



# Religious alterity and violence in contemporary anglophone novels by Indian and Pakistani writers

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## Abstract

Processes of hostile Othering on the basis of religious alterity and escalations of communal violence are represented in many contemporary novels by Indian and Pakistani writers. This thesis analyses the ways in which four selected Anglophone contemporary novels by Indian and Pakistani writers refer to, represent and discuss historical and contemporary events that have repeatedly been categorized as examples of 'religious violence,' i.e. violent conflicts where the religious identities of both perpetrators and victims were the major reason or pretense for their involvement in those conflicts. The four novels analyzed in this thesis and the events they refer to are Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1991) about Partition 1947, Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* (2001) about the riots accompanying the Ram Janmabhumi campaign in the early 1990s, Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006) about the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat 2002, and Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) about the Kashmir conflict. Embedded as they are in the 'real,' empirical world, these novels engage with and respond to what they are surrounded by — a world abounding with violence and violent conflicts which seem to be directly related to religion in one way or another. Drawing on the debates about the question of religion's relation to violence in different fields and conscientiously factoring in the specific historical contexts that the novels refer to and were written in, this study aims at identifying the ways in which the four selected examples of literary fiction represent, respond to and discuss historical instances of religious violence and how they negotiate the relation between religion and the violence they describe. This thesis' overarching question is how these novels, representing those violent events on a fictional level, position themselves regarding the relation between religion, religious alterity, hostile Othering and violence. The approach to answering my principal question importantly involves looking at the ways in which these fictional texts refer to and include contemporary public discourses on the topic of religion's relation to violence in India. In this respect, I am especially interested in literary representations and negotiations of the complex dynamics of marginalization, repression or silencing of memories of traumatizing events in dominant discourses in the public domain. My central hypothesis is that by way of narrating specific instances of religiously connoted violence, the novels scrutinize and highlight processes of hostile Othering on the basis of religious alterity and thereby bring to the fore its consequences both for the individuals directly involved and society as a whole. I contend that these novels deplore the status of religious alterity as singular category of perceiving the socio-cultural 'Other' and, by virtue of providing a multifaceted, complex image of India's and Pakistan's inhabitants, argue for a conceptual pluralization of identities and illustrate the advantages of perceiving others not as same but instead as diversely different.

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