



India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond

NAILESHKUMAR R. PATEL

Research Scholar,
Department of English, Mewar University, Chittorgarh
(Rajasthan) India

DR. S. G. CHAUHAN

Principal,
G. D. Modi Arts College, Palanpur
Ph.D. Guide,
Mewar University, Chittorgarh
(Rajasthan) India

India: From Midnight to the Millennium and beyond the title itself suggests that it is a kind of brief analysis of India from 1947 to 2007 from socio-eco-political point of view. It is a kind of peep into the vast arena of India. The book, *India: from Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond* was first published in the 50th anniversary of India's independence, celebrating its five decades as a free country, and raising the questions regarding the story of those first fifty years and future in the 21st century hold for India. And third edition, *India: from Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond* (2007) adds the history of its 6th decade yet, this book is not only a survey of modern Indian history, it touches upon many of the principal events that to place in the last five decades..... It is a subjective account. *India: From Midnight to the Millennium And Beyond* is chapterised into ten different headings and each of these has its own importance in making a well balanced, informative and highly readable book presenting the current scenario of India. These ten chapters are designed in such a way:

1. 'A Myth and an Idea'
2. 'Two Assassinations and a Funeral:
3. Deaths and a Dynasty'
4. 'Unity, Diversity, and Other Contradictions:
5. From the Milk Miracle to the Malayali Miracle'
6. 'Scheduled Castes, Unscheduled Change'
7. 'Of Indians and Other Minorities'
8. NRIs: "Never Relinquished India" or
9. "Not Really Indian?"
10. 'The Hindu Rate of Growth, and Other Agnostic Legacies'
11. "Better Fed Than Free":
12. The Emergency and Other Urgencies
13. 'India at Forty Nine: Notes Toward an Impression Of Indian
14. Society and Culture Today'
15. 'A Future without Shock'

Keeping in mind the limitation of time and space, one would prefer to discuss all the above chapters in a single harmonious tone rather than going through one by one in detail. A 2007 book, *India: from Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond*, talks of various topics like caste, Indian democracy, the legacy of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the partition of India and India's transition from a socialist economy to a free market. It is a comprehensive analysis of all walks of Indian life after 1947. However, Shashi Tharoor's main interest has been political events, including the emergency years, Mrs. Gandhi's election debacle, rise of the right-wing Hindutva brigade, and the economic reforms. With a lucid and lively style, he discusses India's transition from a socialist economy to a free market and expresses

satisfaction at the Indian leadership's realization that economic interdependence is not incompatible with political independence. The text is interspersed with lively and humorous anecdotes of Tharoor's own childhood and youth that adds a charming touch to the book. Superbly written and analyzed, this book offers an excellent insight into a huge country and its diverse people. If one were to look for one common word to describe them, that word could only be 'Indian'. As mentioned in Washington Post Book World: *India: from Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond* is an eloquent argument for the importance of India to the future of the industrialized world. Shashi Tharoor shows compellingly that India stands as the intersection of the most significant questions facing the world today. If democracy leads to inefficient political infighting, should it be sacrificed in the interest of economic well-being? Does religious fundamentalism provide a way for countries in the developing world to assert their identity in the face of Western hegemony, for is there a case for pluralism and diversity amid cultural and religious traditions? Does the entry of Western consumer goods threaten a country's economic self-sufficiency, and is protectionism the only guarantee of independence? The answer to such question will determine what the nature of our world is in the 21st century. And since Indians account for almost one-sixth of the world's population today, their choices will resonate throughout the globe. Shashi Tharoor deals with this vast theme in a work of remarkable depth and startling originality, combining elements of political scholarship, personal reflection, memoir, fiction, and polemic, all illuminated in vivid and compelling prose. The book's greatest strength is that on all the most important political and economic questions facing India today.

India, the second most populous country in the world after China, has a history stretching back to thousands of years, with enormous diversity in culture, language and ethnicity. On its unpaved lanes, bullock carts jostle for room with the latest four wheel drives while motorists maneuver their vehicles to avoid cows enjoying their siesta on the nation's major roads and highways. India that boasts an excellent Info-Tech industry also houses the largest slum in the world.

While the Indian civilization is one of the oldest in the world, dating back thousands of years, the modern Indian republic is relatively young, having existed for a little more than half a century. The complexities of the blending of the old with the new that have produced an India of immense contradictions and diversity is what Shashi Tharoor's *India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond* is about. When first published in 1997, fifty years had passed since the clock struck midnight on 15th August 1947, the day India became independent. Five decades of independence was time for some introspection. Writing about the bureaucratic corruption and criminalization of politics, Tharoor displays that Nehru was not personally corrupt, but his legacy of socialism has recently come under increasing attack. In the current government, one of the first appointees, Taslimuddin, minister of state, has 18 criminal cases pending against him. The current defence minister, it is widely believed, won his seat by pandering to the Muslims and the students who wanted to be freed of laws restricting their cheating opportunities on exams! As Harkishen Singh Surjeet, a member of parliament, presents the current bureaucratic corruption and criminalization of politics, out of 535 members of the parliament in 1996, as many as 100 have criminal records. The former railway minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav, is also involved in the big 'Fodder Scan'. It is interesting to read an announcement by Dr. M. S. Gill, Chief of the Election Commission, that in the next election no candidates will be allowed to stand for elective offices without criminal records.

As Shashi Tharoor wonders whether Indians as a nation have achieved the goal that they set for themselves, the answer is not difficult to guess. There is poverty, illiteracy, rampant corruption, rundown health-care system, political turmoil - the list goes on. Yet there are causes to celebrate, too. Democracy has taken firm root in Indian soil, making it possible to preserve the pluralist identity of this huge country. There have been setbacks, such as separatist movements in Punjab, Kashmir and the North East, and criminalization and corruption in the political system. The author presents the irony of Indian political system in his own words:

The most dangerous phenomenon of independent India's political life, is the criminalization of politics, for many a lawbreaker has found it useful to become a lawmaker.²

Democracy, with its emphasis on consensus and mandate, has also made it quite difficult for the government to take some serious steps on any front, whether it is economic reforms or the population control programme to curtail Indian burgeoning numbers. Here Tharoor further notes that there is no alternative, as democracy alone can preserve the pluralism of India's people, a people who have no single thread of language, caste, creed, costume or custom to unite them. Moreover, the ballot box has been a great tool to fight that scourge of Hindu religion, casteism. Though, an affirmative-action programme has been in force since 1950 to reserve jobs and opportunities for the people of the lower castes. A few years ago Uttar Pradesh, the largest state of India, elected as its Chief Minister a poor woman Mayavati from a low Hindu caste, an event that might not have occurred fifty years before. This in itself is cause enough for cheering the Indian democracy.

References

1. Sondra, Myers (2002). The Democracy Reader. New York: International Debate Education Association. p. 169.
2. Tharoor, Shashi (2007). India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond. New Delhi: Penguin Books. p. 112.
3. Ibid.
4. <http://www.flipkart.com/book/india-shashi-tharoor-midnight-millennium/0143103245>
5. <http://www.curledup.com/india.htm>