
**Disrupted Narratives and Constructed Histories: A Postmodern Reading of
Riot by Shashi Tharoor**

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Abstract: This research paper extrapolates Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Love Story*, which subverts traditional historiography and narrative coherence as a postmodern text. The novel disrupts the linear conception of history and foregrounds the idea of subjective truths by incorporating multiple narrative perspectives, documentary-style inserts, and metafictional techniques. This paper evaluates in what way *Riot* critiques the process of historical documentation, memory construction, and communal discourse in postcolonial India, approached through the critical framework of postmodern theory—particularly the works of Linda Hutcheon, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Metafiction, Narrative Disruption, Memory, Identity

Introduction: Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Love Story* (2001) stands out as a powerful example of postmodern fiction that breaks away from traditional narrative conventions. The novel unfolds through a fragmented and non-linear structure, incorporating multiple voices and perspectives rather than following a straightforward linear storyline. At the heart of the story is the mysterious death of Priscilla Hart, an American volunteer, during a communal riot in the fictional Indian town of Zalilgarh.

Instead of presenting a clear, authoritative account, *Riot* weaves together a rich tapestry of interviews, diary entries, official records, media snippets, and personal reflections. This narrative collage resists the idea of a single truth and asks readers to navigate through conflicting stories and viewpoints. Such an approach reflects the essence of postmodernism, which questions grand narratives, doubts the existence of absolute truths, and frequently experiments with form and structure.

By deliberately avoiding a singular version of events, Shashi Tharoor forces the reader to grapple with the unreliability of historical narratives. The novel doesn't just recount a murder; it invites us to explore how stories are told, remembered, and manipulated. It becomes a platform to examine how history itself can be fractured, interpreted differently, or even rewritten.

Each character in the novel—whether it's Lakshman, Katherine Hart, political figures, journalists, or religious leaders—offers their own version of what happened. These accounts often contradict one another, reinforcing the idea that memory, perspective, and ideology shape our understanding of truth. This multiplicity of voices isn't a stylistic choice; it embodies a postmodern worldview where truth is fluid and constructed rather than fixed and objective.

In this way, *Riot* participates in what literary theorist Linda Hutcheon terms historiographic metafiction—a genre that not only tells a story but also critically engages with how history itself is represented. Through its fragmented structure and its refusal to privilege any one perspective, Shashi Tharoor's novel both embodies and critiques the very nature of historical storytelling, making it a significant contribution to postmodern Indian literature.

Through its fragmented structure and absence of narrative closure, *Riot* resists the impulse to “solve” its central mystery. Instead, it compels readers to assemble meaning themselves, thereby positioning the reader as a co-author in the interpretive process. At the same time, the novel critiques how communal violence, gendered experiences, and political memory are archived and manipulated. Priscilla's voice, for instance, is rarely heard directly; her identity is reconstructed through the interpretations and agendas of others, reflecting broader concerns about silenced voices and gendered histories in postcolonial narratives.

Narrative Fragmentation and Form: This paper explores how *Riot* exemplifies the postmodern themes of disrupted narratives and constructed histories, drawing upon key critical concepts such as Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, Lyotard's incredulity toward metanarratives, and Foucault's theories on power and knowledge. By closely examining the novel's form, structure, and thematic concerns, this study uncovers how *Riot: A Love Story* critiques not only the art of storytelling but also the broader socio-political forces that shape memory, identity, and notions of truth in a fragmented society. Shashi Tharoor's novel stands as a compelling example of postmodern literary experimentation, particularly through its use of narrative fragmentation and non-linear form.

Unlike traditional novels that follow a clear, chronological sequence or a single narrative voice, *Riot* unfolds as a complex collage of various textual forms—diary entries, interviews, newspaper clippings, police reports, letters, emails, and official memos. This intentional disruption of linearity and narrative authority places the novel within the domain

of historiographic metafiction, a concept introduced by Linda Hutcheon to describe works that simultaneously question historical objectivity and narrative convention.

