PART II

Religion, Myth, and Politics

CHAPTER 5

Constructed Religious Feelings and Communal Identities in *Hamārā Śahar us baras* by Gītāñjalī Śrī*

Alessandra Consolaro

1. Our Town That Year

Gītāñjalī Śrī's Hindi novel *Hamārā śahar us baras* (*Our Town That Year*, published in 1998) presents a story placed in a town that could be anywhere and everywhere in north India, and in a time that could be any time since the 1980s, up to the demolition of the Bābrī masjid[1] in Ayodhya in 1992 and its bloody aftermath. Characters in the novel voice doubts and questions that worry the intelligentsia. The novel can be described as a literary portrayal of the point of view of the academic about the nation and the construction of identity in contemporary India, because all the issues raised in it are connected to the problem of defining one's own identity in relation to the collective identity of the nation, with special reference to religious communities. In fact, whether one likes it or not, in India one is born into a religion. Even for people who are atheist, or agnostic, it is very difficult to be simply a citizen of India. Notwithstanding the secular definition of the Indian State, one has to be defined as Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, Buddhist, Jain, or tribal, et cetera; if one is none of the above, then s/he is labeled as Hindu. Hindu is a wide label covering many different communities: not only Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, who are indeed Hindus, but also *dalit*s, and even Buddhists and Jains are sometimes included in this definition, particularly for political aims. Therefore, in India citizenship is entwined with religion, and it is difficult for an individual to find legal spaces outside

the fold of religion allowing him/her to exercise certain rights merely as an Indian, rather than as a Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian—or whatever religious label—Indian.

Hamārā śahar us baras asks the following basic question: how does it happen that during an insurgence of communalistic violence, even people who refuse the opposition between "us" and "them" end up nolens volens applying it? It does so focusing on a particular environment: the academia. Universities and research institutes in India have for a long time been considered a nest for secular and progressive thinking, and a very common assumption has for long been that if people connected to such institutions are not atheist, or agnostic, they do in any case consider religion a private affair. But during the past decades, under the saffron cultural regime, intellectuals, too, have changed a lot. Free thinking and discussion became progressively out-fashioned, and the central government managed to diminish the autonomy of academics—for example, through the direct choice of Vice Chancellors—and to put loyal people into key positions in the prominent research and cultural institutions.[2]

It could incidentally be emphasized that secularism was not defined in the Indian Constitution, and no official explanation of the term existed before 1978. The Western notion of secularism insists on a total separation between state and religion, opposing laity to clergy. On the contrary, in the South Asian area, "secular" is antonym for "communal," implying tolerance of other religious communities, expressed by the ideas of *dharmanirapekṣatā* (religious neutrality) and *sarvadharmasambhāv* (equality of all religions before the State). This implies that the state does not keep aloof from matters pertaining to religion but is rather meant to act as an impartial broker between the different religious communities. Yet, the history of postindependence India bears evidence to the fact that "fair" involvement of the state in a multireligious context as opposed to complete abstention from religious matters has been detrimental to the process of secularization, both in society and in politics.

Hamārā śahar us baras is set within this historical framework, referring in particular to the sanguinary events connected to the Babri mosque demolition, and depicting the process through which the "old" secular, pluralistic identity is slowly substituted by a "new," communalistic-tinged one. In this chapter, I will present a brief analysis of the character system and of the narrative structure, freely using some tools borrowed from narratology.[3]

2. Three Reliable Friends, a Jolly Old Man, and a Witness

The main characters in the novel are three friends living in the same house: two intellectuals, who are both university professors, and a professional

writer. Hanīf and Śruti are a married couple; they have been renting for years an apartment on the first floor of Śarad's father's house. Śruti, who had been a student of Hanīf's, eventually married him and is a renowned writer. Her trouble in "that year" is that she cannot write any longer. Here I am reminded of some lines of the poem *An die Nachgeborenen* by Bertold Brecht, "Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist / Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!"[4] In deeply troubled times there is a need for committed literature, and it seems impossible to pursue art for art's sake: Śruti feels that writing love tales in such times is odd [52],[5] she thinks that it is necessary to write about what is happening, as writing about anything else is wrong [35]. The writer, though, is stuck: the pen just does not want to move, because it is very difficult to express contradictory feelings and emotions related to contemporary events. The Brechtian echo gets even stronger when one thinks that she loves talking about trees and birds, and that one of the activities she enjoys in the domestic environment is bird-watching.

Nomen omen: the mixed couple is also the union of two revealed truths. Śruti, (Sanskrit, lit., what is heard), denotes the revealed truth heard by the saint seers of the Vedic time. Hanīf (Arab: *hānif*) means "true believer," and the term is also used to define the monotheists that were present in Arabia before the coming of Islam, the followers of Ibrāhīm who did not identify themselves with any of the revealed religions of that time: they were not among the idol-worshipers, neither Jew nor Christian (Qur'an 3:67). This name, though not very common in the Arabic area, is a very common name of persons in South Asia, where the ascetics thus called were considered a sort of Muslim equivalent of a *saṃnyāsin* or *sādhu* (Hindu ascetic who has renounced the world). Interestingly, Hanīf's "true belief" is secularism, but he is a secular intellectual who succumbs to the progressive "denominationalization" of the society when he is boycotted and condemned to isolation, as explained below. Śruti cannot express herself either, as if the world were leaving no space to the "real truth" while everybody is shouting this or that "false truth." The story shows the couple as very close: they are the protagonists of 58 "fragments"—the whole text is organized through a sequence of fragments, which are "recorded" by the narrator and are used both as stylistic devices and as a metaphor, as I will show below—mainly located at home, and they share a close intimacy; Śruti even wishes to have a baby, but Hanīf clearly states that this is the wrong time for having children [200]. Nevertheless they are often shown taking care together of the *madhumaltī* (*Quisqualis indica* or Rangoon creeper), which they planted with much devotion [31], and treat it as a person: they even named the creeper Guñjalkā [83–84]. Unfortunately, even this botanical substitute of a baby is bound to

die, as if no new life can thrive in "that year," when friendship and love are suffocated by hatred. Symbolically, the world being as it is, revealed truth can still exist, but it is threatened and cannot generate new life.

Hanīf is a well-known sociologist, who is always on the students' side and likes telling jokes. His open and frank nature makes him a very popular teacher. Some colleagues of Hanīf's think he is quite arrogant and criticize his love for seminars and visits abroad, and interpret the mobbing he is subject to as a victimizing strategy to get fame and become a hero. Śarad (" 'the season of ripening, i.e. Autumn": here the name seems to suggest a time of "fall") has been Hanīf's best friend since childhood; he too is a well-known scholar. I will deal with these characters more extensively in the coming sections.

Śarad's father, Daddū, is an icon of the mixed Hindu-Muslim culture that the communal divide wants to deny and destroy. He is a poet and a connoisseur of Urdu poetry, and lives isolated from the world from which he gets news through the TV, the press, and, above all, the discussions he directs from his divān. This is a big wooden couch, where Daddū sits like a king in the house, chairman of the assembly of people who come to enjoy the pleasure of his company. Daddū's divān maintains here the whole semantic range of the Turkish original term, being at the same time the council of nobles, the sofa on which the counselors sit—and we often find Daddū and Śruti sitting side-by-side—and Daddū's collection of poetry, which is not a written text but the enormous amount of verses he knows by heart and continuously cites. But sitting with Daddū also has the features of the Hindu *satsaṅg:*[6] in a quiet, mild, and moderate environment, his diffused, natural, soft, and dignified energy is perceived, making people calmer, experiencing nothing but an inner peace [203]. Daddū's house is, in fact, a sort of cultural center, where people meet, discuss, and enjoy the intellectual and literary interchange, but they also come for mere friendship, just to say hello. Daddū is a cynical critic of the world and makes fun of anything, even death, for example, when he reacts to the news of a murder with a joke about solving population density problems [25]. He teases intellectuals because he finds that all their debates are just an empty exercise [68]. Intellectuals have lost the taste for beauty, and, in his opinion, literature should not mix with real problems too much. He denies reality to the empirical world to defend an ideal world, and pretends that nothing is changing even when shouting of insults starts on the phone [151] or threatening letters are found in the letter box [295]. His concealment of these facts from the three young friends may be interpreted as a desire to protect them, to keep fear away. Of course, he is perfectly conscious of reality, but his attitude is to emphasize the good side of life by removing ugliness from it, and claiming that everything is devoid of reality. But his self-assurance

breaks down when he falls victim to a gang of communal youngsters. When Daddū falls, his face on the ground, words are no longer possible: reality is overwhelming, even for those who claim it is ultimately false!

Besides these important characters, we should also mention the role of the narrator.[7] Though the narrator hardly acts as a character within the events, she is the voice that brings together the scattered events and thoughts, providing somehow a rationale for the sequence of fragments that brings about the narration of the novel. Actually, she is a sort of off-voice, an observing actor who is not perceived by the others, and she has a wider perspective than other characters: they seem to act mainly in a private environment, while she reports also external events [e.g., 49, 73, 77, 124] or rumors spreading in the city [e.g., 26, 182–183]. But she clearly states she is not omnipresent [12], nor omniscient [21]. She is no camera eye, because she is definitely a personalized actor, with a minimal yet definite narrative relevance. She is a character-bound narrator who is present throughout the narrated events: she lives in that city, she shares hopes and fears of the other characters, and she speaks of herself as belonging to the group, using the pronoun "we" [25, 30]: like anybody else, she gets involved in the game of naming everything Hindu or Muslim [194], and she comments about the change of mentality in the world she lives in: "We all have become either Hindu or Muslim" [181]. When the curfew is declared, the narrator is worried about getting her ink provision to keep on writing [53], and when she goes shopping for ink and paper, she does not like the young, arrogant shopkeeper who stares at her with an ambiguous smile [248–249, 263, 270, 304, 306–307].[8] The narrator has physical reactions [e.g., 43: she pants because of the hurry to record everything]. She shares emotions and feelings, and reacts to the events she is recording. She speaks of others' and her own relief [17], tension [100], fear [213], loneliness [343]; she makes comments about her style of writing, which is not fluent but rather moves jerkily, possibly because of the fountain pen she uses, or because of the ink, or else because the events themselves are happening in jerks [331]. She dreams [25–26] and she even has nightmares [280].

