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Title: Communalism and Literature in Post-Independence India: A Study of Select Indian Novels in English

Abstract

This research has sought to focus on fictional writing that emanates from these events and/or the divisive times in which they are located. The fictional constructs taken up for study comprise Anita Desai's *In Custody*, Rukun Advani's *Beethoven Among the Cows*, Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* and *Fugitive Histories*, Shashi Tharoor's *Riot*, Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* and David Davidar's *The Solitude of Emperors*. The present research has been divided into five chapters and has sought to examine/study the representation of "contemporary communalism" as reflected in the fictions of these writers.

Chapter One serves as a background to the literary narratives under study. It is divided into two sections and focuses on the definitive aspect of the term "communalism" foregrounding the inherent complexities and differences that lie in the construction of communalism between the East and the West. It attempts to offer a historical overview of the various factors that led to the emergence and consolidation of communalism in pre- and post-independence India

Chapter Two foregrounds the various manifestations of communalism, as reflected in the given novels, thereby revealing the various levels on which it operates and the concomitant fragmentations that emerge – be they geographical, linguistic, or cultural. If communalism is seen as a "hydra-headed monster" these novels represent the particular forms that communal conflict assumes to create rifts between religious communities. While reflecting the nuances of communalism perceptible in present-day India, they highlight the myriad ways in which communal discourse is consolidated and perpetuated in the nation and national discourse. Highlighting the multi-layered and complex nature of communalism in the present milieu, these authors immediately draw attention to the multiple strategies that seek to divide and re-divide the nation and its people.

In many ways, these novels can be regarded as tools that investigate the ways in which inter-community tensions escalate thereby reducing the nation to a fragmented entity.

Chapter Three analyses how the texts under study represent the impact of communalism on religious minorities in the nation. It examines how fictional constructs articulate as well as challenge the physical, emotional and psychological dimensions of the marginalisation and exclusion of minorities in India, and at the same time offers crucial insights into what and who constitutes a “minority” in the present milieu. It seeks to outline the ramifications of the communal discourse and violence on minority women (as they represent a minority-within-a-minority). The protagonist/narrator’s sense of alienation is foregrounded as an offshoot of the Hinduism/*Hindutva* clash that has dominated the socio-political climate of the nation. These novels, thus, present a comprehensive picture of what it means to belong to a minority community in the present milieu. In tracing the multi-dimensional and systematic nature of victimisation, these novels end up addressing an issue that is either outrightly denied or invites discomfiture even in “secular” socio-political circles.

Chapter Four demonstrates how the given fictional narratives articulate the ways in which the construction and perception of an essentially intimate space such as home is impacted by the discourse of religious identities in present-day India. These novels problematise the concept of home and juxtapose its utopian and dystopian facets against the backdrop of violence, rejection and alienation that formed a characteristic feature of the post-1984, post-1992 and post-2002 scenarios. Using a range of representational techniques, these fictional constructs underscore how in the deeply polarised present milieu, the concept of home remains singularly fraught with complexities as it involves a blurring of boundaries between the conditions of “home”, “homelessness” and “exile”.

Chapter Five examines how these multi layered fictions exist as counter narratives of the nation, as fiction that is testimonial in nature, as a body of fiction that can be said to belong to the category of “Partition Literature”, and lastly, as narratives of cosmopolitanism.