In Times of Siege
In Times of Siege is a novel by Githa Hariharan which tells the story about Shiv Murthy-a fifty two years old professor of History at an Open University in New Delhi which is a fictional place. Murthy does not take regular classes but coordinates resources for his correspondence students. When the novel opens, one sees that his wife (Rekha) is in the U.S.A., visiting her only daughter Tara. He is alone at home with his maid Kamala who handles all the household work and stays with her family in the adjoining servant quarters. At the same time, Meena, who is the daughter of his friend Sumati, a research scholar in Kamla Nehru University, suffers from a knee injury and Shiv being her local guardian, gets a call from hostel asking him to pick her up so that she can recover at home. Meena is a sociology student, who is writing a thesis on the stories of women’s affected by anti-Sikh riots after Indira Gandhi assassination in 1984. She is an intelligent, self-sufficient and practical girl. This novel was written shortly after 1999 Parliamentary elections in which NDA formed the government at the center and BJP led government showed its leaning towards an anti-secularist and religiously polarized society where not only an intellectual man like Murthy but common people also faced problems in locating their identities suppressed by political control over intellectual freedom

In the beginning, Shiv feels a bit uneasy but soon he handles the situation. To take good care of Meena he decides to apply for casual leaves. He goes to the department and comes to know about the faculty meeting. He attends the meeting with his colleagues namely: Menon, Amita, Dr. Arya and the head Mr. Sharma. Mr. Sharma discusses that some of the professors are not writing their modules according to the set desired aim, which may hurt the feelings of the Hindu people. Dr. Arya instigates the Head against Mr. Menon. He says that the history professors must understand their duty to glorify the Indian history. Shiv has already heard rumours about Arya’s links with the nikkardharis (members of R.S.S). After the meeting, he collects his papers to write a module on
Vijayanagar Empire for correspondence students, and gives his application for leave and comes back home.

After a few days, Shiv gets a call from a newspaper “Current” and the reporter tells him that his module on a twelfth century poet Basava has instigated the right-wing political functionaries who are hurt and deeply offended by Shiv’s portrayal of Basava as a revolutionary who opposed caste divisions. This so called Itihas Suraksha Manch—a “Hindu watch dog group” (55) claims that the lesson distorts history because it undermines Basava’s reputation as a mystic poet and makes too much of caste divisions among Hindus. It is really surprising that Shiv has written this module for the Medieval History Course of B.A. History programme five years back, and after such a long gap, a group makes allegation for hurting the sentiments and emotions of the Hindu people. The reaction of the Manch seems highly ridiculous to Shiv. The Manch agitates strongly and blames Shiv for distorting history and making a caricature of a historical figure like Basava. This clearly shows the growing influence of fundamentalism.

Here, the sociological concept of identity as stated by Erikson applies when the readers see that Shiv does have a sense of personal identity but he does not fit in the frame of social identity as it is ascribed by others. Identity conflict is there as Supporters of Hindutva do not consider him a true Hindu. The supporters of the “Manch” clearly threatens the university administration that Shiv has to seek an apology for twisting such a religious subject and the university has to withdraw the lesson from the module. Finally, Shiv finds himself in difficulty for writing about Basava, the finance minister to king Bijala (the twelfth century city) of Kalyana. Basava had magical personality and charisma. He was a political revolutionary. He was the founder of a community in which all the people irrespective of their caste and sex were equal. The people of this community were called “warriors of Siva”. But aims of such type of society were not
acceptable to conservative sections of society. Under the influence of this society, a Brahmin girl married a cobbler boy. King Bijala was pressurized to condemn the marriage. He issued death sentence for the fathers of the bride and the bridegroom saying that such caste marriages are not acceptable. Basava protested against this. Then violent clashes took place between the followers of Basava called the “veershaivas”, and the followers of the conservative society. These clashes resulted in the burning of the city and the murder of king Bijala. Basava left the city in disappointment and died under mysterious circumstances, possibly committing suicide.

Later Basava strongly appears as a mystic poet in history and followers of Itihas Surakasha Manch want to highlight this figure of Basava. The main charge against Shiv was that Basava’s presentation as a social revolutionary rather than a mystic poet distorts history, because the staunch supporters of Hindutva do not want to see their saintly figure in any other light than that of a pure and divine soul.

It seems you have implied that Basava[s]...city, Kalyana, was not a model Hindu kingdom. It seems you have exaggerated the problem of caste and written in a very biased way about the Brahmins and temple priests. And also you have not made it clear enough that Basava ... was much more than an ordinary human being. (53-54)

Views presented by Beck directly apply here as Shiv does not get any support from his own culture. He is in the process of “individualization” and tries to compensate for this lack of support. Hariharan, here, presents the true and real image of cultural institutions like the “Manch” which on one hand exploit the religious beliefs of the common people, and, on the other hand impose their supremacy over them. They victimize weak people like Shiv and try to wipe them out if they speak against them and their beliefs. Shiv feels very uncomfortable and tries to take shelter in the calm and
comforting zone of Meena and Babli (daughter of his maid Kamla) from this harsh and cruel world. However soon he realizes that he cannot stay there for a longer period of time. "His brief hour of reprieve, the comforting calm before the storm, spent in secret garden of wise children. Then it all begins again. The world outside the small room, stirs raises its hood" (84).

