



# Academic Enclaves: Navigating Ideological Conflicts in Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper embarks on an intellectual odyssey through the captivating campus novel, delving deeply into the rich tapestry of resilience and resistance within the hallowed walls of an academic institution. Shattering the confines of conventional literary categorization, Hariharan's masterpiece ingeniously weaves together the thematic elements of ideological conflicts and the campus novel genre, employing the university setting as an evocative backdrop to explore the complexities of human existence. This paper attempts to unravel the manifold layers of Hariharan's magnum opus within the intricate narrative framework, dissecting its portrayal of the campus as a microcosm of society. Through a meticulous examination of the characters' responses to adversity, this study illuminates the profound role of political and religious differences within the sanctums of educational institutions. Moreover, it sheds light on the indomitable spirit that thrives amidst these intellectual crucibles, illuminating the remarkable interplay between resilience and resistance. By undertaking a profound exploration of *In Times of Siege*, an attempt has been made to offer a unique and thought-provoking perspective on the human condition within educational settings. This research extends beyond the traditional boundaries of literary analysis, excavating the profound connections between the academic enclave and the wider world. The findings of this paper unveil the transformative power of literature as a catalyst for introspection, enlightenment, and societal change, inviting scholars and intellectuals alike to engage in an awe-inspiring journey through the corridors of academia. Ultimately, this study uncovers the extraordinary intellectual grandeur of *In Times of Siege*, affirming its position as a visionary work that seamlessly blends the artistic prowess of storytelling with profound sociopolitical commentary. While navigating the labyrinthine pathways of Hariharan's narrative, a heightened understanding is attained regarding the triumph of the human spirit and the formidable capacity of academic institutions to shape and reshape society.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Resistance, Ideological Conflicts, Academic Enclaves, Campus Novel, Narrative Intricacies, Microcosm of Society, Political and Religious Differences, Educational Institutions, Human Condition

## INTRODUCTION

In the realm of contemporary literature, the genre of campus fiction has emerged as a powerful tool for exploring the multifaceted dynamics of academic environments. These narratives delve into the complexities of ideological conflicts that shape and challenge academic enclaves, revealing the intricate interplay between resilience and resistance. Githa Hariharan's critically acclaimed novel, *In Times of Siege*, stands as a compelling exemplar of campus fiction, deftly navigating the tensions and contradictions inherent within academic spaces. This research paper aims to unravel the intricate tapestry of ideological conflicts portrayed in Hariharan's work, focusing on the notions of resilience and resistance that emerge within the narrative. By analyzing the novel's characters, settings, and thematic motifs, this study seeks to shed light on the nuanced ways in which academic enclaves navigate and negotiate ideological divisions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that govern intellectual communities. Through this exploration, attempts have been made to gain insights into the transformative potential of resilience and resistance within academic settings and the implications they hold for broader social and cultural contexts.

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, campus novel is “usually comic or satirical, in which the action is set within the enclosed world of a university (or similar seat of learning) and highlights the follies of academic life” (Baldick, Chris, 33). Furthermore, the characters inhabiting such literary works predominantly encompass erudite academicians, pedagogues, erudite pupils, non-teaching personnel, administrative personnel, and individuals intricately associated with the educational establishments that serve as the narrative backdrop. These works deftly employ a satirical lens to tackle weighty subject matters, endeavoring to address multifarious profound themes. Not only do these literary creations facilitate comprehension of the ever-evolving academic milieu, but they also serve as a microcosm unto themselves. This particular subgenre of campus literature entices an inquisitive readership primarily due to its vivid portrayal of the inner sanctum of educational institutions, often referred to as the ‘ivory towers,’ which are externally perceived as utopian dwellings of intellectual elites.

Functioning as a campus novel, Githa Hariharan’s literary opus, *In Times of Siege*, plumbs the depths of various dimensions of university life and the intricate interplay among distinct constituents of the academic community. It showcases the intricate webs of political maneuvering and power struggles that permeate the campus, particularly through the agency of student unions, leadership elections, and skirmishes between different student factions during electoral processes. Moreover, the novel illuminates the sway of political and religious affiliations on campus activities, such as the organization of protests, rallies, and dharnas, which frequently precipitate confrontations and necessitate police intervention. Furthermore, the novel scrutinizes the repercussions of ideological schisms among faculty members. The ideological disparities between professors espousing left-wing and right-wing leanings contribute to controversies and conflicts within the university’s intellectual fabric. These schisms engender a pervasive sense of siege, as clashing ideologies disrupt the campus’s tranquility and harmony.

