims that "a differend, unlike an ordinary legal dispute, is a disagreement in respect of which the parties do not share a common language or code which might be capable of resolving it" (Ost, 2015, p. 357). Ost's (2015) essay connects this notion of the differend with Lyotard's concept of 'victim' and the 'silence' it entails as a result of the pronouncement of the judgement. Marek Kwiek (1997) in "On the Tragic Differend: Dilemmas of Lyotard-Dilemmas of Postmodernity" divides his task into two part: first one is to "present briefly the Lyotardian project of the differend" and second one is to "present a particular application of the project to more than a literary conflict of two reasons from Antigone (that of Antigone and that of Creon, obviously)" (Kwiek, 1997, pp. 75-6). He seems to posit that the tragic, the differend, and the irresolvable conflicts and contradictions are closely connected terms which might be used interchangeably. In its discussion of one the most influential canonical texts (Sophocles' *Antigone*) of Western literature, the essay opens the avenues for further application of Lyotard's concept of differend to other literary texts.

After studying Lyotard's oeuvre, Anne Tomiche (2001), in her essay, "Lyotard And/On Literature", he puts great emphasis on the "concepts of 'figure' and 'unpresentable', both of which name that which subverts articulated discourse and might be outside or beyond language" (Tomiche, 2001, p. 149). Jacob M. Held's (2005) essay, "Expressing the Inexpressible: Lyotard and the Differend", addresses the question of in/justice, wrongs and the difficulties in expressing them in literary or philosophical formulations. The basic argument of the essay revolves around the assumption that some sort of criteria to judge between two or more competing claims is necessary when adjudicating the conflicts. Held understands the paradoxical nature of the task of expressing wrongs which are inexpressible but concludes that Enlightenment rationality can be the best criteria to redress injustices and wrongs. Held offers this possibility despite the fact that Lyotard's *The Differend* pitches its argument against the rational discourse.

Material and Methods

The concept of differend investigates how certain political ends are pursued in art, literature, and philosophy in their respective endeavors to re/present events of social and cultural reality. In a situation where there is a conflict between the claims of truth and authenticity of two or more than two parties and a judgement is passed, one of the parties is 'silenced'. The party to dispute that is 'silenced' is termed as a victim by Lyotard and such a scenario is termed as differend by Lyotard. He maintains that differend is something other than litigation and can be describes as "a case of conflict between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments" (Lyotard, 1988, p. xi).

The distinction between litigation and a differend remains central to Lyotard's philosophy of differends. The parties to disputes which can be settled in the courts or

tribunals agree to a single “determinate rule of judgement” in a litigation. On the other hand, a differend “is a dispute between at-least two radically heterogeneous or incommensurable language games” and in which case no single ‘rule of judgment’ is available to settle that dispute (Readings, 19991, p.87). Whenever the judgement is made in a differend it is made according to the “rule [that] necessarily belongs to one language or the other. In litigation, the accuser and the accused speak the ‘same language’ as it were, recognize the same law” (Readings, 1991, p. 87). In a differend they speak in a radically heterogeneous idiom (Readings, 19991, p. 87). The nature of research is qualitative as it offers to explicate the modes of representation of phenomena. This type of study usually describes some phenomena, an event, or a problem. The examples of this type of research include “[t]he description of an observed situation, the historical enumeration of events, an account of the different opinions people have about an issue, and a description of the living conditions of a community, etc...” (Kumar, 1999, p.13). I employ inductive approach to study data and proceed from individual instances to broader generalization. Employing Textual Analysis as my research method, I offer an interpretation of Shashi Tharoor’s novel *Riot: A Novel* (2001).