If one sees the story in the light of the theory of individualization, one feels that Shiv is a victim of circumstances. He realizes that his honestly written lesson on history brings in criticism and condemnation instead of appreciation. These fundamentalists even go on to the extent of calling him a traitor who is loyal to Pakistan and Muslims. They even advises him to go and settle there. Mr. Anant Tripathi, the leader of the Manch compares him with Muslim invaders like Ghazni and Gauri. Through the “Manch” Tripathi challenges all those who try to demean Hindu pride and civilization. He calls them the modern invaders in the guise of the historians, trying to rewrite the history that has been true since ages and passed the test of time. The fundamentalists even threaten to harm his wife and daughter who are living in a foreign country.

The theory of individualization given by Furlong and Cartmel totally fits into this paradigm when Shiv gets stuck into problems and bears pressure for which he might not be ready. He undergoes strong sense of personal failings and faces various obstacles. At this point, one sees the real selfish image of the people who occupy the center stage of the society. The President of the “Manch”, Mr. Anant Tripathi tries to utilize this chance to earn fame. He blames Shiv for deliberately picking up this controversial issue and calls him a seeker of foreign funding. He sows the seeds of destruction in the society to suppress the weak people like Shiv and when these weak people cannot dare to retaliate, they find themselves helpless in locating their identity. This further leads them to a state of chaos and struggle. Strong people always try to prove their identity by harassing their
weaker counterparts. This leads to the conflict between the two as well as within the self of the weaker one, and this type of conflict is a major cause of identity crisis. This is surprisingly indigestible here that in which capacity such non-historians can judge the work of qualified scholars.

In the very first meeting of Shiv with the head and the dean, Shiv hardly believes his ears when his head asks him to avail leave for some time due to this controversy. The head tells him about the three demands of the “Manch”: (1) the separate apologies from the department as well as Shiv; (2) retracting the material from the students; and (3) rewriting the lesson which must be approved by the “Manch” before the final printing. The Dean asks Shiv to seek an apology at the earliest. Shiv is in a state of dilemma, and finally decides to take a stand instead of rendering an apology for no fault of his own. He decides not to give up and strictly refuses to accept the demands of the fundamentalists. He does not talk about the other two demands put forward by the “Manch” as these involved not only him but the department as well.

Shiv is here undergoing an existential dilemma as he is unable to handle the pressures of the society around. It is evident here that Shiv faces dilemma of identity as he stops reacting as a normal professor. He attains heightened consciousness and ventures into an existential struggle against all odds. Shiv has no other option than to resist in a silent manner. The Head of the department and the Dean both are frightened by the media and want Shiv to do the same as demanded by the “fundoos”. For a normal professor the suitable response seems to be- signing the apology, reprint the lesson and keep the job, but Shiv does not go the same way. Here, Meena’s presence is highly considerable who is a free campus radical and she completely transforms Shiv’s sense of his role as a historian. Fundamentalists show their active resistance but Shiv does not react and adopts non-violence. The people of this “Manch” cover up their agitations, and
violence under the name of welfare of the country. One does not understand here how
can violence and destruction lead to welfare? Meena calls this protest an attack.
“Whether people are talking about culture or history or women’s right, protection has
become a much-abused word. A cover up for all kinds of bullying tactics” (55).

The battle over Basava is further instigated by Dr. Arya. He is an obvious
representative of the Hindu fundamentalism. He gloats over the misfortune of Shiv. “His
face looks bloated as if he has been feasting on Shiv’s misery...No wonder Arya was an
unexpected accomplice; he wanted the meeting so he could gloat in public over the
“Manch’s” new victim” (25). This man Arya is a staunch supporter of Hindutva.
Previously in one of the department’s meeting he declares that Islam and Christianity are
foreign religions and that Muslims are not truly Indians. Here, one sees that teachers like
Arya, who are supposed to teach equality to the society, spit out venom and discriminate
people on such grounds, and hurt them. Dr. Arya feels no shame and hesitation in openly
talking about caste division and separation. He does not think about the sentiments of the
marginalized people. He talks contemptuously about Mrs. Khan, a Muslim secretary in
the department of history, she has to grapple with:

The new status thrust on her- Muslim Mrs Khan, Foreign Mrs Khan. Mrs.
Khan. Mrs Khan, a woman who has travelled leagues from her
grandmother’s and mother’s lives to work in an office and make a modest
contribution to the family income. Now she is being pushed back to square
one, to the old diminishing religious identity. (20)

Mrs. Khan is an apt example of Freud’s “psychodynamic theory” as due to her
religious identity she does not get an affirmation in a Hindu society and runs into
difficulties. Her identity is not acknowledged because what she “wants to be” does not
reflect any possibility within a fundamentalist Hindu culture. Women like Mrs. Khan
stand nowhere in front of people like Dr. Arya. The words used by Dr. Arya hurt Mrs. Khan so deeply that she immediately goes on leave. Shiv says that she needs the leave as she has to recover from the new status thrust upon her- “Muslim Mrs. Khan”. Her suffering is so intense that she does not know if she would be able to “come back the same sweet, hopeful secretary” (20) after the leave.