Notwithstanding her little weight as a character, the narrator has a major role in the novel. She claims for herself the prominent role of witnessing, through her writing, something that nobody is able to do, not even the characters who are supposedly more entitled to do it. This is very clear, for example, if we consider the first and the last fragments in the novel. After setting the events in "that town," there is in the first fragment a retroversion to "that year," contrasting the streets full of water because of the heavy rain with the corresponding image of the past, when water had been allowed to flow from the tanks because of fear of poisoning. The issue of writing comes up immediately: the three main characters are introduced in the very first sentences as

". . . the three of them, who were to find out crimes and criminals, wounded and dead, everything. Śarad, Śruti, and Hanīf, who had resolved they would write. This time it is impossible to remain silent. We have to open up everything and show it" [7]. But, no matter how much they tried, they could not write. Therefore the character-bound narrator intervenes, stating that "it seemed to me that it would be necessary to do something. However it may be, I'll have to write. Whether they understand or not. If they do not write—they who are a professional writer and two intellectuals—I would do it, I who could only be a recorder [lit.: a copy-maker]" [7].

While disqualifying her writing activity as mere recording, the narrator emphasizes at the same time the importance of having a recording, a testimony made of collected fragments. This does not guarantee truth, but it is the best we can do to get close to the object we are investigating. Of course, reality can be experienced in many different ways according to the point of view of the observing individual: sometimes there is a deliberate manipulation of data to cover the truth [51], and sometimes people reconstruct things just to have them fit into an ideological frame that makes sense to them [83]. The narrator, therefore, does not make an assertion of truthfulness; she warns the reader that she is involved, that she does not understand, and possibly the frequent use of the general present tense in the novel is meant to underline the perception by the narrator/focalizer with a minimum of cognitive analysis.[9] On the other hand, the continuous present tense too is frequently used by the narrator, and this may indicate "some sort of special involvement" on her side.[10]

There is also an aesthetic reason why the writing is said to be of little value. In the first fragment the narrator claims that anything that is reconstructed is ugly and cannot be like the original living model. As a metaphor, this idea is applied to many aspects of the narrative. In this fragment, it comes as an anticipation of the climax, the event in the novel after which everything definitely changes, also in the personal relations of the main characters. The narrator is describing a house as it appears at the time of narrating, when Śarad and Śruti are meeting some time after "that year" and it is clear that there is tension between them. The house is desolated, and the narrator notices that the yard is full of wild grass. Here she introduces a comment about the fact that she constantly connects the colors pink and white with two visions: *madhumaltī* flowers—which are characteristically white when they blossom and turn pink to red afterwards, so that there are white and pink flowers on the plant at the same time—and Daddū's dentures, with white teeth and pink gums. Oddly enough, she says, it is a one-way connection: she feels sick when seeing flowers, but she does not think of flowers when seeing Daddū's dentures. His denture on the

ground has nothing to do with his laugh [8], it is just a disgusting vision. The difference between the real object and the constructed one is crucial to understand why a constructed identity cannot be a positive one. Identity is something alive and organic: if the parts are separated and then the fragments are put together, one does not get the individual, but a "'sikuṛan kā kaṭāuṭ" (a cutout of contractions) [9]. In fact, this is what remains of Daddū after "that year": a bundle of contracted limbs, his whole personality having shrunk into silence and having lost all the glamour. As the writing the narrator has produced is itself a cutout of the world, it cannot but be a summarized, partial, and disordered representation of reality, whose aesthetic value is infinitely lower than the one of the original.

The narrator is not only a focalizer, but she fulfils the goal other characters do not (cannot?), thus playing a very relevant role, as revealed in the long, first fragment of the novel. It contains all the main themes of the narrative, it anticipates the main elements of the story, and it ends with the narrator starting again to record. The fragment ends with the image of the divān, the rosewood couch, where Daddū used to sit. This very image is to be found again at the very end of the novel, a short fragment that brings the reader to the time of narrating, with Śarad and Śruti silently sitting in front of the silent divān. For 340 pages the reader has been brought back to the events of "that year": there are only two quick flashes into the present time of the narrative [102, 113] and the whole narration lasts for a very short time, "a couple of instants" when the narrator browses through her scattered notes [113]. Meanwhile, a sense of embarrassment and uneasiness remains, and silence. This silence, though, is just apparent:

> Do not raise objection to my silence. It is not easy to tell how much panic, noise, recording without taking breath is contained in it. Therefore I am silent, but actually I just seem silent. Like the two of them, who look silent. Like these pages, that I have disorderly scattered around [102].

Silence is full of meaning, and sometimes it is necessary, when words have become nonsense, because their meaning is constantly manipulated: Hanīf is the character that embodies this idea in the novel. Daddū, too, clearly states that stories are not made of words, because essence, life, and the ultimate being are beyond words [146]. The novel ends with Daddū's laugh rising again from the couch to the sky, and with the direct speech of the narrator, claiming the importance of her role:

> As I have witnessed so much—even a recording is witness!—let me witness just this much more for the present! I am now giving witness that on the

> divān also a laugh rose, it had risen slowly above, and there, in the inky sky, it became a kite, which has a string, has it?, it must have one, somewhere right here . . . here . . . where? . . . [352].

Also in the previous paragraphs of the novel—the fragments immediately following the long passage narrating how Daddū and Śruti were attacked by militant Hindus—the narrator emphasizes her role of one and only witness [351]. I think it is very relevant to appreciate the connection between this claim and the discussions entertained by intellectuals and academics but also by other characters in the novel, regarding both the importance of sociohistorical research and the role of the intelligentsia facing communalist riots and trying to explain them. At a meta-level it reinforces and amplifies their discourses, as if the literary discourse were the only mode to move beyond the impasse where "high," "scientific" discourses are stuck. A parallel to this can also be found in what is generally defined as "partition literature."[11]

3. Academics and Intellectuals: A World Apart?

The protagonists of the novel, as I said, are educated men and women facing the communalist threat in a riot-stricken town in "unnatural" times: their fears and anxieties reveal how communalist language and discourse creep into the academic environment, which defines itself as "secular." Actually, in the novel, the actors belonging to the academic world are not always examples of high intellectuality: most of them are intellectuals integrated into the academic system, who aim at maintaining the power and do not want to alter the status quo. Hanīf and Śarad tease them, exposing the pettiness of the academic environment and trying to push them to be more committed: they mockingly denounce the low quality of some university professors, especially in research [114]. This draws a line between Hanīf and Śarad and the other *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* (the people working in the department): the two are different because they are committed intellectuals.

The Chairperson of the Department, Professor Nandan (55 fragments), is also the "father" of the department. He is strongly committed to the institution, which he runs as a feudal domain: the department is renowned and gets a huge grant from the University Grant Commission, and this is for Nandan a reason for personal pride [59]. But he does not appear committed to research as well. As long as his domain is secure, he somewhat maintains a neutral position toward his subordinates, but when Hanīf wins an international prize that he had wished for himself, jealousy prevails [46–47] and retaliation begins, turning into mobbing when a rule for rotation

is passed and Hanīf is supposed to take Nandan's place as Head of the Department. When Nandan starts thwarting Hanīf, he does not come to the forefront, but rather lets the other *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* express their complaints, and acts accordingly in the name of rules and democracy, thus escaping any risk of criticism for his behavior [74]. For example, when Hanīf gets an invitation to Europe, he refuses to give him leave because the application has been submitted too late: he righteously claims that it is necessary to respect the rules, because he cannot do favors to anybody. Hanīf is puzzled, because such rules have always been there, but have never been enforced. When he tries to discuss, Nandan reiterates the idea that he is too often on leave and this causes jealousy among other colleagues, who have already complained: therefore he has to act according to the rules to stop envy and suspicion of favoritism [65].

One of the first open confrontations happens when Nandan proposes the introduction of an attendance register for administrative staff, professors, and students [61]. His argumentation stresses the fact that the department is a center of excellence with an unusual freedom for research, but that it is necessary to maintain order and discipline to keep the standard. Hanīf and Śarad oppose it because they fear that this may be the first step toward a repressive policy, which they consider negative for everybody. Other characters intervene, defending Nandan's proposal: they are jealous of Hanīf's invitations abroad, of his attendance at seminars and study tours, as if these were not dependent on the quality of his research work but rather excuses to skip department work, and with a mixture of personal and political motivations, they therefore think that the attendance register could be a good means of control both for students and for "absconding" professors.