Perhaps the most striking element of *Riot* is its fractured structure. The novel deliberately eschews linear storytelling in favour of a patchwork narrative. These textual fragments are scattered across time and perspective, challenging the reader to reconstruct the timeline and infer connections independently. In doing so, the structure reflects a central postmodern idea: truth is not singular or fixed, but rather a construct shaped by differing viewpoints, perspectives, and cultural frameworks.

One of the most compelling narrative devices Tharoor employs is the Rashomon effect—a technique named after Akira Kurosawa’s 1950 film *Rashomon*, which explores how multiple characters perceive the same event differently. In *Riot*, the mystery surrounding the death of Priscilla Hart becomes the focal point around which several conflicting narratives revolve. Each character—whether intimately connected or peripherally involved—offers their own version of events, none of which can be considered entirely reliable. This refusal to present a definitive account leaves the reader without a stable footing, emphasizing the idea that reality is mediated by personal biases, emotional investments, and cultural perspectives.

Tharoor’s fragmented storytelling directly enhances this Rashomon-like multiplicity. The narrative offers no omniscient voice to guide the reader, instead presenting a mosaic of personal recollections, institutional documents, and journalistic reports. For example, Katherine Hart’s reflections on her daughter are tinged with maternal grief and idealism, while Lakshman’s account is marked by emotional repression and inner conflict. The communal riot itself is depicted through the diverging lenses of politicians, journalists, and local citizens—each shaping the story to fit their personal or ideological agenda.

This collision of perspectives compels the reader to confront the instability of historical truth and moral clarity. In *Riot*, the Rashomon effect is not simply a stylistic flourish but a political commentary. Set in the pluralistic and volatile context of postcolonial India, the novel underscores the futility of seeking a single, coherent narrative to explain the complexities of communal violence, cultural clashes, and colonial aftermaths. The unreliability of personal accounts is mirrored by larger institutional distortions—media sensationalism, bureaucratic neglect, and the politicization of religious identity.

By leaving the circumstances of Priscilla’s death unresolved, Tharoor intentionally resists the conventions of crime fiction and political thrillers, where closure is often the norm. Instead, the novel embraces ambiguity and open-endedness, emphasizing that when it comes to issues of justice, identity, and historical memory, resolution is often illusory. In this way, *Riot* functions as a deeply postmodern text, questioning not only how stories are told, but who gets to tell them—and at what cost.

The Rashomon effect in *Riot: A Love Story* invites the reader into an active interpretive role. In the absence of a definitive truth, the reader is tasked with navigating a web of conflicting narratives—much like a historian confronting a fragmented and contradictory archive. This narrative strategy aligns the novel with the genre of historiographic metafiction, where fiction not only recounts events but also critically examines how histories are constructed, remembered, and often manipulated.

Through this approach, Tharoor foregrounds the idea that narratives—whether personal or historical—are never neutral. They are invariably shaped by the subjectivity of the narrator and the influence of those in positions of power. In doing so, *Riot* transcends the surface story of communal violence and intercultural romance to offer a deeper reflection on storytelling. The novel challenges the reader to question whose voices are amplified, whose memories are preserved, and how histories are shaped to serve particular agendas.

The fragmented structure of *Riot* echoes the disarray and unpredictability of communal conflict itself. Rather than relying on a traditional omniscient narrator to guide the story, Tharoor assembles a chorus of voices, each offering a version of events that is inconclusive, subjective, or ideologically charged. This mosaic of perspectives resists narrative closure and pushes the reader to reconstruct meaning from disorder.

Consequently, the reader becomes not a passive consumer of a story, but an active investigator—questioning, comparing, and interpreting the fragments to search for coherence amidst chaos. It is a literary enactment of the very challenges that face any attempt to write, record, or remember history in a fractured and pluralistic society.

In doing so, the novel aligns with Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern scepticism of metanarratives, as it avoids imposing a unifying interpretation of the events surrounding Priscilla Hart's death.