Amartya Sen has written on this issue, arguing that essentializing religious identities diminish the complexities and multifariousness of people’s identities, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, where other markers of identity, such as gender, language, ethnicity or caste are just as or more important than one’s religious affiliation (349-56). Hariharan registers Mrs. Khan’s protest against all sort of religious forces which marginalize her and makes it clear that how these forces hinder the growth of a great nation. This forces everyone to think about the identity of the marginalized people in a secular and democratic nation like India. Here Mrs. Khan is a symbolic figure, portraying the destruction of interpersonal relationships in a communist interpretation of history. This clearly indicates that interpersonal relationships cannot stay when identity is at stake.

Meena who is in support of Shiv suggests him to face all this confrontation boldly. She motivates him to take a stand. She advises Shiv to speak against the “Manch” and even to answer back to Arya as well as the Head of the department. Meena encourages him to confront Arya whom she sees as a real “fascist” who by residing in any part of the world will show his own ideologies and try to cover up his own ways of thinking. People, who lack the necessary knowledge to understand history and harmonious living, reject Shiv’s assignment made by him. In the next faculty meeting, Arya snubs Shiv and supports the “Manch” as a representative of public sentiments. He tells the dean that such professors make the students lose faith in the old culture of our
Saints, and Rishis. After lot of argument, situation worsens and Arya manhandles Shiv and threatens him. The activists of the “Manch” attack his office and ransack it. He receives intimidating mails and threatening calls. He almost loses his patience. The men who attack Shiv’s room know nothing about the motive behind the attack. They are hired by Arya. Such people do not have any identity and get used by economically affluent people who use their power. Their deeds are explained thus: “The tables and chairs and bookshelves are broken, the wall defaced. There are torn books everywhere, cupboard and files open-minded and shambled and they ultimately heaved the history professor a full time fugitive” (131).

Shiv Murthy is being punished by the protestors of *Itihaas Suraksha Manch* because his work hurt their ideology. It is ironical that it is the easiest thing in the world to hire protestors. All it takes is the price of meal. These hungry people are unlikely to ask what they are protesting against. They will do anything even if it involves violence. And the people who are provoking them from behind are no more than *goondas* looking for publicity. They bring chaos in the society. They cannot find their own identity and makes it vulnerable for others to search theirs.

Shiv Murthy is transformed into a hero when Meena comes to live with him during a medical emergency. Steeped in political activism she is surrounded by a group of secular friends, who are aware of the concept of fundamentalism. Meena’s bedroom in Shiv’s house is decorated with two posters along with “a simply framed photograph of the Hampi ruins in South India” (28) that had been put up there by Shiv. One poster has a feminist image. In this picture women are in a perfect circle holding hands together. The other picture tells about the famous poem of Martin Neimoller: “Speak Up! Before its Too Late” (30). These images are used symbolically. Shiv realizes that the study of Hampi ruins cannot be a politically neutral act- which clearly brings in the idea that when History gets questioned, one has to protest, to speak up.
The youthful energy of Meena shakes Shiv out of his torpor and motivates him to take action. By temperament Shiv is totally opposite. He is an intellectual given to his academic ways and is a professor through and through. He is a passive escapist initially and “pulls a sheet over his head” (64). He shuts his eyes tight to the grim situation. He at the age of fifty two has a different state of mind. He wants to rebel against the infringement upon his academic pursuits and hates the pressure of the “Manchies”. He introspects and finds that like the “Manchies”, he cannot indulge in violence and harm people and property. Hariharan through Shiv questions the society whether these “Manchies” will now decide syllabus in classrooms. This portrays the real dilemma of a true academician who is blackmailed by such people. Hariharan makes it clear that not only “Manchies” but Shiv’s co-workers also add on to his misery. In spite of being educated and intellectual people they indulge in back-biting and unfair competition. Their thinking is rigid. Arya is a typical fundamentalist. The Dean is a gutless man while the Head argues angrily with Shiv.

In a meeting with Shiv the Dean disagrees to surrender to the *Itihaas Surakasha Manch* by submitting the material for their approval. He knows that the “Manch” wants to test how far they can go with their logic less demands. The Head wants to avoid any kind of controversy as he is a year short of his retirement. When Shiv bluntly refuses to sign any apology, the Head gets annoyed and advises him not to act like a hero or a stuntman. This shows that the head is only worried about his own position and reputation. The Dean also advises him to take some time to reconsider his final decision.

For Shiv his father was a source of inspiration and idealism, but he also symbolizes a loss of faith. Shiv vacillates between doubt and rage, pleasure and anxiety and sits in the dark garden of his house relishing his whisky. He thinks about his dead father. Like Basava, his father disappeared. He was presumed dead. He recalls that his
father told him to study history. "You must know the past with all its riches and terrors; draw on the lessons of both in equal measure" (82). Shiv wanders, "But how do you seize hold of the past and make it yours? Who owns the past?" (82). Like Basava (a saint in the Medieval age), who was a revolutionary, Shiv’s father was also a revolutionary and part and parcel of the Indian Freedom Movement, and was a somewhat disillusioned man: “the burdens of the new world- the travails of a free India- sat heavily on his shoulders” (36). When Shiv was thirteen, his father went to Indore for a meeting of Congress Party workers, and mysteriously disappeared. The novel does not make the mystery of his disappearance clear but one can guess that he walked away to avoid his familial responsibilities and committed suicide.