Results and Discussion

Tharoor’s *Riot* begins with two diametrically opposed epigraphs regarding the nature of history. The first one is from Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*: “History is sacred kind of writing”; the second epigraph has been taken from Karl Marx’s *The Holy Family*: “History is nothing but the activity of man in pursuit of his ends” (Tharoor, 2001, p. epigraph). The dialectics of the novel corresponds to these two opposing versions of history and engages with the assumptions behind the contradictory truth claims. The novel tells the story of the murder of an American PhD student in India, “beaten and stabbed to death in Zalilgarh” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 1), in the context of a conflict over the site of “Ram Janmabhoomi, on a disputed site occupied by a disused sixteenth-century mosque, the Babri Masjid” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 4). Zalilgarh, a metonym of Indian demography and social and political realities has the Hindu majority population with pockets of Muslim population, mosques, shops and businesses owned by the Muslims.

Multiple perspectives on Priscilla’s death voiced from heterogeneous ideological positions reflect the wider polemics underlying the communal tensions in India. A volunteer foreign social worker’s death which “doesn’t make that much of a difference in a land of so many deaths” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 11) triggers several registers to diffuse and appropriate the singular event. The rationalist voice of putatively multi-faith and multi-ethnic India, Lakshman (District Magistrate and Priscilla’s lover), Gurinder (District Police Officer), and Professor Sarwar (a Muslim professor of History) projects an idealised view of Indian reality. These idealistic imaginings of Indian nation are contested by Ram Charan Gupta’s exclusivist understanding of Indian nation as Hindu Shastra. Both these voices, despite their mutual antagonisms, excoriate the conspicuously absent figure of separatist Muslims, a figure spoken for by two otherwise contesting ideological and historical positions in the process of coherent self-definition. Inscripting India as a unified entity, however, “presupposes a direct confrontation with the moral and philosophical incongruities and unresolvabilities of history” (Verma, 2000, p. ix). The paradoxical and irresolvable nature of this contentious project is summarised by Priscilla in these words: “There’s a lot of tension in these parts over something called the Ram Janmabhoomi, a temple that Hindus say was destroyed by the Mughal emperor Babar in 1526” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 22).

Lakshman, however, brushes aside this ‘lot of tension’ as marginal and peripheral with regard to (putatively) mainstream secular and tolerant Indian reality by terming Zalilgarh as “armpit of India” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 23). His position as the most powerful person in the district accords him the privilege to ‘effectuate’ the “establishment procedures [of reality] defined by a unanimously agreed-upon protocol” (Lyotard, 1988, p. 4). In Lyotard’s (1988) view, “the publishing industry” and “historical inquiry” work as two major protocols to establish reality (p.4). Lakshman’s idea of India challenges the extremist

Hindus' claims about the place of *Ramjanmabhoomi* at the site of *Babri Masjid* by employing the method of historical inquiry. It, nonetheless, uses the normalizing effectuating methods to suppress the differend of Hindu/Muslim conflict by suggesting that it is a minor phenomenon when viewed in the context of wider Indian reality, a notion negated by the frequency and prevalence hostility among these two largest of Indian communities.

Employing ethnographic and rationalist secular historicizing idioms, Lakshman tells Priscilla some of the basic demographic and historical 'facts' about India: "there are five major sources of division in India- language, region, caste, class and religion" (Tharoor, 2001, p. 42). The religion breeds "communalism- the sense of religious chauvinism that transforms itself into bigotry, and sometimes violence against the followers of other faiths" (Tharoor, 2001, p. 44). Condescendingly acknowledging the threatened status of the Indian Muslims, he evinces a confidence in "creative federalism" and "resilience of Indian Democracy" as "Democracy will solve the problems we're having with some disaffected Sikhs in Punjab; and democracy, more of it, is the only answer for the frustration of India's Muslims too" (Tharoor, 2001, pp. 44-5). The proposed solution to the problems of different marginalized communities of India remains a distant prospect and blunts the immediacy of the life threatening conditions of the Muslims. Moreover, the conversion of the religious differences into political ones forebodes another kind of threat. In a political environment of parliamentary democracy governed by the considerations of personal gains by democrats, the already ghettoized and Jewishized Muslim minority is likely to remain 'unrepresented or underrepresented'. The secular democratic discourse neutralizes the Muslim differend faced by them in the form of rapes, killings, torture, lynchings, and other atrocities committed against them by the rightist Hindus with the active support of government. Linda Alcof (1991) states in her essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others" that "[t]hough the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard" (p. 26). Spivak (1993) insinuates towards this lack in Western concepts when she challenges the naturalness, goodness, and incontestability of the concepts like nation, democracy, and participation as they were "written somewhere else, in the social formations of Western Europe" (p. 60). "Certainly the closed circuit of institutional democratic politics can stifle the differend, it can even make it disappear" (Benhabib, 1994, p. 17). Therefore, Lakshman's proposed solution for addressing the problems faced by the Muslims not only appropriates the voice of the Muslims but also 'stifles' the differend, the differend that has in the first place been effectuated through the forces of democratic institutions of India.