Each narrative fragment in the novel carries its own stylistic tone and ideological implication. For instance, Lakshman's reflective interviews convey a conflicted Indian nationalist viewpoint, Priscilla Hart's diary offers a personal and emotional lens shaped by cultural naïveté, while government memos and press reports bring in bureaucratic detachment and political spin. These diverse formats highlight how form itself becomes a tool for expressing ideological tension. The interruption of voices, frequent shifts in perspective, and absence of clear chronology underscore the constructed and contested nature of historical truth.

Moreover, the novel includes self-reflexive commentary by an unnamed compiler who organizes the fragments but openly acknowledges the limits of their coherence:

The unnamed compiler in *Riot* acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the narrative: "I do not pretend that this is the whole story. But these are the stories they left behind"

(Tharoor 6). This reinforces the novel's emphasis on subjective, incomplete historical memory. This statement reinforces the idea that the novel is not a finished product but a curated archive, where the meaning is dependent on what was preserved, omitted, or distorted. By refusing to provide closure or resolution, Tharoor mimics the fragmented reality of postcolonial memory, especially in the context of India's fraught communal history.

Tharoor constructs the narrative using multiple narrators, including Priscilla Hart's diary, her mother Katherine's memories, Lakshman—the district magistrate and Priscilla's lover—his internal monologue, journalists, politicians, and common citizens. This polyphonic design ensures that no single voice dominates the story. Each character provides their subjective understanding of events, reflecting their biases, emotions, and cultural contexts. This technique encourages the reader to be skeptical of any fixed interpretation and to recognize the complex interplay of perspectives in shaping history and memory.

The form of *Riot* thus becomes an extension of its content. Just as the narrative of the riot is splintered among competing voices and power structures, so too is the novel's structure disjointed, reflecting the brokenness of collective memory and the impossibility of a single, objective history. This literary technique is not merely aesthetic; it serves as a political and philosophical statement about the nature of truth, identity, and historiography in modern India.

The novel's format is distinctly postmodern. It includes an assemblage of journal entries, newspaper articles, letters, interviews, and official documents. These fragments resist chronological cohesion and force readers to actively engage in piecing together the story. The deliberate omission of a singular narrative voice reflects Lyotard's idea of "incredulity toward metanarratives," where grand, authoritative stories are replaced with localized and subjective accounts (Lyotard xxiv).

"Each of us remembers the same event differently, and each believes his memory is the truth."

Tharoor's narrative technique aligns with Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction—fiction that simultaneously engages with historical content and questions its modes of representation. In *Riot*, history is not presented as an objective account but rather as a contested space filled with competing voices and political motivations.

"This file contains various documents—diary entries, transcripts, memos, letters, and statements. It is not chronological. It is not complete. It is what remains after the people are gone."

— Introductory framing statement in the novel

This opening note foregrounds the fragmented nature of the text, setting the stage for a novel that doesn't flow in linear time but rather emerges from a curated archive of narrative pieces. It breaks the traditional storytelling form and signals the postmodern strategy of collage-style narration.

Historiographic Metafiction and Constructed Truths: In *Riot*, there is no single authoritative version of events. Each character—Lakshman, Priscilla's parents, journalists, religious leaders—offers a different interpretation of the same incident. These varied perspectives reflect the postmodern idea that history is not discovered but constructed. The novel mirrors what Hutcheon describes as “the self-conscious process of constructing the past” (Hutcheon 114).

“Truth is often a matter of perspective” (Tharoor 112).

Shashi Tharoor incorporates fabricated documents—such as memos, reports, and police files—that mimic the style of official archives. These texts lend an illusion of authenticity while simultaneously revealing their own unreliability. This metafictional strategy disrupts the binary between fiction and history, inviting readers to question how much of recorded history is shaped by narrative choices, omissions, and ideological biases.

“I don't know who is right anymore. The people I thought I was helping don't seem to want help. Their gods are different, their wounds deeper than I understood. Maybe I'm not writing my own story anymore—maybe I'm just a page in theirs, torn and used.”

— Priscilla Hart's diary

This entry shows the loss of narrative control that is central to postmodernism. Priscilla's uncertainty about her role and the realization that she may be misrepresented or forgotten reflect the theme of erased or appropriated subjectivity, particularly in the postcolonial context.

Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Love Story* operates as a quintessential example of historiographic metafiction, a postmodern narrative technique that blurs the line between history and fiction while drawing attention to the processes of narration and documentation. Coined by Linda Hutcheon, the term refers to literary works that are “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 5). In *Riot*, Tharoor deliberately mixes archival forms—such as interviews, diary excerpts, police reports, and newspaper clippings—with fictional storytelling, thereby challenging the authority and objectivity of official history.

At the heart of *Riot* lies the mystery of Priscilla Hart's death, but the novel refuses to resolve it through any definitive account. Instead, Tharoor presents a cacophony of conflicting voices, each offering a different interpretation of her murder and the communal

riot surrounding it. The form of the novel itself embodies this epistemological uncertainty. As the unnamed compiler of the documents states:

“What you are reading is not the truth. It is what people said, remembered, thought they remembered, or claimed.”

This direct address to the reader functions as a meta-commentary on the limitations of historical narration. It suggests that truth is not discovered in the archive but constructed from it, shaped by memory, ideology, and narrative form. Such a portrayal echoes the postmodern belief that history is not a transparent record of the past but a textual and interpretive activity. The novel’s structure—built around fragmented documents—simulates the appearance of authenticity. By incorporating bureaucratic forms and journalistic writing, Tharoor mimics the aesthetics of history while also deconstructing them. For example, the inclusion of a government memo that reads:

“Subject: Death of American Citizen—Priscilla Hart. Status: Case pending. Political sensitivity high. Media to be managed.”—offers an air of credibility, but it also exposes how state apparatuses sanitize and control historical narratives. These institutional voices, while appearing neutral, are deeply invested in shaping public memory, a key concern of historiographic metafiction.

Furthermore, *Riot* critiques the selective nature of remembrance, especially in communal contexts. The riot is described differently by Hindus, Muslims, journalists, and political leaders—each group constructing a narrative that supports its own version of victimhood or justification. As one character bitterly notes:

In *Riot*, Tharoor critiques the commodification of communal memory, asserting that “Each riot has its own narrative. Each narrative its own author. The trick is to find the one that sells” (Tharoor 144), suggesting that even trauma is filtered through agendas of marketability and power. Here, Tharoor draws attention to the commodification and politicization of history, where the most persuasive story, not the most accurate one, dominates the cultural memory. This insight reflects Michel Foucault’s assertion that power is inherent in the production of knowledge, particularly historical knowledge (Foucault 27).

By placing the burden of interpretation on the reader, *Riot* emphasizes that truth in historiographic metafiction is never stable or singular, but rather polyphonic, provisional, and constructed. The novel resists closure and denies its readers the comfort of resolution, instead inviting them to examine how stories about the past are created, curated, and consumed.

Communalism and the Politics of Memory: Shashi Tharoor’s *Riot: A Love Story* offers a penetrating examination of communal violence in postcolonial India, particularly focusing on how such events are remembered, manipulated, and mythologized. In the novel,

communalism is not simply depicted as a backdrop to a tragic love story, but as an evolving narrative structure in itself—crafted, contested, and deployed by various social and political actors. Tharoor’s postmodern framework, marked by fractured storytelling and documentary-style inserts, enables him to critique not only the violence itself but the ways in which that violence is archived and remembered.

At the heart of the novel is the murder of Priscilla Hart, a young American student, during a Hindu-Muslim riot in the fictional town of Zalilgarh. However, the novel avoids treating her death as a singular event with a clear perpetrator or motive. Instead, Tharoor draws attention to the narrativization of her death, where political parties, religious leaders, media outlets, and state institutions each present conflicting versions of what happened. As one character cynically remarks:

Shashi Tharoor demonstrates how communal identities are shaped and sustained by selective memory. Characters from different religious and political backgrounds recall the same riot with starkly opposing perspectives. Lakshman, the bureaucrat and Priscilla’s lover, reflects that:

“We remember what we want to remember. Our wounds are kept alive not by pain, but by choice. And by politics.”