In addition to the exploration of campus politics and ideological discord, the novel offers a perspicacious depiction of the academic milieu itself. It casts a discerning light on the trials and tribulations encountered by professors in their pedagogical endeavors and their engagement with research pursuits. The characters engage in discourses concerning curriculum development, the curation of historical lessons, and the manifestation of diverse ideological influences on academic discourse.

Githa Hariharan’s narrative commences by introducing the central figure, Shiv Murthy, a mature history professor ensconced within the hallowed halls of Kasturba Gandhi Open University (KGU) in Delhi. Shiv’s journey unfolds as he visits Meena, the daughter of his childhood comrade Sumathi, who has suffered a leg injury in an unfortunate accident. Assuming the role of Meena’s local guardian, Shiv graciously welcomes her into his abode for a transient period while she convalesces. Meanwhile, Shiv becomes enmeshed in a maelstrom of controversy precipitated by his lecture on Basava, a revered 12th-century poet and social reformer. The delivery of this lesson elicits the ire of a Hindu vigilante group christened the “Ithihas Surksha Manch,” who vehemently accuse Shiv of purposefully distorting the annals of medieval Indian history. Despite the vociferous demands for an apology, Shiv, heeding Meena’s counsel, staunchly refuses to capitulate. Instead, he forges an astute course of action alongside his scholarly cohorts to counter the Manch’s onslaught. The situation grows increasingly dire when Shiv discovers that his lesson has been subjected to the scrutiny of a review committee, thereby precipitating the imminent threat of his resignation.

In parallel, the university initiates a process of recalling medieval history booklets that were distributed to students. Meanwhile, the president and vice president of the Manch (presumably a Hindu organization) call for a revival of Hindu courage. In response, leftist historians criticize and oppose the actions taken by the university, thereby initiating a conflict with Hindu organizations. Meena, Amar, and their radical associates organize a television program and produce a leaflet that scrutinizes the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and its ideological proponents. The ideological battle spills over into the realm of newspapers, with readers expressing their opinions through letters to the editor, focusing on allegations of discrimination and biased practices by leftist historians.

Tensions reach a boiling point on the KGU campus when a mob attempts to attack an individual named Shiv, but he is fortunate enough to be rescued by his colleague, Menon. Unfortunately, Shiv’s office falls victim to vandalism in the process. Consequently, the conflict between the Leftists and the Right wing escalates, and Shiv becomes the target of threatening letters and anonymous phone calls aimed at his wife and daughter. He also receives newspaper clippings and letters condemning his alleged distortion of historical facts. In a television interview, the Vice Chancellor expresses concern over the university’s security and further reprimands Shiv in a written letter for bringing disgrace to the institution.

Shiv Murthy, an ordinary individual leading a peaceful and conflict-averse life, finds himself unexpectedly stirred by Meena, a young student who manages to ignite a sense of enthusiasm within the otherwise cautious middle-aged professor. Meena's actions awaken something within Shiv, compelling him to act when his personal and professional worlds are disrupted. Githa Hariharan employs the character of Shiv Murthy to exemplify how even the voices of the cautious and typically silent middle class can rise to prominence during times of crisis.

A thorough examination reveals the presence of a Roman-a-clef attribute in the work, wherein the characters bear resemblance to real-life individuals, while the campus setting exhibits numerous common elements found in educational institutions. The characters in the work are occasionally disguised or openly derived from actual persons, including literary figures who are often portrayed as pseudo-intellectuals, often caricatured in nature. This observation enhances the comprehensive understanding and academic acceptability of the work. Elaine Showalter writes, "I am a professor of English literature, and yes, I have been a character in academic fiction at least twice, once a voluptuous, promiscuous, drug-addicted bohemian, once a prudish, dumpy, judgmental frump" (*Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents*, 1). The novel consistently exhibits the author's strong disdain for her adversaries, which is effectively conveyed through the use of Roman-a-clef. Hariharan specifically directs her criticism towards Madhav Sadasiv Golwalkar, who serves as the theoretical inspiration behind the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Furthermore, the author employs elements of mockery, exemplified by the alteration of the name of the then HRD minister Prof. Murli Monohar Joshi to Prof. (Shri) M.M. Behoshi. Additionally, Meena and her friends engage in ridiculing the interpretation of an ancient Sanskrit shloka by the senior historian of the Manch. They mockingly emphasize certain words by associating it with "Great Brahmin Foolness" and call the historian a "clown" (Hariharan, 118, 148). These instances reflect Hariharan's biased approach in attacking her ideological opponents.

