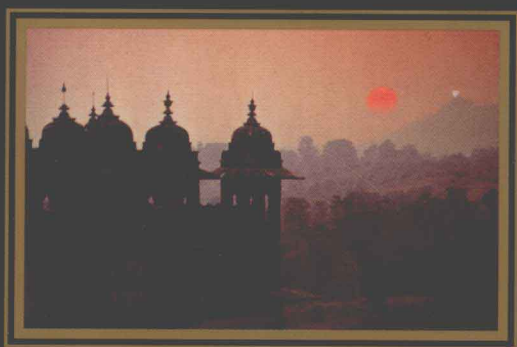


RIOT

"Simply brilliant."

—WASHINGTON TIMES

A Novel

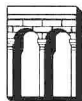


Shashi Tharoor

AUTHOR OF *THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL*

RIOT

Shashi Tharoor



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FIRST EDITION

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Though the author works for the United Nations, none of the opinions expressed by the characters in this novel are to be construed as reflecting the views of the author in his official capacity.

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*to my mother
Lily Tharoor
tireless seeker
who taught me to value
her divine discontent*

“History is a sacred kind of writing, because truth is essential to it, and where truth is, there God himself is, so far as truth is concerned.”

—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

“History is nothing but the activity of man in pursuit of his ends.”

—Karl Marx, *The Holy Family*

“A truth in art is that whose contradiction is also true.”

—Oscar Wilde

RIOT

The New York Journal

Late Edition

MONDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1989

AMERICAN SLAIN IN INDIA

NEW DELHI, India, Oct. 1 (AP) — A rioting mob attacked and killed an American woman in a town east of New Delhi yesterday, a few days before she was to return home, the U.S. embassy announced.

Priscilla Hart, 24, of Manhattan, a volunteer with the nongovernmental organization HELP-US, was beaten and stabbed to death in Zalilgarh town in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where she had volunteered her skills as a public health worker, officials said. It did not appear that she had been targeted because she was American, an embassy source said.

Details of the killing, which occurred during Hindu-Muslim rioting in the town, remain obscure. Ms. Hart had been working and doing research for a doctoral degree at New York University for 10 months.

She was reportedly due to return home on Thursday.

According to a HELP-US spokesman, Ms. Hart was closely involved with developing female

population-control awareness programs here as part of a public health project supported by her organization.

No other foreigner has died in the sectarian violence that has killed several hundred Indians in the last three weeks, and Ms. Hart "may simply have been in the wrong place at the wrong time," an embassy spokesman suggested.

The New York Journal

Late Edition

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1989

DEATH OF AN IDEALIST

By VICTOR GOODMAN

NEW YORK, Oct. 2 — To Priscilla Hart's family, relatives, friends and professors here in New York, the death of the idealistic 24-year-old volunteer and scholar in a riot in India was a heartbreakingly tragic event.

The slim, blond, blue-eyed woman was only a few days away from returning to this city, where she was a doctoral candidate at New York University. During 10 months of field research in the Indian town of Zalilgarh, she had volunteered her time to a population-control program run by the American group HELP-US.

"She loved these people," said Beverley Nichols, an associate professor of sociology at New York University, where she supervised Ms. Hart's dissertation work. "She knew India. Not just the fancy restaurants in Delhi or the diplomatic circles around the embassy. She lived in that little town, among Hindus, Muslims,

everybody. Nobody would have had a reason to kill her."

After 10 months in India, Ms. Hart was to have returned to her mother's home in Manhattan next week. "She was planning to write up her research and work as a teaching assistant next semester," Professor Nichols said.

Her parents, who are divorced, and her two brothers gathered today in her mother's apartment and told reporters of their great sense of loss at Ms. Hart's tragic death.

"Priscilla was a gem, an angel, a person brought onto this earth to do good," said her father, Rudyard Hart, 50, a senior marketing executive with the Coca-Cola Company. "She fell in love with India when I was posted there in the late '70s. It was her dream to go back, to do some good for the people there."

Her mother, Katharine Hart, 52, a high school teacher of English,

agreed. "Priscilla wanted everyone to work together. She was determined to make a difference in the lives of the women of India. The last time I spoke to her she sounded so fulfilled, so sure of purpose. I can't believe she won't be coming back."

Also present were Priscilla's brothers Kim, 27, and Lance, 23.

"She gave everyone her help, whatever their race or religion," said Kim, a stockbroker.

Ms. Hart's interest in India was sparked during the three years her parents spent there, where her father was involved in an effort to revive the operations of the Coca-Cola Company, which was expelled from the country in 1977. She subsequently wrote her honors thesis at New York University on Indian women. "It was first class," said Professor Nichols, who still receives requests for copies of it.

"She was so committed, so engaged in the problems of India," the professor said. "She was extremely interested in the population question, and in the rights of women. She would have given anything to be able to spend the rest of her life in India."