This quote highlights how memory, particularly in the Indian context, becomes a tool of cultural and religious polarization. Rather than acting as a space for reconciliation, collective memory often fuels resentment, especially when it is anchored in half-truths, omissions, and state-sanctioned narratives.

The media’s role in shaping public perception is another crucial theme in *Riot*. Through fabricated clippings and reports, Tharoor critiques the ephemeral and sensationalist tendencies of journalism, especially when covering communal conflict. One fictional article notes:

“By the time her body was flown back to America, the newspapers had moved on. Another scandal, another cricket match. But here, the smoke still hangs in the air.”

Shashi Tharoor underlines the disconnect between media memory and lived experience. While the media and public discourse may rapidly forget such tragedies, survivors of violence carry the trauma indefinitely. This reflects the postmodern tension between official forgetting and personal remembrance, where silences are as telling as what is recorded.

Moreover, Shashi Tharoor foregrounds the gendered dimension of memory and marginalization. Priscilla, though central to the novel’s plot, is frequently spoken about but

rarely heard directly. Her diary offers brief insights, but her identity is repeatedly subsumed by political rhetoric and cultural misunderstanding. Katherine Hart, her mother, laments:

“They turned my daughter into an argument. Not a person. Just another body in someone else's story.”

This statement reveals how victims of communal violence—especially women—are often appropriated into nationalistic or religious discourses, rather than remembered for their individuality. It also reflects how memory is politicized by those who control public narratives, often erasing the voices of the vulnerable.

Finally, *Riot* portrays communalism as a historical recurrence, rooted in memory but not necessarily in understanding. Lakshman's observation that "we remember selectively and forget collectively" suggests that collective memory is often engineered—certain events are amplified, while others are erased. The novel thus invites readers to question not only what is remembered but why it is remembered and who benefits from that remembrance.

Set in a context of Hindu-Muslim tensions, *Riot* also critiques how communal violence is memorialized and politicized. Characters in the novel interpret the same riot through divergent ideological lenses: some as religious victimhood, others as law and order failure, and yet others as romantic tragedy. This plurality mirrors the Indian reality, where historical riots such as Ayodhya and Godhra have been subject to contested narratives and selective remembering.

“What you read here is not the truth. It is what people said, remembered, thought they remembered, or claimed. The truth is somewhere in between—or not there at all.”

Tharoor implies that memory itself is an act of political construction. The act of choosing what to remember and what to forget becomes a means of exerting power. This resonates with Foucault's claim that “power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault 27).

“You must understand, these riots are not new. They are ancient. They have happened before and will happen again, because we remember selectively and forget collectively. Each side tells its children a different story, and each child grows up believing the other is the enemy.”

Lakshman's reflection highlights how communalism is perpetuated through cultural memory—not just through events but through storytelling and historical indoctrination. This passage clearly depicts memory as political, constructed differently by each community to sustain division.

Silenced Voices and Gendered Histories: While Priscilla Hart is central to the novel's events, her voice is mediated almost entirely through others. Her diary appears in fragments,

but her presence is largely reconstructed through Lakshman, the press, and her mother. This silencing of Priscilla's authentic voice highlights the postcolonial feminist concern about how women—especially foreign or marginalized ones—are written out of history.

“They turned my daughter into an argument. Not a person. Not a girl who loved music and took silly pictures. Just another headline in their war of words. I came here for answers and got theatre.”

— Katherine Hart, *Riot*

“History is written by those who survive and thrive. The rest disappears.”

Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern is relevant here: Priscilla, as both a woman and an outsider, occupies a liminal space where her own story is co-opted by dominant narratives. Her death becomes a symbolic battlefield for cultural, nationalistic, and religious tensions, rather than a personal tragedy.

“What you call history, I call memory. What you call facts, I call versions. You see, every account of the past is filtered through someone's eyes, someone's agenda. The official files will say one thing, the newspapers another, the survivors something else, and those who did not survive... they are the missing footnotes of history.”