Eventually, Shiv realizes that there is no clear relationship between history and memory. Many times, Shiv finds himself going down to the memory lane to meet his father. He recalls him time and again. He remembers how his father has always asked him to reach the real truth. He asks him not to run after a comfortable life, or else truth will escape him. He warns him not to be an opportunist. His father feels delighted to know that Shiv’s memory is very good. Since beginning his father wants him to study history, to know the past He always had a good memory, even then, he does not know how to hold the past and make it his own. He astonishes if anyone can own the past.

Stryker opines that self emerges in society and reflects society where other selves also exist. Shiv understands the need of making choices and then committing to them to define his identity. For Shiv both his father as well as Basava merges into each other, idealists and dreamers, who fought for a radical re-alignment for their respective societies, but whose ends are hidden in mystery. The uncertainty about Shiv’s father as well as Basava makes the fundamental enigma of the past very much clear. “Neither of these two father figures, with their possibly suicidal tendencies, can be regarded as being
particularly enabling examples for a man besieged by a high degree of self-consciousness with regard to his own cowardice and failings” (Ghosh-Schellhorn 31). No doubt, history is composed of some facts like- Shiv’s father belonged to the Congress Party or Basava challenged caste hierarchy, but beyond a certain point, one can only speculate. And the problem arises when the “Manch”, tries to impose a monolithic vision of the past. The “Manch” quotes several historians like retired professor Shri A.A Atre, Dr. Fraudley, and Madhav Sadashiv to support the claim that Basava was not against Brahmins at all and they further argued that in a Hindu country, they have every right to assert dominance over other minority groups as a means of expressing their protest. Shiv understands that self and society presents a reciprocal relationship.

The vice-chancellor asks Shiv to apologize and avoid the media. Shiv imagines his lesson to be placed in quarantine like chemicals in a highly inflammable vehicle, “Caution highly inflammable medieval History. Only known antidotes: 500 mg of blissful ignorance or 250 mg of unadulterated lies. Shiv’s booklets have been banished along with the real and troublesome Basava. Only a sanitized Basava is allowed to remain, a ‘saint singer’, a singer with a saintly face” (86).

Shiv feels confused when he is asked to prove his identity by fundamentalists. At home when Shiv shares his anger and feelings with Meena, she tells him about an activist Amar, who is a committed member of several citizens’ groups. Shiv feels helpless. He is supposed to prove that he is a true historian. Shiv’s mind stops working when he considers the voices of several people asking him to prove his identity. He needs to prove that he is a patriotic, a Hindu. He needs to confirm that he is able to say and do the right things. Shiv thinks about Basava and his dream of a vigorous, modern, equal democratic nation. His dream broke up long time ago, but Shiv feels as if he is an heir to his legacy. He feels it necessary to make people see and understand Basava’s dream of a democratic nation.
Shiv attains “identity foreclosure” stage and show willingness to commit to some relevant goals and roles. He strongly wants to define his identity of a true historian. Shiv believes that people only see what they are made to see through history. When Meena enquires about this Saint Basava, Shiv explains that a single image of a person cannot explain him fully. He tells Meena that Basava challenged the old caste system. He asked some uncomfortable questions to the society, but people do not know his contributions in the 12th century. They only regard Basava as a saintly figure. The so-called protestors of history know it very well that whatever they say on his behalf, he will never come back to defend. These fundamentalists assign the position of “Minor Gods” to such figures and then no one questions and tries to understand their ideas and politics as they become pious and spiritual. They cannot make life uncomfortable for anyone.

Meena is a perfect example of the woman who achieves her goals and falls in the paradigm of “identity achievement” in Josselson’s terms. Meena calls forth so many groups of protesters, like “Secular Women Against Patriarchy”, “Forum Against Hindu Terrorism” and “People’s Association of Secular Scientists” who take stand in favour of Shiv. Shiv decides to take a stand and promises Meena not to give up. Shiv realizes that this promise is going to transform his life in future.

As a professor, the modules and lessons which consumed his maximum of time are now replaced by newspapers. Unwillingly he reads them carefully. Many academicians including eminent historians Amit Kumar Mookerjee, N.A. Parthasarthy and Amir Quereshi deplore the action of Itihas Surakasha Manch for making the university withdraw the lesson temporarily after applying pressure on the university officials. The academicians also condemn the failure of the university in taking a firm stand against the “Manch”. They believe that the University must take a stand to avoid such attacks on secular historians further. Shiv really feels happy and strengthened.
A journalist from “News Light” interviews Shiv and enquires about the chain of events. Shiv says, “Yes, well, I am a historian” (96). “The important thing to remember is that history, like the human mind, is a complex body with many strands. Ours is a rich plural history. Of course all these threads must be repeatedly re-examined” (97). Shiv is very right in his perception of history. Hariharan, at one point writes, “Each one of us carries within ourselves a history, an encyclopedia of images, a landscape with its distinct patterns of mutilation. A dictionary that speaks the languages of several pasts, that moves across borders, back and forth between different times” (104).