Nandan is often the target of mocking remarks by Śarad and Hanīf, as well as by Daddū and Śruti, because of his love for sycophancy: Śarad compares him to a buffalo rising out of muddy water with herons and mynas pecking the worms around his feet and on his back [74]. Among the colleagues belonging to Nandan's entourage Choṭe Joś and Urmilā can be described as Nandan's main allies: in fact, there is only one instance of Nandan having to express his opinion directly, when they both happen to be absent from the Department [190]. Choṭe Joś is an example of a selfish and hypocritical man, perfectly fitting in an academic environment where flattery and subservience are more appreciated than scientific capability. He is Hanīf's opposite. His nickname comes from his physical structure, but it fits very well also with his being a small thing as a human being: his "little passion" (this is the literal translation of his name!) for theory mirrors his lack of intellectual curiosity and his love for order, control, and power [72–73]. In one episode Choṭe Joś and Hanīf are symmetrically opposed in

their behavior with a student who has not attended class for some days because of her father's illness [141–143]. Choṭe Joś has no empathy with the student; he shouts at her in the middle of the corridor in a menacing attitude (which the narrator ironically compares to a chameleon with a swollen red chin), threatening to have her expelled from the college. Hanīf on the contrary is very supportive. He inquires whether she can get notes from other students, refuses to add any further reading because of her nonattendance, and invites her to come to him for tutorials in case she has questions. He tears into pieces a letter with an official request for justification, discarding it as a useless bureaucratic complication. Hanīf does not value teaching any less than research work; on the contrary, he tries to develop a good relation with students, to the point that he often invites them home, to the divān. Yet, this is another matter of jealousy, and his friendly informality is considered as dangerous, like any infringement of rules [214]. His behavior is constantly misrepresented to create an image of him as arrogant and selfish: rumors spread that Hanīf has torn into pieces the student's request to her face, having her to pick up the pieces and throw them in the waste basket, and this is the version of the event that even Śarad gets to know [152]. Of course, the rumor is not divulged by Nandan but by Urmilā, who was present at the scene.

Urmilā is, in fact, Nandan's second major ally. She appears to be a simple woman, and there is no mention of any research work of hers: she is more a teacher than a researcher. Her lack of understanding of the sociological implications of changes in everyday life can be inferred, for example, by a short passage showing her enthusiastic participation in some popular events organized by a *maṭh,* which is a major actor in the narration. This old religious establishment expands from a nonshowy *āśram* to a prominent institution with political affiliations. This is no architectural restyling, but it corresponds to a change in religious policy (and politics). The monastery and temple, devoted to the *devī*, is located next to the university campus, across a *maidān* (open area) that used to be a playing ground for children and a praying area for Muslims [27]. After an incident the bushes behind which ṭhe *maṭh* stood are cut, and it manifests itself: here the use of the expression "*avatārit huā*" [27] is particularly meaningful, because the coming to sight of the monastery brings about the stopping of *namāz*—the prayers each Muslim must recite five times a day—in the open space and the appropriation of the public space by the Hindu religious institution. The *mahant* of the monastery is the leader of a "Hindu resurgence": processions and religious meetings in honor of the *devī* start being regularly held, but together with them a continuous fair takes place: the *maṭh* becomes not only a spiritual center but rather "a sporting center for the city dwellers" [133]. Failing to perceive the populist character

of the metamorphosis, something a sociologist should certainly do, Urmilā is excited at the opportunity to participate in the programs organized by the *maṭh*. She is eager to watch old movies like *Jogan*, featuring stars like Nargis and Dilīp Kumār [130]. This film is not only a classic in the history of Hindi cinema, but it contains an icon of Hindu nationalism: in fact, for the Indian audience Nargis is nothing less than Mother India,[12] and in this film she plays the role of Mīrā, another very important female symbol appropriated by the Hindu nationalistic revival. Urmilā, though, shows no sign of understanding the ideological agenda of the *maṭhvālās*, but is quite happy with the entertainment she is offered.

When we analyze the discussions that take place among these academics and intellectuals, we can see that the debate on communalism and identity is present from the very beginning. Hanīf appears to be the only Muslim-born person in the staff, and he raises the question: "Do I belong here less than you do?" [30]. Nobody denies his belonging, but in the ongoing discussions more and more people stress the fact that separate identities do exist and that they are communalist identities. Choṭe Joś, for instance, writes an inspired article denouncing anti-Muslim biases [72–73], but he himself seems to be imbibed by stereotypes: for example, when Śarad speaks in agreement with Hanīf, he rebukes him, "You grow a beard, so you are an advocate of Muslims" [62].

A serious reason of friction between Śarad and Hanīf on one side, and the *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* on the other is a report on communalism. This is a project born on Nandan's suggestion, which states that the present situation of the country requires that all good citizens do something, and intellectuals and educated people have to do what is in their power, according to their abilities [41]. Hanīf immediately thinks of a report, but discards it as a time-consuming and dangerous enterprise. Choṭe Joś's proposal of a minor report, though, is accepted with great enthusiasm: they should produce something like a first-aid handbook against communalism, with fieldwork on selected topics, and this should be edited and distributed to the administration and the newspapers.

Once the report is written, it gets approval from Trivedī, the District Judge, and this is a reason of satisfaction for everybody [119]. But when Bābū Penṭar, a newspaper editor, is ready to publish it, official pressure is exerted not to publish it [137], and the *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* refuse to put the name of the department on it [144]. Therefore, Hanīf, Śruti, and Śarad decide to write an article about the report's findings, to be published in their name on the central page of Bābū Penṭar's newspaper [142]. This causes strong reactions and much debate [148], and the colleagues react condemning the publication as an act of arrogance, motivated by desire to acquire fame [144]. This single opportunity for the audience to hear a voice

different from the one coming from the loudspeakers of communalist activists aims at spreading consciousness about what is happening. Some readers do indeed start checking statistics [163], but this is the very reason why authorities would rather not have the results published [175]: Trivedī even warns Prof. Nandan, summoning him, not to let external affairs enter into the university [155–156]. Here another important theme is stressed: though intellectuals and academics claim they do not live in an ivory tower, they do represent a world apart, and an interference in the "real world" is perceived by the establishment as a destabilizing, therefore potentially dangerous, factor. Some passages explicitly emphasize the desire to keep the outer world aside, and the uneasiness at discovering that this is no more possible [158–162]. In a hot debate, a student reveals that on campus everything is an academic masquerade, but outside everything is naked, and that is the real world [136].

The separation of the academic and intellectual field from the "real world" is also marked in the novel by the physical gap between the university and the city. One of the leitmotifs is, in fact, the opposition between "here and there" and between "us and them," symbolizing the distance between educated people and common people. In the novel there are many examples of boundaries between two opposed locations. The front door of the house where Hanīf, Śruti, Śarad, and Daddū live is a crucial barrier between outside and inside: in the story, it is first attacked when crackers are put into the letter box [314] and later when there is an explosion in front of the entrance door [343]. Finally, some youngsters penetrate the house, they physically pollute it spitting *pān* (chewed betel leaf) in front of it, and this marks the definite collapse of the private "secularist" world.

Another opposition is found between the colony and the *mohallā* (ward), and it again marks the supposed opposition of educated and common people. In the ideological construction of intellectuals as secularists, and illiterate people as ignorant fanatics, this physical divide is very important. In one of the first passages showing the three friends "going out" in the city lanes [26], an actor named Babbū Khāṁ Darzī states overtly the fact that everybody was conscious of divisions and frictions even earlier, but now everybody is "ready" and lives on guard. The main problem for common people is to live in this state of uncertainty, also because this brings about the difficulty in continuing everyday activity in times of trouble. Also, subaltern people related to the house—a female domestic servant, a male domestic servant called Nankaū, the greengrocer, a *dhobī* (washer)—lament their problems: they come from afar and they find it more and more difficult to reach the colony every day, because of the curfew [19–20, 184]. Actually, some of these subaltern actors, like Dagdū, the department peon, express the biases of common people

toward Muslims [259–260], but his ideas are often echoed by other staff members, who are supposedly more intellectual, and no doubt educated, thus showing that biases are not exclusive to the lower class.

The novel shows that a "new" invented identity is being advertised by the propaganda of communalist activists, both Hindu and Muslim. The reactions and responses of academics and intellectuals to it lead to a redefinition of their own identity as opposed to the "Other." The loss of security, as the escalation of violence lays bare the fact that the campus is not distant from the dynamics of religious politics, leaves these intellectuals confused, helpless, and scared. They grieve in a dilemma, in fearful confusion, perceiving the need to explain something they cannot understand, because "things that one had studied as referring to other times and other places have started happening all together and right in this place!" [84]. Suddenly, secularism becomes an unclear notion, and it is unresolved, even suspect, in secularists' eyes as much as in the eyes of nonsecularists. Trying to explain why secularist experiments have failed and how such a brazen growth of fundamentalism has been possible is not an easy task. Intellectuals know that they are going to be criticized both in case they speak out and in case they remain silent [216]. Nevertheless, they must try to understand and explain, or else they are just going to be overwhelmed by events.

Hanīf's question about belonging poses the challenge of what is a secularist identity, and at the beginning, the general answer to it is in perfect unison: "the point is different, you are different, we and you are different" [30]. But as external events touch the university, more and more often the issue of secularism is overshadowed by the need to choose between two options, namely, the constructed identities of being Hindu or Muslim: *tertium non datur*. Everybody starts defining everything as either Muslim or Hindu, even when they do not believe in this opposition [169–170]. Urmilā is the one who voices the necessity to take one side when the antagonism between the *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* and the students on one side, and Hanīf on the other, has become definite [302].