Ms. Hart had worked for HELP-US, a nongovernmental organization whose initials stand for Health, Education, Literacy, Population – United States, as an intern at their office in New York City

during the summers of 1986 and 1987. Throughout her time at graduate school, she remained involved with the group. During her doctoral field research in India, she volunteered to assist in a HELP-US project she had helped design. "She touched a lot of people here with her evident sincerity and compassion," said Lyndon Galbraith, president of HELP-US. "She will be greatly missed."

The New York Journal

Late Edition

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1989

Parents Plan to Visit India to View Site of Daughter's Death

By VICTOR GOODMAN

NEW YORK, Oct. 3 — The parents of an American student killed in India announced today that they will travel next week to the town where their daughter was attacked two days ago. They say that the only way to overcome their grief over their daughter's violent death is to confront it. So they are traveling to Zalilgarh, an obscure town in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, to relive their daughter's last moments.

"We want to talk to her friends and colleagues, the people she worked with, to see where she was," her father, Rudyard Hart, said in a telephone interview from his home in Stamford, Connecticut.

Priscilla Hart, a 24-year-old NYU student and HELP-US volunteer, was killed in a riot. Mr. Hart said she would be cremated in India and her ashes flown back

to New York City, where a memorial service will be held next week.

Mr. Hart, a marketing executive, said he and his former wife, Katharine, would fly to India after the service. In the meantime, Mr. Hart said, he hoped the American public would read about his daughter's death and think about the issues that mattered to her.

"I want to make sure Priscilla isn't forgotten," Mr. Hart said. "I want the world to know what she was doing in India, the cause for which she gave her life."

Ms. Hart's mother, Katharine, who is divorced from Mr. Hart, was unavailable for comment.

The New York Journal

Late Edition

MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1989

AN AMERICAN DEATH IN INDIA

By RANDY DIGGS

ZALILGARH, India, Oct. 15 — It was dusk, that time of the day in rural India when the kerosene lamps are lit and the mosquitoes emerge to prey on the unwary. That Saturday, Sept. 30, Priscilla Hart, 24, had said goodbye to her friends, because in a few days she would be packing her bags to return to New York, where she was a doctoral student at New York University.

The young American woman, a volunteer with a population-control awareness project run by the charity HELP-US, had completed her field research in the small North Indian town of Zalilgarh. That evening, she bicycled to an abandoned fort on the Jamuna River, which flows by the town. Perhaps she hoped for an escape from the crowded and noisy city, where Hindu militants had organized a major religious procession. Perhaps she sought a quiet glimpse of the sunset, a sight she would miss upon her return home.

She would never return. Her body was found a day later. She had been stabbed sixteen times.

In the town she was leaving behind, passions were riding high. The Hindu militants had organized a mammoth procession, some 30,000 strong in a town of just 100,000, to take consecrated bricks through the center of Zalilgarh to a collection point. From there the bricks would be transported to Ayodhya, where the Hindus hoped to use them to construct a temple, the Ram Janmabhoomi, on a disputed site occupied by a disused sixteenth-century mosque, the Babri Masjid.

The procession would wind its way past the town's Muslim quarter, where resistance to the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation was high. The previous night's stabbing, presumably by Muslims, of two Hindu youths putting up banners for the procession had inflamed

Continued on Page 266

from Katharine Hart's diary

October 9, 1989

I cannot believe I am sitting next to him, yet again, on a plane. How many times we have done this, how many flights, transfers, holidays, my passport and ticket always with him, even my boarding card: he was the man, the head of the family, he held the travel documents. And when it was all over, that was among the many rights I had regained, the right to be myself on an airline. Not an appendage, not a wife, not Mrs. Rudyard Hart, no longer resigned to his determination to have the aisle seat, no longer waiting for him to pass me the newspaper when he'd finished it, no longer having to see the look of irritated long-suffering on his face when I disturbed him to go to the washroom, or asked him to catch the stewardess's attention to get something for the kids.

The kids. It's been years since we've all traveled together, as a family. He enjoyed travel, he often told me, but on his own. He was self-sufficient, he didn't need things all the time like we, the rest of us, did — juice, or entertainment, or frequent trips to the bathroom. He made it obvious that being accompanied by us was not his preferred mode of travel. But we did it often enough, till the kids began to rate airlines and hotels and transit lounges the way other kids compared baseball teams. And because of Rudyard's postings, the kids had an unusually exotic basis for comparison. "Emirates is cool," Kim would say, because that airline had video monitors on the backs of the seats and a wide range of channels to choose from. "But they make you fly through Dubai," Lance would retort, pronouncing it Do-buy, "where it's just shops, shops, shops everywhere. Schiphol is cooler!" At Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, his own favorite, Lance would pray for our connecting flights to be delayed so that he could have even longer in the arcade, shooting down monsters and dragons with no regard for jet lag.