Shiv’s high flown ideas about liberalism remain theoretical until he finds himself stuck in this severe crisis. “Ideas can only get tested ‘in times of siege’, whether one takes the case of the Emergency, Babri Masjid Crisis, or Gujrat riots. At such times people exactly evaluate and figure out that how their ideas compose their identity” (Gupta, vol. 15). Through history one can understand one’s identity, but power hungry people make big issues out of small things and distort history. Hariharan tells how Arya makes an ardent comment in a meeting, “...if it’s someone like that or someone who wants to make hundred percent blue films about widows in Benaras, the secular fundamentalists are all on the streets shouting, ‘No ban, and no censorship. But our historians and thinkers and activists get different statement. They won’t even allow us speak” (127).

Hariharan tries to show that people can go to any extent just to prove their point whether it includes politicizing of history. Shiv feels, “The world, that vast map of furrowed wisdom his father spread out for Shiv’s delight, shrinks all the time in the wrong climate” (150). Shiv concludes that history “is only a lone, orphaned atom left behind, a sullen, impoverished particle of knowledge” (150). This only indicates that in such a situation it becomes very difficult for a normal person like Shiv to stay on the same planet with biased and prejudiced religious bigots.
The peculiar academic environment in educational places clearly shows the wrong and step-motherly treatment given to academicians as compared to people in the bureaucratic services, “One marked feeling among Indian academicians is their awareness of the less importance that their job entails in comparison to bureaucratic jobs” (Tiwari, vol. 5). Although the job of a teacher is to impart knowledge and understanding to the students; but they behave like bureaucrats. Many professors cash their political links without considering right or wrong. Powerful professors rise to great positions by their political connections. The unhealthy practice of awarding doctorate to undeserving persons is made clear by Shiv. He wonders when Arya receives such a degree, “Shiv still doesn’t know where the man got a doctorate from, or even if he has one in the first place” (17). He could get it just for his being politically affluent.

At times the readers see a desire or a kind of lust in Shiv for Meena. He is obsessed by his sexual fantasies. He associates his mind with a snake which represents his sexual longings. He thinks, “The mind is a snake; the body is the basket. They live together, the snake and the basket. You don’t know, though, when it may kill you; you don’t know when it will bite you” (171)! This lust becomes a catalyst for heroic action. Hariharan presents this relationship suffused, particularly for Shiv just to make a balance in the story, portraying Meena as a source of inspiration for Shiv while at the same time not over-idealizing her character. The readers see Meena inviting her caresses, which indicated that both are aware of this relation. When Shiv decides to turn his lust into action, symbolically it shows his entry into the danger zone. He does not only leave his cautious sexual self but also the moral one, which again symbolizes his intellectual battle against censorship.

[Meena] must see that he is on the brink of more than one precipice. Sense his ache for her, forever coupled in his mind with the fear of living with
danger, choice and commitment. Fear for his new life, a small room crowded with strangers. With thugs, bare knives glinting in the dark. He must take hold of it all; claim his life as his own. (175)

Shiv decides to stand up for his beliefs. Though his lust for Meena does not consummate yet he feels transformed. Meena emerges as a motivator who forces Shiv to travel the path of heroism. It is Meena who helps Shiv to grow as a politically active intellectual. Shiv sees her as his mentor. He makes Meena a “promise to stand firm, to resist giving up. A promise bigger than both of them; the promise he has made though it may change his life” (180). This shows that they both share a bond which is more important and memorable than actual physical love.

The supporters of the “Manch” openly invite speakers to instigate the sentiments of the general public, who can easily be cheated in the name of religion. Thousands of policemen cannot control such emotionally charged people once out in the streets.

(Shiv) In the lone eye of the storm, waits with clammy hands and a weak heart, the beast is preparing to charge him, the beast with many heads, many masks, and many voices. Is there no escape? Shiv could extend his leave, resign then slip out of sight. His supporters grateful as he is to them unsettle him. The others, the fanatical revisionists, terrify him, bewilder him. What has happened to history, the history his uncle thought was a dull, safe choice of subject? It has become a hive fiery thing, as capable of explosion as a time bomb. (134)

Such people according to Kierkgaard have no identity. They do want to attain selfhood in true sense but their life is purposeless and full of despair and this is the crux of the problem. They are neutral and due to lack of guts necessary for truth and reasoning, they neither locate their identity and nor help others in locating theirs. Shiv is
horrified by “Fundoos” and their absurd behaviour. They are ready to kill and get killed. Shiv resists all this peacefully as he knew that he has not committed any mistake. At the time of protest in the campus, Menon requests Shiv to call the security people and is ready to talk to the protestors on his behalf, but Shiv does not lose faith and tackles everything with the force of logic and reasoning. He sees the protestors with various slogans in favour of him and against him. The loud slogans of the “"Manch people try to instigate Shiv’s anger but he does not lose his temper and let his people speak on his behalf. In an interview with Luan Gains, Hariharan makes it clear that “Fundamentalists-whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian- are not exactly well known for their knowledge of history, which is why we have to resort to censorship, force and violence as their contributions to debate”.