Hanīf is in fact incapable of remaining part of an institution that defines itself as secularist but has accepted communalist identities, and in the end he makes a choice: when the leader of the *anjuman-e islām* (Muslim society) contacts him, he agrees to an interview [297–298], thus accepting his role as a symbol that everybody is attaching to him. In fact, his position in the Department gets very uneasy when a rule is enforced requiring rotation, so that the Chairman is forced to leave his dominant position to the oldest member of the faculty, who happens to be Hanīf himself. Nandan's hostility becomes palpable, because he would prefer a more submissive successor. Hanif declares from the very beginning that he is not available to be a

puppet, someone who has to put his signature under words he disagrees with [160]; he also claims that he would not accept the appointment even if this were motivated by his good scholarly reputation [161], because he knows that Nandan wants to maintain control. When Nandan angrily replies that everything has always been decided according to majority, he stresses that what puts him in a no-win situation is exactly the fact of being a minority. It is important to stress that he thinks of himself as a minority not as a Muslim, but as a secularist [167]. But for everybody else his identity is only the communal one: the reported version of his reply to Nandan that circulates afterwards is that he declared that he would accept the headship only if he "could become such a Head that could decide by himself, according to his own will, ruling like his ancestors ruled" [168]. Similarly, Hanīf's critical stand about Śarad's conciliatory behavior—Śarad is going to become Head of the Department if Hanīf does not, but Hanīf warns him that Nandan will use Śarad as a scapegoat [93–94]—is interpreted as another act of arrogance. Hanīf's reaction to mobbing, and even more when he is threatened and his name gets into a hit list [296, 304], is silence and isolation, but even this adds to suspicion, because it is interpreted as a wish to be considered a tragic hero [284, 301–302]. Śarad himself thinks Hanīf is wearing his solitude as a martyr's mark [294]. Hanīf becomes the target: when in Bābū Penṭar's newspaper a letter to the editor is published with many signatures under it, including Śarad's and Urmilā's—but significantly not Nandan's and Choṭe Joś's—denouncing the restriction to free debate and the interference of Hindu clerics into the university life, anonymous letters are distributed requesting only Hanīf to apologize.

His crisis precipitates dramatically when he loses the students' support. Thanks also to the propaganda of groups like the Akhil Bhārtīya Vīr Dal students' wing, [223] the students' union passes a resolution to dismiss Hanīf from the university [272]. Of course, this has no official value, and the Vice Chancellor takes immediate position defending Hanīf [274], and many people express solidarity to him, but no voice is raised from the *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* [284]. In the end, 14 BA students skip Hanīf's class in favor of Nandan's and Urmilā's [307]: this is the epochal event that causes Hanīf to break down. He is shown crying for the first and only time, unable to bear what is for him the worst forsaking: no external menace is as threatening as the loss of personal ties and trust. Incapable of remaining a teacher boycotted by his own students, he goes on sabbatical, but this is once again interpreted by the *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās* as irresponsibility, as a runaway in difficult times [343–344]. Devoid of support from all the people he is related to, Hanīf remains a secularist, but takes the only side everyone expects him to take, and he ends up teaching in a Muslim university.

Oppositions are constructions, which trap us if we naturalize them. In the narrative the trap is the illusion about the opposition between "here" and "there," between "we" and "them," and between "inside" and "outside." But the ideological construction it implies (educated vs. uneducated, secularism vs. fanaticism) is substituted by another more powerful and pervasive construction, the opposition between Hindu and Muslim, which becomes the only possible one. We might interpret this as a suggestion to confront the oppositions we perceive and to notice the ones we hold ourselves, in order to become aware of them and to emancipate from their tyranny, using differences as a hermeneutical tool. In fact, as the story unfolds, we find that the "there" has come "here," that "we" have become "them," that "our discussions, our words" are the same as "their words." As I said, from the point of view of space at the beginning of the narrative, the campus appears clearly separated from the city. The bridge on the river is both a physical and a mental divide, because madness and frenzy are definitely located beyond the bridge. People like the three main characters, who live on this side of the bridge, where there are the university, the colony, and the *maṭh*, feel secure because riots and street fights, looting, and fires are always on the other side of the bridge, far from "here." But it does not take long before this feeling changes into one of insecurity.

Hanīf and Śruti say: "We are a third community" [167]. In fact, they are a mixed couple, he being born Muslim and she Hindu, even if—at least at the beginning of the fabula—neither would define himself/herself using these religious labels. There is a small secular "third community," a non-communalist community, to which not only Hindus and Muslims but also many others belong, all of them educated people. The discourse on intellectuals forming a third community is based upon the assumption that intellectuals share a secular idea of state and society. This allows them to move through different communities without being part of any of them, and this should allow them to be just "Indian." But in the midst of the rising communal violence, this shifting becomes harder and harder: there is a strong pressure to adhere to standard models only and to maintain one's own identity because a mixed cultural being creates only more and more confusion. There is a brief and effective scene representing this very well. Śruti is shown visiting a Muslim *mohallā,* and while entering a house she

> [. . .] shakes hands with one saying *namaste*, to another she joins hand in *namaste* posture saying hello, and to a third one she says *ādāb* keeping her hands close to her body. I feel like laughing, but she looks like crying, maybe just because of this confusion in what to do with one's hands and what to say. [168]

Intellectuals and academics, therefore, do not live in a world apart, being an enlightened élite. When irrational and emotional thoughts prevail over rational and logic reasoning, prejudices become universal truth. Any supposed distinction between the world of cultured people and the world of common people is totally erased. Even intellectuals who pretended to be revolutionaries must admit that they lost the most-wished-for thing: their private space. In the turmoil of "that year," nothing can remain private, because any single thing turns political. People living an anonymous and common life are pushed out of their houses; people living in protected and privileged environments are asked to identify themselves, to declare their name, to lower their trousers. Everything must be either Hindu or Muslim. The only given choice is between these definitions, and it is impossible to be both at the same time.

Throughout the novel there is a continuous effort to underline the fact that intellectuals and academics are common people, and to erase the aura of superiority that is often connected with them. One stylistic tool is the continuous stress on bodily needs and references to bodies:[13] for instance, Daddū is often shown going to the bathroom, and from the doctor's visits and the many references to his health, we can infer he suffers from prostatitis [87, 134–135; 318]. Also Hanīf and Śruti are shown in their preparations for the night: washing, going to the bathroom, and drinking milk before going to sleep.

The description of permanent physical characteristics is minimal, at least with regard to the main characters, not to mention the narrator. But we find many descriptions of temporary physical traits, such as facial expression, tone of voice, gesture, posture, manner, physical condition, and the narrative itself is thereby grounded in the body, even if what is more relevant is not traditional description but the lived experience of embodiment. If we extend embodiment to include all bodily manifestations, we find passages where the characters have exteroceptive sensations, that is, they are aware of and experience external stimuli via the surface organs of the body: think of the narrator's insistence on colors, when she operates as our default body within the world of the text, providing eyes, ears, sensations of perception and of motion, and so forth [e.g., 76, 79–80, 116, 224, 265, 313, 326]. From the beginning, bodily sensations are invested with psychological reactions and emotions. For example, a cold feeling is often perceived by some actors in difficult or embarrassing situations, having nothing to do with the weather: Hanīf feels cold when the colleagues start mobbing him, and Śarad's coughing gets worse as his feelings toward Hanīf become more ambiguous. The accurate description of the reactions of the nervous system to external stimuli can be seen as a strategy to stress the antiheroic condition of the characters.[14]

Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" is useful to understand how these aspects of embodiment are commandeered by culture to produce embodied practices

that enact class hierarchies, gender roles, et cetera, whose power derives from the fact that these practices remain largely "invisible" due to their habitual, automatic nature.[15] For example, in the novel, eating and drinking when performed by the main characters are a marker of socialization more than the mere satisfaction of bodily needs, but they acquire a totally different connotation when referring to refugees in the camps. Habitus can be said to operate beneath the level of ideology; in fact, not simply ideology, but practice is to be taken into account when examining the modes of human agency. "Spontaneous" behaviors become suspect when characters are confronted with new, unexpected situations: a joke, a smile, a dress, a gesture represent the habitus that has been formed in tandem with a definite set of circumstances. But sometimes there occurs a disjunction between habitus and environment, when historical and social forces contrive to provide unforeseen situations, obstacles, and opportunities. We can find an example of how this is introduced in the novel in a passage showing Śarad and Beverly sitting on the veranda. Hanīf—unaware of their presence—arrives with a bucket of water for the *madhumaltī* creeper [194–196]. On seeing the couple, Hanīf is embarrassed: he wonders whether his sudden arrival might seem inappropriate. Śarad, ill at ease because of Hanīf's embarrassed greeting, tries to reply with a casual comment about Hanīf's paṭhān suit. This is supposed to be the most spontaneous and casual small talk, but it immediately acquires a communalist overtone. Hanīf remarks that this is his usual evening dress, but Śarad insists that he never saw it before. Beverly is the silent witness of this cross talk. Exit Hanīf. Follows a dialogue between Śarad and Beverly, emphasizing a totally different interpretation of the previous scene by each of them. Śarad projects on Hanīf his own intention of giving meanings to anything, while Beverly does not notice anything abnormal. Śarad explains this as her inability to judge things properly as she is a foreigner. In the end he declares that in any case that kind of suit does not look well on Hanīf: if he himself would wear such a suit, he would seem a Pakistani. This is said in a playful tone, but the series of analogies it opens leads him suddenly to an epiphany of his own biases. Śarad's behavior in this passage can be seen as an example of how the habitus works: unspoken social requirements and injunctions guide our existence, before awareness, reflection, and representation, and we spontaneously apply to the order of things mental structures that are generated by that very order.

4. Relations among the Characters

Confusion and the shaping of new identities have a strong impact on human relations, and this is shown very well in the characters of the novel.

Even if they are strongly individualized characters, they generally come in groups, and Śruti, Hanīf, and Śarad are often shown doing things together (58 fragments): the three friends share a house, they entertain intellectual discussions, go together to the campus. But slowly a division creeps in: when Śruti and Śarad visit Hindu places where bombing happened, to interview some witnesses, Hanīf stays at home, because without his presence people would be "more open" [130–131]. This marks the beginning of Hanīf's isolation: later on, when they visit a Muslim camp, he refuses to go [264–265], because he does not accept the communal label.