How wonderful it is to have your monsters and dragons on a screen in front of you, to be destroyed by the press of a button, and not inside your heart as mine are, hammering away at your soul. Monsters and dragons, not just at an airport arcade between weary flights, but on the plane, in your seat, in the seat next to you.

In the seat next to me sits my monstrous ex-husband. Here we are again on a plane, Rudyard and me together, not husband and wife, merely father and mother. Father and mother with no kids in sight. Kim couldn't get away from work, where he tells me junior stock-brokers are lucky if they can take Thanksgiving weekend. And Lance — Lance, who could never understand why I had to leave his father, Lance is in a world of his own and has no need of other worlds. But I'm not going to worry about Lance today. I've got too much else to think about.

Priscilla.

Priscilla with the baby blue eyes and the straight blond hair and that look of trusting innocence with which she greeted the world. Priscilla with her golden skin, her golden smile that lit up the eyes of anyone she was with. Priscilla with her idealism, her earnestness, her determination to do some good in the world. Priscilla who hated her father because of what he had done to me.

I look at him now, trying to read a magazine and not succeeding, his eyes blurring over the same page he has been staring at since I began writing these words. I look at him, and I see Priscilla: she had his eyes, his nose, his lips, his hair, except that the same features looked so different on her. Where his good looks are bloated by self-indulgence, hers were smoothed and softened by gentleness. And that sullen set of his jaw, that look of a man who has had his own way too easily for too long, set him completely apart from his daughter. There was nothing arrogant or petulant about Priscilla, not even when she was upset about some flagrant injustice. She was just a good human being, and no one would say that about Rudyard.

I look at him, trying to focus on the page, mourning the daughter whose loss he cannot come to terms with. Cannot, because he had

already lost her when he lost me, lost her while she was still living. Despite myself, I feel a tug of sorrow for him.

It hurt so much to use the past tense for Priscilla. My baby, my own personal contribution to the future of the world. I would give anything for it to have been me, and not her. Anything.

cable to Randy Diggs

October 9, 1989

FOR DIGGS NY JOURNAL NEW DELHI FROM WASSERMAN FOREIGN DESK. HAVE BEEN USING MAINLY AGENCY COPY ON HART KILLING. GRATEFUL YOU LOOK INTO STORY IN GREATER DETAIL FOR LONGER FEATURE PIECE. WHO THE GIRL WAS, WHAT SHE WAS DOING, HOW SHE WAS KILLED, WHY. SUGGEST YOU ALSO MEET PARENTS RUDYARD AND KATHARINE HART ARRIVING ON AIR INDIA FLIGHT 101 TOMORROW AND TRAVEL WITH THEM TO ZALILGARH. SHALL WE SAY 1200 WORDS IN A WEEK? AND GET THAT FAX FIXED. THESE CABLES ARE COSTING US A FORTUNE.

from Randy Diggs's notebook

October 10, 1989

Delhi airport. Crowded as usual, even at 4 bloody a.m. Curse of this New Delhi job is that everyone lands and takes off in the middle of the effing night. Engines droning, lights flashing, cars roaring, all at 2-3-4 o'clock. It's only in the 3d World that residents near the airport would take this crap. But then they don't have a choice, do they?

Harts emerge from Customs, escorted by clean-cut consular type from the embassy. Good PR, that. What every traveler needs in India is an escort through Customs and Immigration. Bad enough to lose your daughter without having to lose your patience as well in those interminable queues.

Hart's a striking-looking fellow. Tall, with smooth good looks now going to seed. Sort of Robert Redford plus thirty pounds, some of it on his face. Eyes blue, gaze steady, firm handshake. But there's a weariness there that goes beyond the exhaustion of the journey.

Mrs. Hart: maternal/intellectual type. Short, heavy-set, with wiry brown hair and skin too dry and lined for her age. Glasses on a chain around her neck. Sensible, drab clothes that'll be far too warm in this heat. (And she's lived in India before: doesn't she remember the climate?)

She's distinctly unfriendly. Hart seems happy to see me, utters the predictable thoughts (need to see where it happened — meet the people who knew and worked with Priscilla — trying to understand — etc) and welcomes the idea of my traveling to Zalilgarh with them. Mrs. Hart objects: "This is a private visit, Mr. Diggs. I don't think . . ." But he brushes her aside, as if from habit. They're divorced, of course.

“Priscilla lived for a cause,” Hart tells his wife. “If we don’t talk to the press, how are people going to know about her life and her work?”

A couple of agency photographers click at them desultorily. One hack asks all the obvious questions. Not much press interest here. If they’re lucky, they’ll get an inch or two in one of the Delhi papers. Zalilgarh is too far, the riots yesterday’s story.

Hart looks disappointed, as if he’d expected more. A TV crew, perhaps, backing away from him as he strides to the consulate car. He’ll learn soon enough that one more death doesn’t make that much of a difference in a land of so many deaths. Poor bastard.