The novel provides an in-depth exploration of the political dynamics within educational institutions, shedding light on the influence exerted by political parties, student unions, and social organizations on campus life. It delves into the complex power structures, conflicts, and acts of violence that arise from political affiliations and rivalries among both teachers and students. The author critically examines the manipulation tactics employed for political gains and highlights the detrimental effects they have on the academic environment.

By delving into the realm of political ideology, the novel *In Times of Siege* offers a nuanced portrayal of the socio-political realities of late 20th century India. Specifically, it focuses on the clash between right-wing nationalism and more progressive, inclusive perspectives, allowing readers to gain insights into the broader implications of these ideological battles. The novel effectively highlights how these ideologies shape the lives of individuals, impact their relationships, and influence the wider society. It encourages readers to engage in critical analysis of the political landscape and its far-reaching consequences.

Set in India during the late 1990s, a period characterized by intense ideological conflicts, the novel captures the backdrop of a society engaged in ideological warfare. The ascendancy of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government prompted attempts to replace Marxist intellectuals with right-wing scholars in national-level curriculum development agencies. This political climate serves as the chief backdrop for the central conflict in the story, as evidenced by the following lines:

... the Head pushed for Shiv's being In-Charge of B.A. History because he was sure that Shiv would, while being liberal, "balance any Marxist bias." The Head's great fear is that the "consensus approach" so dear to his heart may be demolished by some course expert who is "too controversial" or "dominating" or "given to extreme ideas." (51)

The novel *In Times of Siege* explores the significant role of political ideology in shaping the narrative and driving conflicts experienced by the characters. It delves into the clash between different ideological positions and the broader impact it has on individuals and society. Within the novel, one prominent political ideology under examination is Hindutva, which advocates for a Hindu nationalist identity in India. However, the novel presents a critical perspective on Hindutva and its associated beliefs, portraying it as a divisive force that challenges the secular fabric of society.

The character of Dr. Arya serves as a representative of Hindutva ideology, engaging in debates and confrontations with other characters who hold opposing viewpoints. On the opposing side, the novel depicts characters aligned with leftist and secular ideologies, who actively resist the rise of Hindutva. These characters, such as Meena and Prof. Murthy, embody the resistance to the dominant Hindutva narrative. They advocate for a pluralistic and inclusive society, emphasizing the importance of religious tolerance and coexistence. Furthermore, Dr. Arya articulates the foundational premises of Hindutva during a staff meeting, suggesting that Islam and Christianity are perceived as foreign religions, while Muslims are considered to be not truly Indian. This statement exemplifies the character's adherence to Hindutva ideology, highlighting its exclusionary and divisive nature, he says:

Today, apart from Muslims, even Christians, Parsis and other foreigners are also recognized as minority communities. But in many of the states the Hindus have been reduced to a minority, and the Muslims, Christians or Sikhs are in a majority. (26)

This perspective is juxtaposed with the character of Meena, embodying the author's personal secularist ideology. Meena takes an active role in confronting discriminatory practices, exemplified by her active participation in a legal case against the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act. Through the portrayal of these characters and their interactions, Hariharan offers a comprehensive critique of Hindutva and its detrimental effects on religious harmony and inclusivity. Her reaction to Shiv discussing Dr Arya is, "You're trying your best to humanize him, aren't you . . . Why should we rack our brains figuring out his life? Finding out what made him such a twisted piece? He's like all his ancestors—tyrants capable of personal acts of kindness. Nazis who responded to music and poetry" (35).