The process of separation, of individualization, and the breaking of a consolidated group is shown also in connection with Daddū and his divān. Forty-two fragments are related to the "family group": Daddū, Śruti, Hanīf, and Śarad are almost all the time together, having fun, having dinner and drinks, joking, and laughing. The discussion may be very hot, particularly between Hanīf and Śarad, but it generally ends with a joke, a witty notation by Daddū, and a general reconciliation. Nevertheless, toward the end of the novel, some fragments show a totally different relationship in the same location, with the characters separated from each other [304, 320–321].

I have already dealt with the process of isolation as far as Hanīf is concerned. As for Śarad, he seems a winner, at least from an academic point of view: he gets the position of Head of the Department [333], and he does not have to move or to find a new job. Yet, he too feels more and more confused and alone: in the public sphere, he keeps on acting as a secularist, but this separates him from the other *ḍipārṭmenṭvālās*, who are happy with the new order [335–336]. And in the private sphere, his biases and contradictions are exposed. In one passage, Śarad is alone outside, observing Hanīf and Śruti in Daddū's company, and he expresses jealousy, love, and hate toward Hanīf, as if the latter were an intruder in his own house, stealing his affections and emotions [304]. Friendship slowly dissolves into a formal relationship [316], and a progressive isolation takes place also in the relation between father and son: they are very seldom alone, because the family is composed of the whole group, but in the last part of the novel [297, 300, 302, 310–311, 322], Śarad's isolation is marked by the fact that he is always showing his back, while Daddū is silently observing Śarad's back.

In the 43 fragments where the pair Hanīf and Śarad is protagonist, they are almost exclusively connected to their professional environment. Their relation is very dialectic, but they are perceived by outsiders as "brothers" [32], and they act in harmony: for example, when driving to the campus, they either travel together on one scooter or each drives his own scooter proceeding in parallel. When the break has taken place, though, they are

shown leaving the house separately, one immediately after the other, with Daddū as focalizer watching their back [300].

Also, Śruti is seldom shown alone, even if her profession as an independent writer might let us think of an activity to be performed in solitude. On the contrary, she is most often in the company of Daddū (44 fragments), being his favorite interlocutor: together they discuss poetry and writing, they cook, laugh, and are the victims of a violent attack by youngsters. They are the most domestic characters in the novel. Daddū appears 144 times, and is shown outdoors only twice, and in both passages this happens in order to drive away the interference of communalism. In the first passage he observes a procession of Hindus from the *maṭh* shouting anti-Muslim slogans, and harshly drives two activists out of the front door, summoning the three friends to come inside, lest they get accustomed to the noise of loudspeakers [22]. In fact, he keeps on playing classical music on his old gramophone, in an unsuccessful effort to keep out the shouts that drown the notes of *sāraṅgī* Daddū's second appearance outside the domestic sphere is in the final dramatic episode leading to the conclusion of the narrative: here a definite break of the spatial division between private and public sphere, between "here" and "there," takes place, and the secularist identity is definitely reduced to silence, overwhelmed by a triumphant and haughty communalism. With the assertion of this ideology, any other kind of bond has to be broken, and those who do not accept rigidly communal categories are bound to remain isolated and lonely individuals: they might not merge in the communalistic sense of collectivity they do not believe in, but they are deprived of the possibility to maintain multiple ties and a pluralistic sense of belonging.

5. Constructing a Communalistic Identity

The construction of a communalistic identity through the adoption of a discourse requiring the creation of a new language and the redefinition of concepts that have always been there is a process taking place both in the public arena and in the inner world of the individual. As for the public sphere, the novel is replete with references to the propaganda of Hindu activists and to the media. Circulation of manipulated information and news is necessary in order to mould the audience. This affects, first of all, freedom of speech and information. In the novel we can see a growing pressure and control in the media world. Newspaper editors, who at the beginning of the story are eager for original and independent reports [30], grow progressively cautious, or replace words like "Indian," "secularist," and "pluralist," which have become devoid of meaning, with the words everyone wants to hear: "Hindu" and "Muslim" [142]. For example, the actor named Bābū Peṇṭar—who appears in 16 fragments—is a

publisher who tries in the beginning of the narrative to help the three friends by publishing their articles, but as the story proceeds, he is also a victim of the censorship imposed on, or self-imposed by, the press.

In the public arena there is a vast circulation of propaganda material aiming to spread new categories that are to be the foundations of a new communalist identity. In the novel it is possible to find excerpts from different sources (cassettes, pamphlets, slogans, speeches) that are not only fictional but echo real documents. Let me just quote an example. In the communalist discourse, names are very important because they are the labels through which reality is understood. Therefore, there is a reinterpretation of place-names to make them fit the new identity that is being promoted.

> "Throw your cowardice away, or else drown it in the Indian Ocean (Hind Mahāsāgar) . . . Don't say "Hind," [. . .] say "Hindū Mahāsāgar." That is the Hindū Ocean! [. . .] For others there are thousands of countries, but for us there is only Hindustān." "Say 'Hindusthān'!" [22]

This is a typical process of equating language, religion, and ethnic identity. Hindū is a Persian word denoting someone who lives around or beyond the Indus River (Skt. Sindhu, which also means ocean and any large body of water), and in fact meant any inhabitant of the Indian subcontinent. I would like to emphasize the shift from the Persian denomination "Hindustān"—which is the correct geographical term—to Sanskritic "Hindusthān," intended to mean that this is the land of the Hindu religious community. This way, the speaker, who is promoting the Hindu communalistic identity, denies any non-Hindu alternative. A religious meaning is imposed in the name of linguistic purity, which in the end is nothing but a politically oriented identity. This is the reason why Hanīf, whose full name is Hanīf Jaidī, is shown correcting a colleague who abruptly starts pronouncing his name as Zaidī [48]. Zaidī is in fact a Muslim name, which can be traced back to some descendants of the Prophet Muhammed, denoting a tribe settled in many parts of the Middle East and in the Indian subcontinent. But Hanīf remarks that it has to be pronounced according to the regional and local influences, thus losing the sound "z" in favor of the pronunciation "j": the assumption that it be necessarily linked to the pure Urdu élite, therefore maintaining the pronunciation "z," is erroneous. But when everything becomes either Muslim or Hindu, any pronunciation or name has to be marked, there is no default value: a publishing house whose owner has a Muslim name cannot retain the name Sarasvatī, and a hotel named Mugal Mahal whose owner is a Hindu must find a new name in a Hindu dictionary [173].

As I have already observed, Hanīf suffers from mobbing and psychological abuse: this character shows the inner effects of communalist ideology, the way it influences the perception of an individual's identity, and it ends up construing a new identity in his/her inner world. His reactions to the communalist pressure are the ones generally described in trauma literature: he gradually stops talking; he cannot concentrate on his job; he changes habits, cannot sleep, gets irritable, and retreats into his inner world. Contrary to Śarad, who reacts by expressing his anger and getting loud, Hanīf slowly loses the impetus to discuss and explain. He finds himself interpreted as a symbol, his "Islamity" being forced on him [233]. He tries to resist, but in the end he accepts the new state of the world, and he ends up working in a Muslim institution. Of course, this changes his attitudes toward other people: the narrative does not describe him after the separation from Śarad and after moving to his new house, but we can easily infer that his good nature and love for wits and jokes is gone.

Interestingly enough, overt violence never touches Hanīf in the story. Other characters—"Hindu" characters—suffer from physical abuse, representing the paradoxical effect of communalist violence. First of all, Śarad. At what is described as "the last public debate of that year" [236–240], Śarad is hurt by a stone thrown by a Hindu fanatic, who accuses him of being a "non-Hindu." It seems that the real enemy of the activist is not only the now well-defined "Other," but, even more than that, those people who do not have a clear-cut defined and definable identity, people who refuse to accept rigid categories of thought. Śarad's character depicts the condition of a "secular Hindu," who accepts the cultural tradition of Hinduism, recognizing its connection to religion, but also its other roots. In the novel there is a strategy of the doublet that aims at emphasizing complexity, as we can see through the pair Śarad and Kāpṛiyā. Kāpṛiyā, a character appearing in 32 fragments, is a policeman, a former classmate of Śarad's, who has been appointed in the town because of the riots. He is a controversial character, because he introduces himself as *Hindutva*-oriented: he is shown bragging about Hindus being strong and masculine; we are also informed that he had wished to marry a Muslim girl, but was forced by the girl's family to stop the relation [97]. This makes the reader prone to suppose that Kāpṛiyā might well nourish revenge feelings toward the Muslim community. Nevertheless, he reveals himself as an honest policeman, because in the end he admits that the police has to stop the Hindus, otherwise no Muslim would be left alive [281–283]. Moreover, when violence is spreading in the city, he warns both Hanīf and Śarad about the struggle for power in the *maṭh*, giving a friendly advice to both [325]. If Śarad's trajectory is from feeling secularist to identifying himself as Hindu, Kāpṛiyā

represents the very opposite, because he identifies himself as Hindu but acts as a secularist. They mirror each other in the common difficulty and uneasiness in finding a language for a noncommunalist "Hinduness."

