



# A Social Cognitive Approach to Shashi Tharoor's *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*

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**Abstract**— *An Era of Darkness*, a speech by Shashi Tharoor at Oxford Union in England in 2015, came in print in October 2016. The speech was mostly devoted to dispelling the notion of the benefits of British rules, such as democracy and geographic and political unity. However, the book was slightly modified further to graphically record the blinding darkness of British rule in India. This book undoubtedly serves as an eye-opener for the previous and current generations of Indians. In this book, Shashi Tharoor explores how the racist, selfish British brutally exploited India - starving its people, taking their wealth, tearing apart its social structure, and leaving it with a collapsed economy, an unfit democracy, and bewildered modernity. The objective of this research is to analyse the novel using the social cognition concept.

**Keywords**— *British Rule, Era of Darkness, Imperialism, Indian Economy, Oppression.*

## INTRODUCTION

In this book, the author discusses the black period of India's impact on pre-independent India. During that period, Indians suffered from various problems due to the British Indian movement and the colonial system of India. Here the author has pointed out the influence of cognitive-based knowledge about Indian history and the Indian political system. It includes various movements, incidents and good decisions of the Indian people. This book consists of 8 chapters. Each chapter is discussed various issues in the Indian and British contexts very elaborately.

### Cognitive theory

Cognitive theories of human behaviour and decision-making models became popular in the early 1970s and 1980s as a response to behaviourism. The psychological literature supports that human beings maintain several thought distortions, especially about a venture. Illusions of control refer to a belief that one has a greater amount of control over the conjecture outcome than would be expected.

Both the creative process and the creative person are emphasised by cognitive theories: the process emphasizes the significance of cognitive mechanisms as a foundation for creative thought, and the person takes into

account individual differences in such mechanisms. Some cognitive theories emphasize universal abilities like memory or attention, while others emphasise individual differences like those revealed by tasks that require divergent thinking. Some theories place emphasis on conscious actions, while others place emphasis on preconscious, implicit, or unintentional processes.

Cognitive theories explain the mind as the interaction of mental representations and the processes that operate on them. Neither representation nor process is sufficient by itself. Representations do not do anything without processes to operate on them, and processes do not do anything without representations to operate on.

### Social cognition

It is a broad term to describe cognitive processes related to perception, understanding, and implementation of linguistic, auditory, visual, and physical cues that communicate emotional and interpersonal information.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) started as the Social Learning Theory (SLT) in the 1960s by Albert Bandura. It developed into the social cognitive theory in 1986 and posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour. The social cognitive theory

describes the influence of individual experiences, the actions of others, and environmental factors on individual health behaviours. There are two important types of unconscious social cognition:

1. Unconsciousness of the influences on judgement and behaviour.
2. Unconsciousness of the mental states (i.e., attitudes and feelings) that give rise to such judgments and behaviours.

The social cognitive theory is composed of four processes of goal realization: self-observation, self-evaluation, self-reaction and self-efficacy (Redmond, 2010). The four components are interrelated, and all have an effect on motivation and goal attainment.

### **Social Cognition in *An Era of Darkness***

*An Era of Darkness* can be studied from the perspective of social cognition theory. According to Tharoor, there was nothing to relish and benefit from the British rule of our country. Throughout this novel, Tharoor highlighted that India suffered from several manmade famines, wars, racism, incompetence in administration, expelling of its people to distant lands and economic exploitation in an unusual way which was contradictory to the expectation of the people of India. All the rules and policies the British defined benefited them more indirectly than the Indians.

Tharoor feels that the collective consciousness of the people of India is manipulated and carried away by the fancies of British India. The book highlights how the influence of British Rule unconsciously overpowered the people. It was to be noted that people's feelings and emotions were easily targeted to achieve the successful ruling policies of the British. Most surprisingly, the transition and passing of the rules and legacy of the British to the people of India were smooth, and it did not cause any turbulence. Tharoor makes a point that it was even more surprising to see how the people of India embraced the changes without the slightest doubt of the intention.

### **The Looting of India**

Tharoor shared his views in *TED TALKS* presentation in 2013 on the education of India and explained Indian history in comparison to British India. He begins with India's demography and the four E's of education: expansion, equity, excellence, and employability. He also creates good literary statistics for India before and after the British. In conclusion, he has thrown a ray of light into the globe with a high literacy rate and a large innovation report. He eventually dared the world by signalling, "we are coming."

Next, Shashi Tharoor's lecture at the Oxford Union in England on July 24, 2015, was published in print under the title "An Age of Darkness" and is mostly

dedicated to exposing the idea of British rule's blessings, such as democracy and geographical and political unity. In *An Era of Darkness*, Shashi Tharoor reminds the world that we share a history with Britain of centuries of oppression, terrible killings, mass arrests, repression of civil liberties, and the replacement of our society to suit British interests. He provides an accurate history of three periods of India's Raj, from plunder to colonial exploitation to financial imperialism.

In Namitha Dev and Neeraj Dev's article, they explain how colonisers cleverly used the trading system. As they write:

"The few undisputed advantages were never necessarily meant for the good of the colonised but implemented to support the needs of the colonisers, i.e., the English language, tea and cricket. "An Era of Darkness" would help to correct many misconceptions about one of the most controversial periods of Indian history. It defeats the false narrative that tyrants were inevitably Muslim rulers. Though they were outsiders, Tharoor assures us that they did not drain the resources of the country to any other foreign nation. India's share expanded to more than a quarter of the world's trade under the Muslim rulers. It is a thought-provoking contrast to the polarising and often repeated assertion that India was ruined by Muslims." (Dev, 103)

Here the author has explained how our natural resources and men's powers were looted by the British and other related agencies during the pre-independent time. Further, he collected various sources from various authors, both national and international levels, for supporting documents on the corrosion of India. Further, the author has highlighted the stealing of steel and the destruction of our shipping and buildings. Too much taxation on agricultural products, deindustrialization and corruption played a vital role during this time.

According to Ghani's research article, she observes that "When British banned publication in Indian languages, large scale resistance was experienced. Dadabhai Naoroji's drain of wealth theory opened the eyes of many to realize what was done to India. Attacking British officials, Satyagraha, non-co-operation, and civil disobedience movements proved to be very powerful resistance; once it started, it only kept growing as many Indians supported these groups, but whatever movement or any individual caused a threat to British rule or caused an uprising, those individuals/freedom fighters were killed or hanged after being kept in jail for a few days." (Ghani, 29)

Even today, India is still facing the same problem due to the over-exploitation of our natural resources. More

privatization leads to a lot of issues related to our economy. Our politician depletes our natural resources. The same method was also used in the pre-independent period.

Shashi Tharoor's *An Era of Darkness* reveals the agony of British colonialism in India with erudition, great research, and unique sarcasm. The physical freedom of a community, on the other hand, was doomed. Ideological, social, political, technical, geographical, and psychological scars exist and appear to be permanent. The work also reimagines writing on nationalist culture. Even after seventy years of independence, India appears to be struggling under the after-effects of colonial rule, with no end to the myriad issues sown by the British on Indian soil.

### CONCLUSION

The government has framed new rules and policies for people's welfare. But the people are not willing to accept the new rules and policies because it mostly favours corporate bodies. During the dark period, India also suffered trading or commerce by the East India Company and Dutch. Not only British people looted our natural resources. Now, there is a modern way of looting the natural resources of India by means of privatization. The author highlighted the social conditions of India chronologically from Colonization, British Rule and Post Independence. The author finds that the looting of India is the same but in different forms. Further, it is to be noted that Indians are vulnerable to the changes and transitions which take place unconsciously.

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