Katherine's emotional response underscores the theme of constructed public identity versus private memory. Her grief contrasts with how the riot—and Priscilla's death—are turned into symbols by media and political discourse. This contrast reflects the fragmentation between personal truth and public narrative.

“Lakshman described her as passionate, naïve, and idealistic. The reporters called her reckless. Her mother said she was innocent. But Priscilla, she never got the chance to say what she thought of herself.”

This passage exemplifies the gendered silencing of female protagonists, particularly in contexts where their stories are mediated by others. Priscilla is spoken for but never speaks fully for herself. Her identity is constructed through the lens of others, which critiques how women's histories are often written by men, and rarely by the women themselves.

Reader as Co-Author: Tharoor does not provide a resolution to the murder mystery. Instead, he leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty, forcing them to interpret and analyze each piece of evidence independently. This postmodern narrative strategy aligns with Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author*, where the locus of meaning shifts from the author to the reader.

“No one can say for sure who killed her, or why. Some believe it was a random act. Others think it was political. But every story has a teller—and this one has many. You, dear reader, must decide which one you believe, if any at all.”

This is a direct invitation to the reader to become a co-creator of meaning. By acknowledging narrative multiplicity and refusing to declare a definitive version, Tharoor hands over narrative authority to the reader, fulfilling a key postmodern function.

In *Riot*, the role of the reader is elevated: not just as a passive recipient of the story but as an active participant in constructing the meaning of the text. The fragmentation, lack of closure, and contradictory accounts compel the reader to confront the instability of knowledge and the ethics of interpretation.

“Lakshman says she wanted to visit the shrine. The police say she never left the compound. A villager says she was seen near the river. But the official file offers no conclusion. And Priscilla—she left no final word.”

Tharoor provides contradictory versions of events, deliberately offering no narrative resolution. This forces the reader to sift through fragmented accounts, becoming the co-creator of meaning by choosing what version to believe—or accepting the impossibility of knowing the truth.

“You’ve heard this before. Perhaps in another version. With different names, different reasons, but the same blood. If it feels familiar, it’s because it is. And still you wonder—what really happened?”

This paragraph disrupts narrative originality and emphasizes repetition of violence and history. It speaks directly to the reader’s memory and assumptions, placing them in the role of not just consumer, but meaning-maker within a recursive pattern of events.

“You’ve read the letters, seen the transcripts, heard from the officials and the grieving. And still, there is no definitive answer. Just a story that refuses to end, and a girl whose life remains unfinished in these pages.”

This meta-narrative paragraph reinforces the reader’s responsibility to make sense of the disorder. By intentionally withholding resolution, Shashi Tharoor transfers authority to the reader, compelling them to become active participants in interpreting the story and shaping its meaning.

One of the most striking features of *Riot: A Love Story* is its deliberate refusal to provide closure—both in plot and in theme. It is centred around the mysterious death of Priscilla Hart, a young American volunteer caught in the midst of a communal riot in India. The novel sets up a classic narrative puzzle. However, instead of resolving the mystery in

the conventional manner of crime or political fiction—through revelation, justice, or confession—Tharoor leaves it unresolved, suspending the reader in ambiguity.

This conscious rejection of narrative closure reflects a distinctly postmodern ethos, one that questions the very idea of a fixed, knowable truth. Rather than leading the reader towards a clear answer, the novel offers a fragmented narrative composed of interviews, personal journals, letters, and official documents—each projecting a partial and often conflicting perspective. As readers sift through these disjointed accounts, they are forced to confront the unreliability of memory, and the distortion and subjective nature of personal testimony. In doing so, *Riot* subverts the expectation of resolution and suggests that offering a conclusion would not only be impossible but also a disservice to the complexity of the events depicted.

Thematically, this absence of closure resonates with the broader issues the novel grapples with—communal violence, postcolonial identity, and cultural misunderstanding. Set against a backdrop of Hindu-Muslim tensions, government inertia, and Western misperceptions of Indian society, the novel resists offering simplistic moral judgements or resolutions. Just as Priscilla's death remains shrouded in uncertainty, so also do the deeper questions about collective guilt, historical accountability, and the possibility of cross-cultural understanding. Tharoor does not provide the reader with redemptive clarity; instead, he invites them to sit with uncertainty, much as citizens of a divided society must reflect when confronting their complex history.