Śarad somehow also tends to simplify things to make them more acceptable: he keeps on thinking that violence is aimed at abstract categories, but that in individual relationships friendship, harmony, respect, and mutual acceptance are still there. He finds a justification for people voicing stereotypes, stating that they repeat meaningless words without thinking; but this sometimes happens to himself, and it puzzles him [123], because he cannot understand what is going on inside himself and how relationships are changing even inside the house where he lives, where a partition is slowly created between the upper and the lower floor [184]. And he finds himself helpless and confused, unable even to have a sincere love story with his foreign girlfriend Beverly (see section 6): at the very instant he realizes that he is close to her as he has never been to anyone, and the idea of marrying her flashes in his mind, he also feels totally aloof from her and starts repeating rhetorical statements about what is happening around them [251–252].

When he finally gets the position of Head of Department, he must face the truth that nothing is like it used to be, even if people and places are the same. Śarad wonders: "Did we make such discussions here before? Or is this something that was already here and just became open?" [335]. This raises the question of what was there before, that is, of the biases that everyone carries within. He has to face his own prejudices, for example, when he realizes with horror that he hopes that a rumor about raped women is not about Hindu women [127, 193]. In another passage, he gets confused when he instinctively labels the overpowering smell of garlic in the camp as a Muslim smell, "as if it were the smell of a whole community" [197]. In fact, the novel is not a paean to a supposedly happy India before the clash: throughout the narrative it is emphasized that cohabitation has never been easy, and that communalist clashes have always happened. The major change brought about by the radicalization of the conflict seems to be that now the hostility is overt. Nobody is immune to this metamorphosis: the archetypal savage is inside the illiterate as well as inside the educated. In the novel we can see this process very well in the character of Śarad, who is shown as gradually feeling the rise of hatred inside himself: in the end he knifes the *madhumaltī* creeper, with a transfer of violence, his eye glimmering with savage madness [338–340].

The violent assault of Hindu fanatics also strikes Śarad's father. Daddū's character is particularly relevant from a literary point of view, as he represents the mixed culture that the intelligentsia pretends to defend. But this paternal and optimistic figure, too, will progressively retreat into silence,

and in the end he will lose his most human traits: enraged, he reacts to the violence of his assailants by shouting obscene words [349], and when Śruti visits Śarad after some time, Daddū is completely reduced to an inert object: "On the bed lies a bundle with the back turned this side. Something like a couple of thin sticks comes out of the blanket" [8].

Beating Daddū is like beating the very tradition of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. In the novel there are many passages dealing with the history of the earlier, particularly Hindu-Muslim, relations that try to clarify what this tradition was. The version of Indian history circulating through communalist publications stresses only conflict and opposition [50–51]. In an effective passage Hanīf declares: "We know that there were conflicts as well as warm friendship, even if we may not know the details of them. Then why not put in front the issues of friendship?" [190]. This statement comes in response to Śarad's doubt about the possibility that even the secularist version of history may be a construction, just like the fundamentalists' one. Hanīf continues:

> We always make choices. We put some things in the foreground. But this does not mean that what remains in the background is falsified. If there were conflicts, we will acknowledge them, but why should we make them bigger? Why don't we put an end to them? If there was love, and still can be, why don't we celebrate it, why don't we acknowledge quarrel as destructive?

But this option is discarded as nonfeasible.[16]

The question about past and present is a *fil rouge* in the whole novel. It is discussed in both the academic and the private sphere. The process of trying to understand how the divide is being carved does not take place in a high-brow series of scholarly debates: the characters are mainly located in a familiar setting, and they are shown expressing their thoughts and fears in a very intelligible and direct way, even if sometimes they may sound rhetorical. Daddū is very relevant as he acts as a catalyst: he attracts people, encourages discussion and debate, but always succeeds in breaking tension when it gets too strong and finding a happy ending note. There is a parallel between what happens in the world and what happens in Daddū's house. The initial friendly atmosphere is progressively substituted by quarrels and rancor between Hanīf and Śarad; students and friends do not visit, people do not gather any longer, fear prevails, and each character remains isolated and lonely. For some time Daddū's presence has a balancing power between the quarrelsome friends [203–204], but his presence is more and more marginalized, and in the end he becomes a silent observer of the fight that is going on, helpless and worried. Daddū's function, though, is never of teaching or preaching [203]. Even if he constantly makes learned quotations,

he never wants to show off: his scholarship is not pedantic, but rather has become part of him, a very natural and simple mode of expression. He always quotes by heart, and, significantly, he also happens to make mistakes. For example, when quoting Galib's *gazal* 17, he substitutes some words. The original text reads as follows:

bas kih duśvār hai har kām kā āsāṅ honā
ādmī ko bhī muyassar nahīṅ insāṅ honā.

In the novel we read:

bas ki muśkil hai har ik bāt kā āsāṅ honā
ādmī ko bhī mayassar nahīṃ insāṅ honā.

In Daddū's version there is a substitution of the Persian *duśvār*, which is not used in standard Hindi, with the term *muśkil*, a word of Arab origin, which has entered the Hindi standard usage. "Har kām kā" becomes "har ik bāt kā," which has the same meaning but is a free recollection, recreating the metric of the verse with another colloquial Hindi-Urdu expression. The Arab adjective *muyassar* becomes *mayassar*, with a regional spelling. The meaning of this *śer* is more or less: "It is difficult for anything to be easy. For a man it does not come easy even to be human." We may say that this mistake of Daddū's is in itself a demonstration of the complexity of life and an exhortation to avoid the tendency to oversimplify and reduce unfamiliar foreign terms to clear-cut concepts.

The strong prevalence of dialogues confers the novel a dramatic flavor. They are generally related with direct quotation, without *inquit*, so that the reader is made to forget that we are dealing with embedded texts. As I said, the location of the narrative is mainly domestic: more than half the fragments (315) take place at home or in the surrounding colony, with a particular relevance given to the ink-seller shop where the narrator regularly goes, and to the greengrocer's stall where Śruti and Hanīf go shopping for food. The second main location is the university, particularly the department where Śarad and Hanīf work [120], but here again there is a prevalence of dialogic mode, and discussions are predominantly informal; also, when excerpts of lessons are presented, they maintain a very colloquial style, never getting a professorial or pedantic tone.

6. Gender and Communalism

A female character in the novel shows the capacity of transcending dichotomy and being open-minded: Śarad's girlfriend Beverly is a foreign woman,

interested in folk art, witnessing the city's events with an external eye. She enters the story as an absolute outsider: she does not speak the local language, she does not know the culture, and she is not interested in sociopolitical problems but rather in aesthetic issues, because she is researching women's home paintings. But her relationship with Śarad is troubled. He imposes on her the role of a tabula rasa, which she is not: she has her own history, her own ideas, but he treats her as if she were pure and innocent just because she is not Indian. When she tells fragments of her own story of repeated surgeries, he does not even listen to her, being too absorbed in himself and his own thoughts [250–252]. Beverly functions as a sort of inner mirror for Śarad: she is different, but she is not the absolute "Other." She represents the "other" to which there is no opposition: facing it does not open fight, but rather starts a positive process leading to self-knowledge. This allows her to act as a catalyst; her spontaneous behavior reveals how constructed everybody else's behavior is [266]. She shows that it is possible to relate to a different entity without necessarily coming into conflict with it, on the contrary, receiving an illuminating new point of view on reality. At the same time, her relationship with Śarad does not develop into a full-fledged love story: they are very close, but the communication between them is somehow restrained. This represents the impossibility of true relationships in a world where absolute categories are applied: a fundamentalist ideology reduces anything to stereotypes, and communalism is this very process.

In the novel, female characters often stand out with a sort of mediating and linking function. As I said, the novel begins with Śruti visiting Śarad, some time after "that year." The friends have drifted apart, the house where the three of them used to live together looks abandoned: the yard full of weeds, no more blossoming creeper on the wall. Daddū is reduced to silence by his humiliation. Between Śruti and Śarad, communication is not easy, tension is thick. Still she keeps contacts, refusing the logic of separation. There are not many fragments (18) showing the pair Śruti and Śarad. When the categories Hindu/Muslim begin to be applied, they even seem to acknowledge a common "Hinduness" in order to be able to get a better response from interviewed people [130–131]. With the progressive isolation of Hanīf from the family group, when he refuses to go downstairs and to speak, Śruti does not accept to severe her relations with Śarad, but she keeps on visiting downstairs, almost secretly [300], even if the dialogue with Śarad has become impossible and no open communication is left [334–335]. Also, the almost invisible undefined narrator is a woman, recording words, thoughts, feelings, and actions of the other characters and sharing with them the trauma of that "town that year," thus linking in her narration apparently disjointed fragments of events and opinions.

Female characters in the novel try to resist the polarizing trend more than male characters. We should not think, however, that communalism and gender always relate in this way. In a brief scene, for instance, we can see a female character, a saffron clad *sādhvī* who shouts sermons from inside the *maṭh* van. Her voice is heard cracking from the loudspeaker, she is shouting into the microphone and the message she conveys is a violent one. The woman is talking in order to whip up mass frenzy: there is a climax when the van stops and finally the *mahant* gets out of it, followed by the woman, in the middle of an ocean of people shouting slogans. It is interesting that the hero of the scene is the *mahant*, but the voice exhorting the crowd is a feminine one. This scene illustrates very well the role of a woman according to *Hindutva*. As many scholars have clearly explained, the ideology of *Hindutva* appears quite tolerant of a new, seemingly empowered feminine model.[17] A woman can have all the power she wants, but only as long as she does not question patriarchy and accepts her place inside the home and the family. If she breaks out of the four walls of the house and makes a play for power, then different rules apply: she must renounce the world, be a *sādhvī*—a celibate ascetic, whose sexuality is under control. This fictional character of the *sādhvī* has a historical correspondent in a few women politicians who happen to be the iconic female figures of the Hindu nationalist movement. In 1992, when Ayodhya was "the city" and Bābar's mosque was "the mosque," it was a woman's voice that gave the impetus to the destruction. That was Sadhvi Rithambara's voice, a most prominent voice of *Hindutva* in India: hers was also the voice playing from the popular cassettes circulating in the months preceding the demolition of the *masjid* in Ayodhya, containing a series of very violent speeches presaging the act of destroying the sixth-century mosque, to which there are many references in the novel. News reports then had quoted the *saṃnyāsin* exhorting Hindu volunteers: "Ek dhakkā aur do, bābrī masjid toṛ do" (Give one more push, bring down the Babri mosque), using the idiom *dhakkā denā*, which has an overtly sexual overtone. This has a particular significance for Hindus who commonly see the Muslim as sexually aggressive, and themselves as "effeminate" and "emasculated."[18] It is also a case of tactical redeployment of women as vehicles for masculine agency: for men who participated in the demolition of Babri mosque, these words pronounced by a woman were likely to elicit a response of this kind: "If a woman is capable of this, then shame on me if I can't do the same."