Above all, Lakshman's "representation of the subaltern are inevitably loaded" and are determined by his/her privileged position instead of the consideration of the truthful articulation of subaltern's reality (Kapoor, 2004, p. 631). The core of Lakshman's identity is already situated in the (Hindu) culture and discourse of democracy and democratic institutions. In Kapoor's view, he "can never represent or act from an 'outside', since [he is] always already situated inside discourse, culture, institutions, geopolitics" (Kapoor, 2004, p. 640). Uttered from this interpellated position his enunciations undermine his capacity to speak for the community that is marginalized by this discourse. Democratic and secularist discourses work in tandem to stymie rather than liberate. Lyotard (1988) exposes the role of democracy in stifling the voice of the victims it creates in these words: "In the deliberative politics of modern democracies, the differend is exposed, even though the transcendental appearance of a single finality that would bring it to a resolution persists in helping forget the differend, in making it bearable" (p.147).

The essentialist view of 'retrograde' Muslims, their customs, and Muslim Personal Law as well as of the "very basis of Indianness" (Tharoor, 2001, p. 45) offered from the location of authority creates a dualism between the two largest of Indian communities. These "historical suspicions between Hindus and Muslims could still act as mobilizing principles leading to extreme violence and brutality" (Morey and Tickell, 2005, p. x). Far

from being confined to any 'arm pit of India', the discrimination against the Muslims is widespread phenomena that has spread even to "Middle-class people" who participated in looting the houses of the Muslims in riots of 2002 in Indian state of Gujarat (Roy, 2013, p. 187). Amir Mufti(2007) , in his book, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, confirms this view and states that the video tapes of rapes of the Muslim women were shared and circulated among Middleclass households of India. Both Roy and Mufti compare the situation of Indian Muslims to that of the Jews of Nazi Germany. Roy further states that the patterns of torture and brutalities committed by the Nazis were repeated by the Hindu mobs who destroyed Muslim businesses and who "had computer-generated cadastral lists marking out Muslim homes, shops, businesses and even partnerships...They had not just police protection and police connivance but also covering fire" (Roy, 2013, p. 187). The discrimination against the Muslims, add Roy, were not limited to businesses as they were "not served in restaurants" with their children denied entry into schools while the parents continuously "liv[ing]in dread that their infants might forget what they've been told and give themselves away by saying 'Ammi!' or 'Abba!' in public and invite sudden and violent death"(Roy, 2013, p. 188). Roy's assertion that these crimes against the Muslims were committed by the active support of the 'democratic' government elected by the people undermines the confidence in the healing power of democracy and creative federalism. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell(2005) also speak of the complicity of Indian state in stoking up of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims to gain politically in parliamentary democracy. In their view, the Congress Party, considered to be a secular political outfit and opponent of the rightist Bharitya Janta Party (BJP), "has had a poor record when it comes to making a stand against aggressive communalist discourses, adopting divisive rhetoric and actions when it has been considered politically expedient" (Morey and Tickell, 2005, p. xvii). Their condemnation of the failure of Congress to stand up for and protect the rights of the Muslims confirms Roy's claim, she makes somewhere else, that Congress and BJP are the two sides of the same coin when it comes to the treatment of the Muslims by Indian state and its institutions.