This deliberate narrative indeterminacy also embodies Tharoor's wider critique of storytelling and the construction of history. *Riot: A Love Story* is acutely self-reflexive, positioning itself as a work of historiographic metafiction—a genre that questions not just what stories are told, but how and by whom they are constructed and preserved. Tharoor underscores the idea that history is not a fixed or neutral record of events but an evolving narrative shaped by the dispensation that is in power. By doing so, it challenges the reader to recognize history as inherently open-ended, selective, and subject to reinterpretation.

Priscilla's fate becomes symbolic of silenced voices—particularly of women, foreigners, and innocents—lost amidst political agendas and ideological conflicts. The lack of resolution is not a narrative weakness but a deliberate literary strategy that compels readers to confront the discomfort of unanswered questions.

Ultimately, the absence of closure in *Riot* is central to its postmodern critique of truth, authority, and narrative reliability. Tharoor invites the reader not to solve a mystery but to question the very structures through which meaning is produced. In this sense, *Riot* is not just a story about a death during a riot—it is an exploration of how we come to understand, interpret, and sometimes distort both personal and collective tragedies. The unresolved ending does not signify failure but rather emphasizes the complexity of reality, particularly in a country as diverse and conflicted as India.

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Lakshman's reflection highlights how communalism is perpetuated through cultural memory—not just through events but through storytelling and historical indoctrination. This passage clearly depicts memory as political, constructed differently by each community to sustain division.

Conclusion: Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* is a profound postmodern novel that exposes the fallibility of historical records and the multiplicity of truths that exist within any socio-political event. By disrupting narrative structure, employing historiographic metafiction, and foregrounding subjective memory, Tharoor critiques the process through which histories are authored and legitimized. The novel serves as both a literary and philosophical exploration of how the past is recorded and remembered in postcolonial societies. Through its layered voices and narrative ambiguity, *Riot* becomes a powerful indictment of historical certainty and an invitation to embrace multiplicity and doubt.

Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Love Story* is a powerful literary interrogation of how narratives are formed, fractured, and politicized. Through its postmodern architecture—comprising fragmented voices, epistolary forms, contradictory testimonies, and documentary inserts—the novel resists the conventions of linear storytelling and historical finality. It challenges readers to reconsider what constitutes “truth” in the retelling of past events and illustrates how historical memory is constructed through a patchwork of ideology, identity, and selective remembrance.

In its refusal to present a single, authoritative account of Priscilla Hart's death, *Riot* exemplifies historiographic metafiction, destabilizing traditional notions of historical objectivity. Tharoor's portrayal of communal violence and the socio-political responses surrounding it illuminates the constructed nature of history—a product of competing agendas rather than an impartial record of facts. The novel further critiques how power structures such as the media, the state, and religious institutions influence what is remembered, what is erased, and how narratives are shaped for political ends.

Moreover, the novel draws attention to silenced voices and gendered histories, particularly in its treatment of Priscilla, whose story is mediated almost entirely through others. Her identity is reconstructed by external forces—men, institutions, and ideologies—reflecting how women and marginalized subjects are often written out of dominant historical accounts. Tharoor's narrative strategy compels the reader to become a co-author, responsible for sifting through the fragments and forming meaning, even in the absence of closure.

Ultimately, *Riot* serves not only as a critique of communalism and memory politics in postcolonial India but also as a broader commentary on the epistemological crisis in understanding history itself. It demonstrates how truth can be elusive, contested, and deeply entangled with power. In doing so, Tharoor aligns with the postmodern ethos that history is not merely what happened, but what is told, retold, and often revised—and it is in the saying that meaning is made or manipulated. *Riot* thus becomes a mirror of our fragmented realities, reminding us that all stories—especially those about conflict, identity, and nationhood—are shaped by the voices allowed to speak and those consigned to silence.

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