Shiv as well as Meena both knows that it is a battle of minds. Meena clearly tells Shiv that these blood thirsty “Manchies” need to be stopped to avoid every kind of mental and physical torment. At times, one sees Shiv loosing hope and courage and breaking up but Meena inspires him to plan things gradually and not to step back. Meena seems to be very much clear in her approach towards life. She along with her friends “plan over potato chips and coke to fight back, revolution against counter revolution” (Sarna, vol. 27). When Shiv gets confused and perplexed and feels, “miscast as a protestor marching down the road” (143), Meena again gives him strength and courage. Everywhere he sees slogans, mikes, flash lights, cameras and policemen. He sees his co-workers Amita and Menon on the rally spot and feels delighted and full of gratitude. Amita comes forward to meet him. Shiv is confused and tensed on seeing the huge crowd. Amita calls them “muppies”. Shiv comes to know that “muppy” is a “Marxist”. Later in the night Shiv watches the interview session on television along with Meena. He notices that his seven minutes speech has been reduced to forty five seconds. This clearly shows that politically affluent people keep media and T.V channels in their pockets.
Next day, there are fights between the supporters and opponents of the “Manch”. The “Manch” accuses the supporters of Shiv for not letting its people talk to the students. For some time both the groups stay calm—may be planning their next move. Shiv broods over the serious scenario. Now going far with the guidance of a dead father or a banned Basava seems impossible to him. To change his mind, he sits on to write his next lesson on Vijayanagar Empire, but he does not find himself in a psychological state to read or write. He imagines confronting the agitation, riots and interview sessions again. He again sees himself as a culprit and a traitor who distorts historical facts. Then he again sees the faces of the Dean and the Head asking him to stick to the simple facts. All these things make him nervous.

Shiv puts down his pen as he thinks it impossible to write history under pressure, objections and sentiments of his masters. He thinks about Hampi and it ruins. He visited the place in 1996. Along with the solid factual proof, he recalls his meeting with the auto driver—Suban, who tells Shiv some stories about the ruined city. He looks grief-stricken over this devastation of the city by the muslims. Shiv feels that Suban being a muslim is rendering an apology to Shiv for this destruction by his ancestors. He places Shiv and himself on two different sides. At this point Shiv feels that all his knowledge of history is questionable. He feels unprotected. He feels as if all the heroes of the history had never lived or recent Indian history never happened. He remembers well the confused face of Suban with burden of guilt seeing himself as a part of a battle in the past he knows nothing about. He asks him not to be guilty at all but in vain. Shiv thinks about the “Manchies” who claim to be the heirs of Basava but ironically they stand for everything Basava fought against until his last breath.

Shiv tries to make a connection between 1168—time of Basava and 2000—his time. He shockingly realizes that the critical link between the two is not Basava but the
hatemongers. He compares the protestors of the “Manch” with the protestors of Basava’s time. Just as Basava’s opponents in the past had put the city on fire, these fundamentalists question Shiv and ask him to write the past within the pre-set boundaries.

Shiv faces the opposition not only in public but even at home. His daughter disagrees with him. She finds it difficult to digest that how her middle aged father, who has been gutless, suddenly becomes courageous due to Meena. Shiv recalls Tara, who overcame doubt at a very tender age. Since the very beginning, Tara knew that Shiv does not believe in God. One day when she was a small girl of about seven or eight years, she tells her father that the whole world believes in God and she is with the world not with him. In the same way she again shows him that she is with the world, her friends, and the people, who are against him. She e-mails her father and questions him about his controversial statements which have hurt the sentiments of Hindus. Even his Dean and Head wonder when they see the transformation of Shiv. “New Shiv” shocks all as it is totally against his normal way of teaching.

Here, Hariharan shows that how Time and Circumstances can change a person totally. How it becomes important to prove your stance and identity so that you can find a place in society as well as live comfortably with your soul. The Dean who had given him time to rethink and felt that Shiv may change at any point completely. He wonders when sees him entering headlong into the battle after deciding that “he will pick up a spear and a shield and rush headlong into battle” (57).

The sociological concept of society given by Mead focuses on the reaction of his daughter, which on one hand, makes him question his personal identity and on the other hand, he finds himself not having any social identity as according to the “Manch” he is not able to match up the requirements of a given social position that is of a historian.
Hariharan intentionally focuses on his daughter’s reaction to the situation. She makes the readers see that how one’s own people do not support one in times of need. Man being a social animal cannot live in isolation. Family is the smallest unit of society and a man gets strength, motivation and support from it. Man wants to get understood by his family as they are the people who stand really close to him. If family members do not support such a person in times of crisis, then this type of behaviour obviously adds on to his misery. He feels more insecure and questions his identity time and again. His daughter feels embarrassed and criticizes him for writing against temples and priests and further blames him for speaking against religious beliefs. This again shows that how people are bound to act and speak in permitted spaces whether it diminishes their self-esteem and shakes their identity. Hariharan has made this very clear that all people have their own set of beliefs, ideologies and principals. They boast of their own trusted ideas but actually it is in times of siege that these ideas really get tested and one can only come up with one’s true identity by overcoming all the dilemmas.

Meena calls Shiv an “idealist” (154) and though she is tough, she is afraid that the powerful” manchies” will harm Shiv. Ironically even the intellectual professors are no more than pawns at the hands of fundamentalists. For intellectuals it is necessary to give vent to their feelings and display their views without any fear. But when Shiv does the same, he gets caught in the crisis. The supporters of the “Manch” do not agree with Shiv’s ideas that Basava died of disillusionment after being lonely. He clearly follows his instincts and resists injustice. He feels really pity to discover that issue is not about history but politicization of academics.