As an important part of this state machinery, Lakshman's stakes are mirrored in the way he presents the view of democratic India which is largely peaceful for and just towards its citizens, despite the five divisions enumerated by him to Priscilla. His argument thus picks and chooses phrases (events) and links them "by eliminating those that are not opportune" (Lyotard, 1988, p. 84). The intended teleology of Lakshman's argument suspends the Muslim differend and seeks to achieve "[a]n internal peace... at the price of perpetual differends on the outskirts" (Lyotard, 1988, p. 151). In other words, Lakshman, instead of advocating the elimination of the Muslim differend, defers it to peripheral concerns of the socio-political responsibilities of the state. His upper-casteist understanding of the Muslim oppression seeks to resolve this dispute through the use of very procedures that engender this victimization in the first place. The rhetoric of Democracy derived from the principles of secularism and rationalism suppresses the dissident voices of the Muslims in order to delineate an image of a peaceful India.

The conflict triggered by construction of *Babri Masjid* or demolition of Ram's temple activates a number of registers of articulation. Occupying the place of heterogeneous symbols of mutually antagonistic religions, cultures, traditions, and ideology along with myriad other differentials, these two religious sites engender a differend between incommensurable versions of reality. "This heterogeneity, for lack of common idiom [that can regulate their conflict], makes consensus impossible" (Lyotard, 1988, pp. 55-6) between the two parties to the conflict. The Muslims and their religious and cultural symbols stand out as unwelcome extrinsic impurities introduced into the harmonious civilization of India when viewed from the subject position of an extremist Hindu like Ram Charan Gupta, a local leader of the Hindus in Zalilgarh. His notion of true Indianness contest Lakshman's syncretic views of Indian nation. Conflating mythical reality with historical epistemology, Charan Gupta tells Randy Diggs, an American journalist covering the story of Priscilla's murder, that "our god Ram, the hero of the epic Ramayana...was born in Ayodhya" and that "in treta-yuga

period of our Hindu calendar, Ayodhya is a town in this state” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 52). Because of the presence of a large number of temples to Ram in the city of Ayodhya, Gupta feels secure in making the logical inference that “[i]t is the Ram Janmabhoomi, the birthplace of Ram” where the most famous of his temples was built but is now missing (Tharoor, 2001, p. 52). The Hindu faith and knowledge “passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth” proves to him that Ram was born where now *Babri Masjid* stands (Tharoor, 2001, p. 120). The Austrian priest Joseph Tiffenthaler’s claim that the “famous temple marking the birth of Ram had been destroyed 250 years earlier and mosque built with its stone” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 120) and the mythological Hindu faith confirm the truth, in his estimation, that “this accursed mosque occupies the most sacred site in Hinduism, our Ram Janmabhoomi” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 121).

The replacement of the *Ram Mandir* with *Babri Masjid* symbolizes hundreds of years of foreign rule of “evil [Muslim]...who are more loyal to a foreign religion, Islam, than to India” (Tharoor, 2001, pp. 53-54). United through the Islamic faith and indifferent to Indian culture, they are seen as the cause of the division of great Indian civilization. This understanding of Muslim what Gupta calls “ghetto mentality” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 54) reflects the assumptions of a “majoritarianism” that “attempt[s] to reshape national identity along Hindu lines, [is] prepared to use democratic and extra-parliamentary means to achieve its aim, and [seeks] to create a purified Hindu culture in a purified Hindu homeland” (Morey and Tickell, 2005, p. x). Gupta’s demonizing view of Muslim practices also shares Lakshman’s evaluation about Muslims’ faith as being ‘retrograde’. His demands of racial purity exert ‘terror’ internally on the Indian Muslims “who are always suspected of not being pure enough” (Lyotard, 1988, p. 103). Another serious risk to the demography of the whole nation is epitomized by ‘prolific fecundity’ of the Muslims: “Muslims are outbreeding the Hindus” and soon they will “outnumber us Hindus in our country, Mr. Diggs” (Tharoor, 2001, pp. 55-6). The pogrom like solution to this threat is offered by Sadhvi Rithambara (a Hindu nationalist ideologue and the founder-chairwoman of Durga Vahini) and quoted by Gupta who proposes that “Hindus should cut the Muslims into little pieces, squeeze out the pips and throw them away” (Tharoor, 2001, p. 57). Arundhati Roy describes the purpose and functioning of Hundreds of RSS *shakhas* and *Saraswati shishu mandirs* established across the country to act upon Sadhvi Rithambara’s injunctions. She claims that these establishments are “no different from, and no less dangerous than, the madrassas all over Pakistan and Afghanistan that spawned the Taliban” (Roy, 2013, p. 193).

