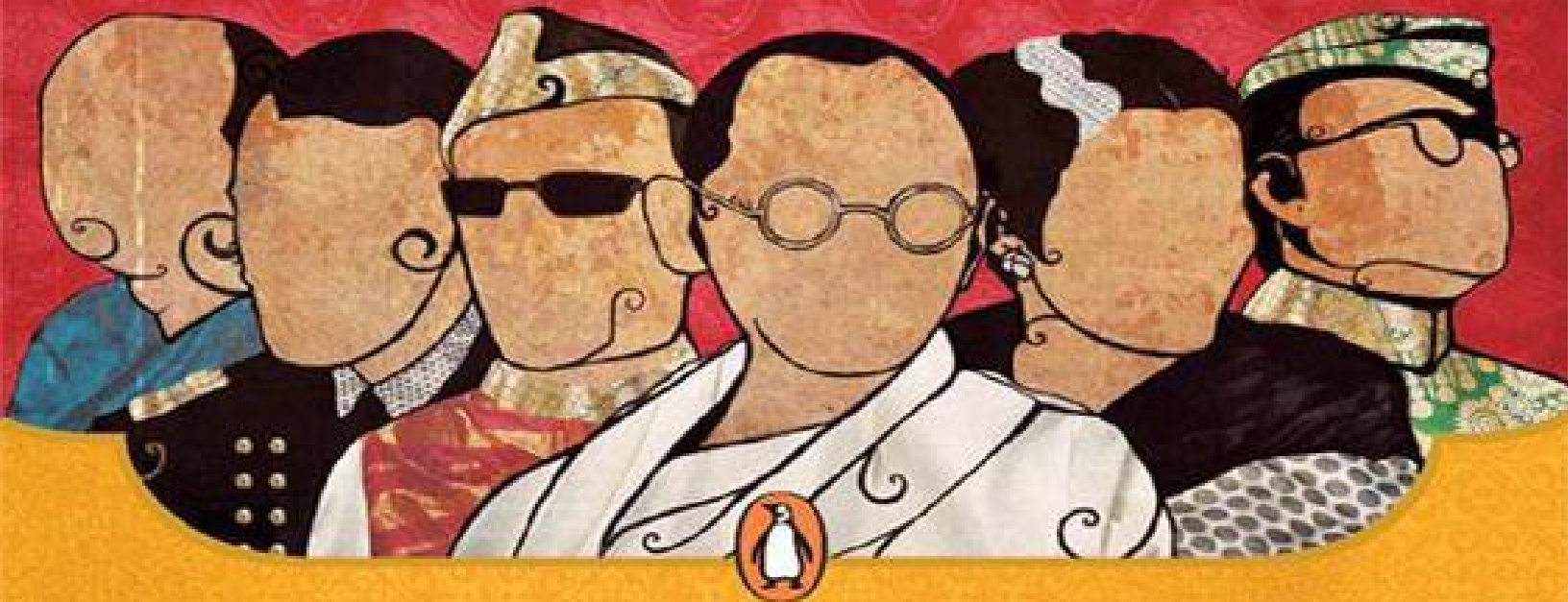


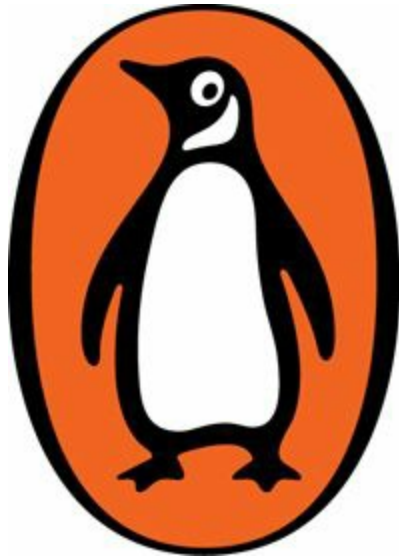


'An entertaining tour de force'—*Sunday Times*

THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL



SHASHI THAROOR



Shashi Tharoor

THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL



Contents

About the Author

By the Same Author

Dedication

About the Title

Family Tree

The First Book: The Twice-Born Tale

The Second Book: The Duel with The Crown

The Third Book: The Rains Came

The Fourth Book: A Raj Quartet

The Fifth Book: The Powers of Silence

The Sixth Book: Forbidden Fruit

The Seventh Book: The Son Also Rises

The Eighth Book: Midnight's Parents

The Ninth Book: Him – Or, The Far Power-Villain

The Tenth Book: Darkness at Dawn

The Eleventh Book: Renunciation - Or, The Bed of Arrows

The Twelfth Book: The Man Who Could Not Be King

The Thirteenth Book: Passages Through India

The Fourteenth Book: The Rigged Veda

The Fifteenth Book: The Act of Free Choice

The Sixteenth Book: The Bungle Book - Or, The Reign of Error

The Seventeenth Book: The Drop of Honey - A Parable

The Eighteenth Book: The Path to Salvation

Afterword

A Note on Dharma

Glossary

Acknowledgements

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THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor is the prize-winning author of ten books, both fiction and non-fiction, and a widely published critic, commentator and columnist (including for *The Hindu*, *Times of India* and *Newsweek*). In 2007 he concluded a nearly twenty-nine-year career with the United Nations, including working for refugees in South-East Asia at the peak of the 'boat people' crisis, handling peace-keeping operations in the former Yugoslavia, and culminating as the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. In 2006 he was India's candidate to succeed Kofi Annan as UN Secretary-General, and emerged a strong second out of seven contenders. Dr Tharoor earned his PhD at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at the age of twenty-two, and was named by the World Economic Forum in Davos in 1998 as a 'Global Leader of Tomorrow'. He was awarded the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, India's highest honour for overseas Indians.

For more on Shashi Tharoor, please visit www.shashitharoor.com

By the Same Author

Fiction

Riot: A Novel

Show Business

The Five-Dollar Smile

The Great Indian Novel

Non-fiction

*The Elephant, the Tiger and the Cellphone: Reflections on India in the
Twenty-first Century*

India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond

Bookless in Baghdad: And Other Writings About Reading

Nehru: The Invention of India

*for
my sons
Ishan and Kanishk
and
for our own
Tilottama*

About the Title

A hasty note of disclaimer is due to those readers who may feel, justifiably, that the work that follows is neither great, nor authentically Indian, nor even much of a novel. *The Great Indian Novel* takes its title not from the author's estimate of its contents but in deference to its primary source of inspiration, the ancient epic the *Mahabharata*. In Sanskrit, *Maha* means great and *Bharata* means India.

The *Mahabharata* has not only influenced the literature, art, sculpture and painting of India but it has also moulded the very character of the Indian people. Characters from the Great Epic . . . are still household words [which] stand for domestic or public virtues or vices . . . In India a philosophical or even political controversy can hardly be found that has no reference to the thought of the *Mahabharata*.

C. R. Deshpande, *Transmission of the Mahabharata Tradition*

The essential *Mahabharata* is whatever is relevant to us in the second half of the twentieth century. No epic, no work of art, is sacred by itself; if it does not have meaning for me now, it is nothing, it is dead.

P. Lal, *The Mahabharata of Vyasa*

Our past and present and future problems are much more crowded than we expect . . . I think in India, some stories should be kept alive by literature. Writers experience another view of history, what's going on, another understanding of 'progress' . . . Literature must refresh memory.

Gunter Grass, speaking in Bombay