After the act of violence for some time the supporters of the “Manch” and its opponents maintain silence. Shiv gets a letter from the Vice Chancellor of the university telling him the traits of a true historian. VC tells him that whatever the historians write
should not create any doubt in the minds of the people. He further asks him to keep in mind that any historical writing must not have “divisive consequences”. Shiv is surprised that VC is not concerned about the ransacking of his room or threats to him by the goons. By “divisive consequences” he only means the result of a blunder done by Shiv. He clearly mentions that his controversial lesson has brought politics and chaos in the university. He tells Meena about the letter, who warns him to be ready for the coming disaster. He asks Shiv to stay firm and determined despite of any kind of pressure. Shiv reacts in the following manner:

It is like looking at an image where the photographer has made a deliberate choice of depth of field. History in the foreground—what happened recently in Shiv’s university room, for example—is entirely out of focus. The letter does not contain a single word about what the ‘unfortunate incident is’. The ransacking of Shiv’s room is clearly a footnote, a minor by product of divisive consequences what really matter—the unfortunate incident sharply in focus in the background is still in original sin that his lesson. His words invited an unwelcome spotlight, the hired colours of scandal and controversy and politics into the university. (185-186)

“In volume 15, Monika Gupta has rightly said that religious fundamentalists all over the globe have been responsible for the horrific destruction of the world. Though Hariharan has written about Hindu Fundamentalists, it applies to every kind of fanatic and fundamental following of any religion”.

It is surprisingly shocking that how religious fundamentalists have crept into academic circles as well and created disharmony in society. Shiv here can be compared with Gandhi Ji, who was not liked by the fundamentalists because of his simple life style
and appeal to the masses. He never used violence. “This low profile, ordinary style of functioning endeared Gandhi Ji to the masses but antagonized fundamentalists whose whole mindset was ruled by western status consciousness, classification, difference and hierarchy” (Tiwari, vol. 5).

Shiv feels that circumstances do not allow him even to stand up for truth. Shiv undergoes a stage of serious mental trauma. He astonishes that just to establish their hegemony how people rout the life of weak people. Eventually Shiv gets strength from Meena, Basava, memory of his dead father and protests against all these unfair allegations in a peaceful manner. Shiv finds it difficult to stick to Ahinsa like Gandhi Ji but his morals and convictions do not allow him to wayward his path. Meena along with her friends support him all the way.

“Some biographers date Basava’s death- or the presumption of death- as January 1168. But in Shiv’s mind, this tentative date creeps forward insidiously, not to June 7, 1962, when his father disappeared, but to its medieval counterpart, June 7, 1168” (105). Shiv knows that Basava’s end would always be hidden by shadowy circumstances and assumptions. With the ghost of Basava- or his father- standing behind him on, Shiv’s imagination travels beyond the modest limits of prescribed module and syllabus.

Basava’s death has a resonance for Shiv. Shiv thinks about the last day of Basava when he leaves the ruined city of Kalyana and returns to Kudalasangama, the confluence of rivers where he began his career. Shiv knows that Basava was tired and disillusioned. He wanted to find out the cause of this catastrophe. Shiv constructs a viable narrative-which he thinks is a key to Life. Of course what Shiv perceives is speculative but through imagination he breaks the boundaries of a set module or syllabus. Shiv imagines a strong Basava standing in front of the river. Shiv realizes that this powerful river where Basava committed suicide is symbolic. On closer scrutiny he sees that this river is made up of two rivers- flowing down their separate courses- they meet, then they part and meet
again- to make a point of union and from there it flows as a composite third river. These two streams of the same river symbolize two different perceptions of a situation but both meet at some point.

Shiv perceives that Basava saw the truth in the river. And the truth Shiv realizes, “That cross-currents can co-exist, that rapid and most placid of waters are fellow travellers? Or that it is possible to move, to break free of gold-encrusted temples, customs and prejudices made of petrified stone, aspiring to stand like monuments for all time?” (107).

The readers clearly see the psychodrama going inside Shiv’s mind. This psychic journey comes to an end when Shiv sees a literal thunderstorm. He recalls all the past events, recreates them with whatever facts he had. Now Shiv enters the stage of “identity conflict” as mentioned by Habermas and tries to resolve all the problems. Such identity conflict is caused by internal changes. Shiv undergoes constant internal changes and tries to reach up to “identity achievement” stage.

In the first “Heroic scenario” he sees his father as a person who is fighting against amnesia. Shiv feels that his father’s past is incomplete, “having holes in it”. His father must go back in past to “meet himself” again, to know it fully which symbolically means that incomplete knowledge of past is not helpful for anyone. Shiv does not have the sufficient details about his father’s past and this makes him speculate about him time and again.

The second part of the scene named “poignant scenario” tells Shiv how his father loses heart and commits suicide, metaphorically if not literally because his voice is no more heard by the people. The glory of his time is no more as the “fabric of the new republic is fraying rapidly” (188). Shiv understands that the memories which cannot be deciphered must be deserted.
In the last part of the scene named “Banal scenario” he sees his father as a victim of robbery or murder, who has no control over his fate. Though Shiv has thought of the situation earlier also but this time, he visualizes a thunderstorm in the background- “a worthy opponent in the sky”. He along with Meena witnesses the sound and fury of this storm. He watches a skinny papaya tree splitting and falling on the ground as if a concrete house is losing its foundations. This symbolizes the vanishing appearance of his father. Shiv is ready to say “goodbye to his father for all time” (191).