Despite the apparently wide ideological gulf between Lakshman and Gupta’s views, they share the pride in India being a democracy. The legitimacy that Gupta accords to the Hindu nation in India, however, “owes nothing to the idea of humanity and everything to the perpetuation of narratives of origin by means of repeated narrations” (Lyotard, 1988, p. 147). In the visualizations of the myths of origins and racial purity the benign Hinduism stands at a higher level of Indian morality than “secularism” as this word cannot “be found in the Vedas” (Tharoor, 2001, pp. 230-231). Gupta’s estimation of the Hindu religion, (Hindu) Indian nation, and Muslims’ place in it contradicts Lakshman’s secularist and syncretic view of historical Indian reality. His alternation between reason and mythology to delineate a seamless Hindu Indian nation exhibits two modulations of the differend. The first kind can be located in historical antagonism between the values and principles of receptive and benign Hinduism and those of secessionist and fundamentalist Islam. The second type of Muslim differend is born out of the superiority accorded to Hinduism as an ideology over other ways of being within Indian social spaces.

Conclusion

Gupta’s extremist Hindutva ideology is contested by a nationalist Muslim professor of History, Muhammad Sarwar, whose ideas of Indian Muslim identity bespeak of his privileged position and situate the current communal tensions within the dialectics of partition of United India in 1947 into India and Pakistan. Through the coercive demands of

this nationalism the experience of differences of religion and culture are driven to the margins of social interaction which, however, remain supreme in the lives of ordinary Muslims of India. Sarwar's invocation of the composite culture and religiosity "becomes almost a form of propaganda for state policies" of community cohesion (Bhanot, 2019, p. 205). The solution he offers for the exclusion and oppression faced by the Muslims of India sounds similar to the one offered by Lakshman through 'more democracy' and 'creative federalism'. This inclusive secularist nationalism, however, "has throughout its history been either covertly or overtly associated with a 'Hindu' majoritarianism that is far from secular (Mondal, 2005, p. 5). Mondal (2005) further claims that "the grammar of politics in India has been communal even when its syntax has been secular" (p.9). Sarwar's claims to a unified Indian "cultural and national identity have a homogenizing logic,...they level out differences, create imaginary and purified forms of identities, and eliminate the non-identical and the differend from their midst" (Benhabib, 1994, p. 20). Sarwar's faith in the unifying potential of the shared Indian myths rehearses Nehru's idea of 'unity in diversity', an idea that still remains to be translated into reality for the majority of Indian Muslims. The secularist and democratic panacea offered by Sarwar and Lakshman "would then be this monster: an archaic, modern politics, a politics of the community as a politics of humanity, a politics of the real origin as a politics of the ideal future" (Lyotard, 1988, p. 152). This mythical democracy and secularity of Indian constitution and society fails to yield verifiable dividends for the Muslims of India. As "Indian nationalism articulate[s] visions of nationhood that [are] implicitly communalist in structure and specifically Hindu majoritarian in emphasis" (Mondal, 2005, p. 10). It can be concluded that the putatively liberating discourses of democracy, rationality, and state secularity become the site of generation and perpetuation of Muslim differend in Shashi Tharoor's novel.

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