In addition to the ongoing ideological conflict surrounding secularism, the novel also delves into the divisions between left-wing and right-wing ideologies. The university staff is portrayed as being divided along these ideological lines, with Dr. Arya leading the right-wing faction and Dr. Menon representing the left-wing perspective. This clash of opposing ideologies gives rise to frequent confrontations and disrupts the peaceful atmosphere within the university campus. The novel provides a vivid depiction of a political landscape dominated by student unions, elections, factional disputes during elections, protests, and rallies. Students align themselves with various political parties as well as social or religious groups, resulting in frequent clashes that often escalate into violence, necessitating police intervention. These activities are heavily influenced by the guidance and mentorship provided by political and community leaders.

One notable incident in the novel involves Shiv, who faces reprimand for the lesson he prepared on social reforms. During this incident, the Head of the university expresses disapproval or discontentment with Shiv's teaching approach by saying, "The Dean and I have received an angry, abusive letter about this lesson . . . This group, something called the Itihās Surakṣā Manch, accuses you of distorting history and historical figures" (*In Times of Siege*, 55). In the fictional KGU campus devised by Hariharan, a series of events intensify the situation and escalate it into a full-fledged political conflict. The novel portrays the dissemination of leaflets, urgent meetings being organized, protests being staged, processions being planned, slogans being chanted, placards being displayed, and public statements being made to ridicule leaders and their ideologies. The media also contributes to sensationalizing these events, conducting television interviews, while acts of vandalism occur, resulting in a chaotic atmosphere. Despite being a distance learning institution, the KGU campus is not immune to external influences, as evidenced by the attack on the professor's office. University campuses have become centers for a variety of both social and antisocial activities, with both the Manch and leftist groups actively participating.

Githa Hariharan's novel *In Times of Siege* delves into the ideological differences among the characters, which contribute to the conflicts and tensions within the story. These ideological disparities play a significant role in shaping the narrative and advancing the plot. One of the primary ideological conflicts depicted in the novel revolves around the concept of secularism. Hariharan explores the practice of secularism within the context of various ideologies and "isms" that influence the characters' beliefs and actions. The university campus, which is intended to be a sacred and inclusive space, becomes a battleground for conflicting ideological positions. The author highlights the discomfort and silence that arise when characters encounter views that challenge their own perspectives. For instance, the character Mrs. Khan is deeply affected when Dr. Arya raises objections regarding the editing of a history lesson that addresses demographic shifts in India, particularly the decline of Hindus as a majority in certain states. This incident exposes the tensions and sensitivities surrounding the perception of religious and cultural identities. Hariharan's novel examines the

practice of secularism within a university setting, emphasizing the impact of different ideologies and exploring the discomfort caused by Dr. Arya's use of terms like "foreigner" and "Muslim" during the discussion, which prompts Mrs. Khan to leave the room, eliciting sympathy from other faculty members. As an activist and secularist, Hariharan employs the novel as a platform to criticize the Hindutva Brigade, using various names and derogatory terms such as "fundoos" for fundamentalists (Hariharan, 19, 57).

## CONCLUSION

Hariharan's novel, *In Times of Siege*, aims to draw attention to the perils of thought policing and the repercussions of political control over intellectual freedom. The character of Meena serves as a reflection of Hariharan herself, given the author's active engagement in human rights advocacy. Meena's activism and her personal involvement in challenging discriminatory laws effectively mirror the author's own experiences, establishing a strong connection between the character and the author. The novel depicts a once tranquil university that becomes a center of controversy due to clashes between professors holding contrasting ideologies. By delving into the political climate within the university, the book sheds light on the power dynamics, ideological conflicts, and societal implications that arise from student politics and external influences on academic institutions.

Moreover, the narrative explores the ideological disparities among the characters and how these differences contribute to the tensions and conflicts within the story. Through these portrayals, Hariharan endeavors to depict the intricate ideological complexities prevalent in society, employing the enclosed world of the fictional KGU as a backdrop. By situating the narrative in this academic setting, the novel provides a comprehensive examination of the various forces at play and their impacts on individuals and society as a whole. The exploration of these themes in *In Times of Siege* contributes to a greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of ideologies and their implications within a societal context, making the novel a valuable work in the academic realm.

## REFERENCES

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