Shiv finally abandons the ghosts of his father’s memory which symbolically points out that now he has come to terms with his incomplete past. He also says goodbye to Meena who finally leaves for her hostel after her recovery. She does not need her crutches anymore, but Shiv presents his father’s walking-stick to her, which again highlights that Shiv can go all alone with courage on his chosen path without the helping stick of his father. He confronts the demands of his time and chooses a direction for his future. “He can hear his father’s cane, now Meena’s tap, and its way out of the house. Then he hears the door shut behind her” (204).

His father and Meena, the two inspirational figures of his life, the two symbols of heroic action, merge symbolically, and give way to a newly “empowered” Shiv to fight his own battles. His father legacy to Shiv is “the gift of remembrance” (193). Now Shiv is prepared to face any kind of situation. He gives up all the safe crutches and is ready to walk in the present. He understands that if one really wants to know the past, one has to enforce one’s right to know a thing in every possible way, and then, one is free to be curious, to speculate, to debate and to dissent. A person needs to get changed according to the demands of the time. Like Shiv everyone has to make out whether their ideas hold good at a given point of time or not.

This novel not only deals with identity crisis in Shiv’s personal life but also on a larger scale. It tackles the problem of national identity also. A nation also faces the times
of crises when its identity is at stake. Parallel to Shiv’s personal crisis, one sees debate on nationalism and communalism. Hariharan makes it very clear that there can never be one true version of history. Each and every person belonging to different political groups uses and abuses history accordingly. Manju Jaidka in an article published in ‘The Tribune’ makes it clear that “the distortions of History by political parties in power, the ‘Hinduisation’ of education, and the interference in academics by the ‘knicker brigade’” aggravates the problem of people like Shiv. The fault of Shiv lies in not making and showing the heroes of history heroic enough and making the villains very cunning. Unlike other historians, Shiv does not pay tribute to Hindu Kingdoms; moreover he also shows the chinks in the caste system. Githa Hariharan points out that during the colonial rule Indian history was glorified by the nationalists, then how the same history can be questioned in post-colonial times, is not digestible to the fundamentalists. They consider it unpatriotic and an act of betrayal.

Citizenship can never be related to loyalty. If one loves foreign culture, how he/she can be considered anti-national. Those political groups which condemn diversity of culture must be demolished. Every nation requires a space where new identities can co-exist. Hariharan criticizes the new kind of cultural nationalism and calls it “monstrous” (133). She tries to make it clear that “A revival of the glorious Hindu past means rejecting cultural modes of the west like Michal Jackson and McDonald’s- a result of mental blockage. To remove such blockages an international and multi-cultural outlook is needed” (Singh, vol. 3).

In volume 30, Madhuparna Mitra rightly says that this novel evokes institutional wrangles over historiography, contains its polemics within the realm of the personal and clearly espouses the responsibility of the individual to resist institutional pressure and to fight against the coercive
tactics of political groups. She opines that the past is murky and any attempt to impose a homogenized vision of history must be resisted. One sees Shiv Murthy gradually emerging as an advocate of tolerant secularism, a true hero who stands up for academic freedom and professionalism.

This novel of Githa Hariharan can be compared with her another novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. In both these novels the protagonists play the roles of teachers. Both are haunted by the ghosts of their fathers and both find strength by the memories of their dead fathers. Their haunted lives signify that they both are not living only in the present but looking backward in their past to know the real meaning of their existence.

On one hand, there is Vasu Master, a retired school teacher, who is haunted with the question “who am i?” His actual learning starts when he leaves his teaching profession. He is made teacher by the system and he just played his role. He is not sure of his role as a father, or teacher or a member of society. When he starts teaching the reticent Mani, only then gradually he understands the real meaning of a teacher and discovers his true identity. In the process of this self-discovery he faces many challenges but eventually he overcomes all.

On the other hand, there is Shiv Murthy, a history professor who is charged by the college authorities and fundamentalists with the distortion of historical facts and figures. He, after the controversy over his lesson written on Basava, a Hindu saint poet, understands the true meaning of history. He gains his true identity of a historian when he learns to keep aside the institutional pressure and political prominence. Like Vasu Master, he also goes through much mental trauma but eventually comes to terms with his life.
In the end, one sees that Identity crisis describes someone who is in the constant state of searching for his identity. So, Identity crisis does not only refer to real crises but describes a normal stage of personality development. As soon as Shiv discovers his loss of right personal identity of a historian, he faces a big life challenge. This loss gives a powerful blow to his self-confidence and self-image. He from the very beginning identified himself with a historian but soon after the controversy he starts questioning his place and position of a historian. Initially he finds himself stuck in a historical crises but when gradually he handles crises in his relations, deals with stress and other outward pressures, resolve all types of panics, fears and anxieties, works through difficult decisions and breaks through depression and sadness, he regains his lost identity and proves himself not only a good fighter but also a true historian.