7. Fragments and Identity

The whole novel insists on the idea of fragmented identities being the result (or possibly even the cause?) of communalism, and the story develops

through a fragmented style. Therefore I have tried to analyze some aspects of the relation between the narrative technique and the issue of identity. The narration is brought about through a total of 611 fragments, of which 44 are a one-line fragment. The narrative technique thus reinforces the idea of a split identity.

I have tried to see whether there is a pattern in the fragmentation or whether it is a random effect. First of all, it is evident that the one-line fragments are almost all allotted to the narrator: they are comments, or descriptive notations, or else reports of external events. Most fragments are very short: 8 percent of the total consist of 3 lines, 8 percent consist of 2 lines, 8 percent consist of 4 lines, and 7% consist of 1 line, which makes about one-third of the total number of fragments.[19] Most fragments in the text have a length varying from 5 to 20 lines, representing 49 percent of the total number. The remaining 15 percent comprises fragments with a length ranging from 20 to 80 lines.

Long passages (99 lines to 341) are very rare: there are only six fragments in this category—that is, less than 1 percent, but they are very relevant from the narrative point of view because they focus on the main events in the plot. Let us analyze them briefly, in the order they are inserted in the narration. The first long passage is the very first one in the novel: I have already discussed the role of the narrator in this "fragment," and its function of introducing the main narrative lines, actors, and characters. It expresses the impossibility of getting the whole by putting together some fragments [8].

The second and longest passage—341 lines—[102–112] shows the whole "family" with some students while having a discussion sitting on the divān. The narrator gives a scene description, together with a sort of formal introduction to the main characters of the novel. In this passage, different opinions are contrasted, and the friends are surprised listening to their own students bringing forth strongly biased arguments, like the one claiming a supposed propensity of Muslims to blood and knifing, because of the custom of *halāl*, as opposed to a tendency to nonviolence supposedly linked to vegetarianism [110]. The third passage is 125 lines long [158–162], and it is set at the university, during a staff meeting where rotation is discussed, together with the change of policy in the department, according to which elements that were valued earlier—for example, a friendly and open relation between student and professors, freedom of thought and of word—are now condemned as indiscipline. Both passages emphasize that students are a very important actor in the novel: we have 32 passages ("fragments") where they appear, which are mostly located in the university, but sometimes they are also shown in Daddū's house: some of them are regular visitors at Śarad and Hanīf's. With the passing of time, though, they gradually stop visiting

the house: among the students' associations, too, communalist groups gradually take over [223]. This leads first to attacks on Hanīf and Śarad for their secularist position, then to the request of Hanīf's dismissal from the college—even if some of them express solidarity with Hanīf, who is being mobbed at the university.

The next long fragment, 115 lines long, narrates the last public meeting at the community hall where Śarad is victim of an assault by a Hindu fanatic [236–240]. Śruti, Śarad, and Hanīf are the protagonists of the passage: Śarad and Hanīf have a public role as speakers, while Śruti sits in the audience. The episode is particularly relevant, because the setting is a totally Hindu audience and the violent opposition is between "secular" Hindus and "communalist" ones. A stone cast by a young Hindu hits Śarad, and the comment at the end of the passage is that the city is not half-Muslim, half-Hindu, but rather half-non-Hindu, half-non-Muslim. Identity is defined in negative and exclusive terms.

The next long segment is a 99-line fragment [274–277], introducing Śruti and Hanīf at home while bird-watching. The passage is positioned at a crucial point in the fabula, because Hanīf has started being attacked by students, and this development marks his definite breakdown. From this moment he will accept (albeit unwillingly) the breaking of old bonds and the necessity to define himself as Muslim. It is interesting that this label has already been applied to him, even by Śruti herself [169–170]. Nevertheless, in this private setting, Hanīf maintains his sense of humor, he tells funny stories, and he tries to ease the tension. It is the last tentative attempt to maintain the distinction between private and public, but it is clear that the situation is deteriorating, and that pretending that nothing has happened is no longer possible: even the relation between husband and wife will be affected by the outer events, and they will become more and more nervous, with dialogues becoming discussions, and a growth of tension in their relationship.

The list of relevant "long fragments" ends with a 167-line segment [344–350]. It narrates the final breaking of illusion; the destruction of the private sphere; the end of the world of poetry, fantasy, and refined mixed culture. Śruti and Daddū are engaged in one of their witty discussions, when the outer world breaks in, represented by some youngsters who not only do not show respect toward a woman and an old man but also take pride in violently oppressing them. The first section of the fragment is located in the house hall, where Śruti and Daddū are talking about what is real and what is unreal, about the importance of fantasy and imagination. The atmosphere is very relaxed and serene. Suddenly, the dramatic catastrophe takes place, and reality breaks in: the violent insults of the young

Hindu activists force Daddū to react, so that even his language and behavior change, and the narrator wonders whether this is the same person she used to know. Symbolically, this marks the collapse of the last bulwark of the "old" world believing in a pacific cohabitation: it is absolutely no longer possible to maintain unconcern and serenity, to keep off the outer communalist ideology, and even if this is refused, opposing it leads to a violent reaction to violence. Daddū's denture falling in the dust represents the loss of power of his values, the helplessness of those believing in the ideal of a mixed culture.

I think it is possible to draw a pattern from the sequence of the six longest fragments in the novel. We start in a private setting after the events happened during "that year," where no spontaneous relation is any longer possible: this is the result of the past events that are presented, through a chronological deviation, in the following text. The events of "that year" are structured with a climax that is clear in the subsequent long fragments: they are, in fact, a series of discussions with a growing sense of confrontation and violence. From the domestic setting we are first taken to the professional field, then to the wider social sphere, and each time we perceive the deteriorating conditions of free speech and human relations. The first discussion, during a session on the divān, is a turmoil of different voices, but people try to listen to each other: disturbing opinions are confronted, and a feeling of uneasiness is perceived, but different interlocutors show mutual respect. There is an exchange between the private sphere and the outer world, even if the protagonists seem to realize for the first time that communalism is not alien to their environment. The discussion at the Department meeting confirms this idea, and it also introduces the problem of repression of free thought in the name of order. The meeting at the community hall shows the end of any polite confrontation and exchange of opinions: no debate and discussion, there is open violence instead. In the novel, violence is at first shown as psychological pressure, then it explodes in physical attack, hitting the symbols of secularism and of mixed culture: it is the progressive destruction of any mediating power, leaving no other choice than compliance to the new order or marginalization. In the private sphere, spontaneous relations can survive, but there too we find tension and anxiety, as is shown in the fifth long fragment: it will eventually be affected by the outer world. The sequence of long fragments, therefore, shows the progressive destruction of the separateness between public and private spheres—finalized in the last long fragment—and is a map of the escalation of violence and of its spreading like a wildfire, with a trajectory from private to collective and back.

We can see that there is a clear correspondence between the insistence on splitting bonds and identities in the narration, and the stylistic choice of fragmenting the novel into minimal unities. The rapid pace of the dialogues

reinforces this idea, and many dialogues insist on this concept. Here is an example:

> "Hanīf!" she suddenly calls out. From the bathroom comes an answering "Yes."
> "Am I a Hindu?" No answer.
> "Whether I like it or not, am I a Hindu?"
> "Maybe," a voice comes out of the bathroom.
> "Śarad too?"
> "Yes."
> "What about you?"
> "No."
> "Are you a Muslim?"
> "Yes."
> "But I'm not?"
> "Śruti!" in the bathroom voice there is a laugh.
> "I am more like Śarad, less like you?"
> "There must be some more or less similar fibre" the bathroom says.
> "And that fibre is not in you?"
> The bathroom is silent.
> "I am a woman."
> "I don't know."
> "What?" Śruti asks louder.
> "We were talking Hindu fibres, not women's," the bathroom spurts abruptly.
> "My father was Pañjabi?"
> The bathroom is silent.
> "Was he or not?"
> "He was, darling," comes forward from behind the splashing sound of water.
> "Mother was from Banaras?"
> "Yes."
> "Then how many fibres are there, that are in me and in Śarad but not in me and you?"
> [. . .] Why should I separate fibre by fibre, nerve by nerve, from this whole and complete identity? What I am is clearly definite in my consciousness, why should I wake it up, choose some parts of it and leave out others? If I do so, my self would shrink. My self-pride would be impaired. Its essential beauty, its real shape would be spoilt. Dimming it, thickening it, pushing this out and pulling that in . . . we ourselves are breaking into pieces our form and figure, but we are just becoming ugly. [206–207]

Fragmented identities in a collapsing world are literarily conveyed through a fragmented narrative. We may note that this allows the narrator, who is the main focalizer, to multiply the focalization through indirect or

character-bound focalizations, also through the direct dialogues. The use of fragments in postmodern literature has been connected to the chaos theory, and we may well think that in this novel, it is a technique allowing to present multiple points of view and reinforcing the idea of complexity as well as of fragmented identity.

Conclusion

Hamārā śahar us baras is a novel about the crisis of secular reasoning and the problems of a rigidly polarized ideology. The Indian intelligentsia represented in it is shown facing the crisis of secular tolerance in the demolition of the secular state, being incapable of giving alternative answers. Anguishing in confusion, they fall helplessly prisoner of the "us vs. them" logic, with a negative effect both from a private and from a collective point of view. The stories of the main characters show how the outer turmoil has a strong reflection in their inner life also. But academic life is stricken too: in the anarchy of communalist disorders, it seems that research and intellectual quality are bound to succumb. Rather than solving the existing problems of Indian universities, communal ideology seems to emphasize the tendency to sycophancy and subservience characterizing a great deal of Indian public life. This attitude, though—as the story suggests—can hardly lead to a flourishing intellectual life.

Whatever the new chosen identity, modern India is historically composite, resulting from the confluence of heterogeneous streams. Eclectic, mixed India may be an illegitimate offspring, but it is fascinating, suggesting that identity is pluralistic, open, and intercultural, rather than a rigid, close, and bounded entity. In an interview, Gītāñjalī Śrī elaborated on the notion of mixed culture, which she defines as "hybrid,"[20] and this novel no doubt is a strong accusation against the sinister effects of ideas of purity in contemporary India. Gītāñjalī Śrī suggests that the only possible solution is the acceptance of heterogeneity versus homogenizing pressures, because only this can allow freedom and cultural development.

Hamārā śahar us baras stresses how absurd this world has become, individuals being left with a feeling of alienation and helplessness, and society being shaken by violence and fanaticism. In the novel there is a strong criticism of the instrumental use of security, discipline, and law and order in the name of education and morality, in the context of a politically tinged religious discourse aimed at the creation of communalistic identities. The novel deals with historical facts dating back to the last decades of the twentieth century, but the issues it addresses are still very urgent: for example, as I write, India's renowned 92-year-old painter M. F. Husain is being subjected

to a round of moral policing, targeted by communal groups for his supposed irreverence to the Hindu religion. Even more connected to the subject of *Hamārā śahar us baras* is the attack on freedom of expression launched at the reputed Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda on 9 May 2007, when a group of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) activists led by a local Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and accompanied by a section of the media stormed into the campus of the Faculty of Fine Arts during the annual display of the works by final year students, abusing and attacking a student with the claim that his works were obscene and offensive to religious sentiments. It is pertinent to emphasize that the works were being shown as part of an internal academic assessment exercise being conducted by the faculty, therefore they were not on public display, and in no way were they intended to be exhibited for public viewing. Not only was Chandramohan arrested without a proper warrant and without consulting the Faculty of Fine Arts, but the acting Dean—Dr. Shivaji Panikkar, one of the leading art historians of India—was suspended. This event is just an episode of the sustained campaign led by extremists that has been going on for decades, aimed at bowdlerizing the cultural life and denying people their right to freedom of expression. It is a proof of their worrying attempt to gain a stranglehold over educational institutions through various tactics of intimidation, but also of the connivance between academic authorities and political power. In fact, the BJP-supporting Vice Chancellor refused to initiate any action against the trespassers or to apply for bail for the victimized, seizing the opportunity to launch an attack on a portion of the campus that had always held strong secularist positions both inside and outside the University political arena. In the rise of intolerance, India risks to become an illiberal democracy, guided by competing populism. This raises serious questions also about the State's ability, or even desire, to protect the cultural freedom of individuals. Of course, a literary work is not requested to give answers to this all: this novel amplifies very well doubts and questions, challenging the reader to reflect upon them.

Notes

* The first *avatār* of this paper was presented at the International Conference on "The Past and Present of South Asia: Unity in Diversity?" Pavia, September 2004. A revised version was presented at the eighteenth ECMSAS Conference in Leiden, 27–30 June 2006. I would like to acknowledge the comments of the participants at those conferences. I am especially indebted to Theo Damsteegt, University of Leiden, for his thoughtful remarks and for the time he devoted to the revision of the text. I warmly thank Gītāñjalī Śrī, who so readily answered my questions. I remain, however, solely to blame for whatever inadequacies remain.

1. Built in the sixteenth century by the first Mughal emperor, Bābar, it was razed to the ground in December 1992 by Hindus claiming that it had been built on that spot after desecrating and destroying a temple standing on the birthplace of Lord Rām.
2. Let us just mention the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS), the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, the National Museum, the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, the All India Council for Technical Education, the University Grants Commission (UGC), and the Hindī Saṃsthān.
3. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (second edition) (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997).
4. What times are these, when / to speak of trees is almost a crime / because it passes in silence over such infamy!
5. The edition I quote is Gītāñjalī Śrī, *Hamārā śahar us baras*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1998. All subsequent page references in square brackets are from this edition of the text.
6. Lit: "the company of the good ones": in its common usage the term denotes any assembly of persons (be they two or a large group of people) who meet to pray, sing, listen to the recitation of sacred texts or sacred tales, discuss and comment on them, and assimilate the truth.
7. This narrator could be type "g" of the categorization proposed by Bal, pp. 25–28.
8. Śruti, too, has a problem with ink: when she finally starts writing, she realizes that her fountain pen is dry [24]. This private obsession acquires in the end also a collective connotation, when people start writing with ink on their houses "this is a Hindu house" and the whole sky turns inky [237–352].
9. Theo Damsteegt, *The Present Tense in Modern Hindi Fiction* (Groningen, Netherlands: Egbert Forsten, 2004), p. 102.
10. Ibid., p. 108. Actually, in both passages, Damsteegt deals only with IFA, but maybe they can be taken as valid also with reference to this kind of narration.
11. There is an immense bibliography on "Partition Literature." I shall only suggest a few titles, that can be useful in distinguishing between the discourse of historiography and the one of literature: Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint, *Translating Partition* (Delhi: Katha, 2001); Mushirul Hasan, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995); Gyan Pandey, "The Prose of Otherness" in David Arnold and David Hardman, eds., *Subaltern Studies VIII* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 188–221.
12. Mehboob Khan's masterpiece (1957), the first Indian film that got a nomination for an Oscar.
13. Genie Babb, "Where the Bodies Are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character," *Narrative* 10, no. 3 (October 2002): 195–221.

14. This is a narrative technique typical of the *nayī kahānī*: Konrad Meisig, *Erzähltechniken der Nayī Kahānī* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1996), pp. 75–79.
15. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les editions de minuit, 1979); Pierre Bourdieu, *Le regole dell'arte. Genesi e struttura del campo letterario* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2005).
16. The debate about the interpretation of ancient and premodern India, especially regarding the question of the origins, as well as the relationship between Hindus and Muslims, has been one of the major themes in South Asian historiography in the past decades: Romila Thapar, *From the Origins to AD 1300* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002); Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, and Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2004, second ed.); Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, second ed. 2006).
17. Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, (New Delhi, India: Kali for Women, 1995); Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, *Women and Right-Wing Movements Indian Experiences* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995); P. Bacchetta, *Gender in the Hindu Nation RSS Women as Ideologues* (New Delhi: Feminist Fine Print for Women Unlimited, 2004); Amrita Basu, *Two Faces of Protest Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu, *Appropriating Gender Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
18. Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); see also Gayatri Reddy, "'Men' Who Would be Kings: Celibacy, Emasculation, and the Re-Production of Hijras in Contemporary Indian Politics—Gender Identity, Social Stigma, and Political Corruption," *Social Research*, Spring 2003.
19. Percentages have been rounded off.
20. A. Consolaro, "Meeting the Hindi writer Geetanjali Shree" in *Roads to Knowledge: Hermeneutical and Lexical Probes, DOST Critical Studies I*, ed. A. Monti and S. Bianchi (Alessandria, Italy: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2007), pp. 123–141. We need not discuss here how successful the concept of hybridity has been in postcolonial Indian literature, where it usually refers to the "mixing" of one's own culture and that of the colonizers: see, for example, B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 118; on hybridity as a metonymy of presence: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 115.

Bibliography

Babb, Genie. "Where the Bodies Are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character." *Narrative* 10, no. 3 (October 2002): 195–221.

Bacchetta, P. *Gender in the Hindu Nation RSS Women as Ideologues*. New Delhi: Feminist Fine Print for Women Unlimited, 2004.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (second edition). Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Basu, Amrita. *Two Faces of Protest Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Il corpo tra natura e cultura*. Milano: F. Angeli, 1987.

Damsteegt, Theo. *The Present Tense in Modern Hindi Fiction*. Groningen, Netherlands: Egbert Forsten, 2004.

Dubois, Jacques. "Pierre Bourdieu and Literature." *SubStance* 93 (2000): 84–102.

Gupta, Charu. Sexuality, *Obscenity, Community Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Jeffery, Patricia, and Amrita Basu, eds. *Appropriating Gender Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Meisig, Konrad. *Erzähltechniken der Nayī Kahānī*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1996.

Reddy, Gayatri. "'Men' Who Would Be Kings: Celibacy, Emasculation, and the Re-Production of Hijras in Contemporary Indian Politics—Gender Identity, Social Stigma, and Political Corruption." *Social Research*, Spring 2003.

Sarkar, Tanika, and Urvashi Butalia, eds., Kali for Women. *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995.

Sarkar, Tanika, and Urvashi Butalia. *Women and Right-Wing Movements Indian Experiences.* London; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995.

Śrī, Gītāñjalī. *Hamārā śahar us baras*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1998.