



Portrayal of Communal Harmony and Religious Discord in *Never Together Never Apart*

Poorvi Garg

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5996-8670>

Corresponding Author: Poorvi Garg, Research Scholar, Department of English,
Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, poorvigarg613@gmail.com

Research Article

Keywords: Communal
Harmony, Religious
Discord, Riots, Social
Novel, Interfaith Love

Article History

Received:

June 1, 2025

Revised:

June 14, 2025

Accepted:

July 1, 2025



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPLJLH)



Abstract

Aim: *This paper aims to explore the portrayal of communal harmony and the underlying discord caused by religious differences in Professor Vikas Sharma's novel Never Together Never Apart. It investigates how literature can act as a reflective medium for socio-political realities, particularly the dynamics of interfaith relationships and communal violence in contemporary India.*

Methodology and Approaches: *The study employs a close textual analysis of the novel, focusing on character development, narrative structure, and thematic depth. A qualitative approach is adopted, with the novel examined through the lens of cultural studies and postcolonial theory. Attention is given to historical and social contexts, particularly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the author emerged as a voice of social concern.*

Outcome: *The analysis reveals that Never Together Never Apart is not merely a love story but a layered socio-political commentary that critiques the fragile nature of communal relationships in India. Through its characters and plot, the novel reflects how deeply religious prejudices can fracture human bonds while also offering glimpses of hope through moments of understanding and empathy.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *The paper concludes that literature such as Sharma's can play a vital role in promoting communal understanding by presenting humanized narratives of conflict and coexistence. It suggests that more literary works engaging with interfaith themes should be incorporated into academic discourse to broaden perspectives and foster social sensitivity.*

***Correspondence:** Poorvi Garg, poorvigarg613@gmail.com © (2025) All rights are reserved with the author (s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is appropriately cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online at www.literaryhrm.org, and CaveMark Publications, India, published it.

India is renowned for its unparalleled diversity in culture, religion, language, ethnicity, and geography. The linguistic and cultural diversity across states and regions forms a crucial part of its national identity. However, this diversity has also led to internal strife, especially when religious differences lead to misunderstandings and communal violence. Communal harmony has often been challenged by such incidents, which have deeply scarred the nation's historical narrative. Literature, as a reflection of society, has continuously engaged with the subject of religious conflict and its repercussions.

Numerous Indian writers, including Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan*, have documented and critiqued the partition and the ensuing communal violence. Similarly, Prof. Vikas Sharma's *Never Together Never Apart* tackles the delicate theme of religious discord through a compelling tale of love and communal conflict. His narrative captures the emotional, psychological, and social impacts of riots and hatred on the common man, especially on those who strive for peaceful coexistence.

Prof. Vikas Sharma began his literary journey during the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. His first Hindi novel, *Raah Ke Patthar*, marked his debut, which he later translated into English under the title *Never Together Never Apart* in 2023. The novel is subsequently translated into Urdu and Punjabi, extending its reach across linguistic boundaries. His works are rooted in social realism. His novels typically begin by highlighting a social issue, then unravel its societal implications, and finally suggest possible solutions. *Never Together Never Apart* follows this trajectory, addressing communal disharmony, its origins, and its impact on everyday human life and interreligious relationships:

I ask those people, who shout Hindu Muslim unity slogans-Where is the animosity between Hindus and Muslims in this pious land of India? Some Muslims came to India in the time of Prophet Muhammad, and since then, people of both the religions have been living together happily. I accept that Aurangzeb suppressed Hindus, but when did he encourage Muslims? Never! He didn't spare Dara Shikoh's friend Sarmad, a Sufi saint. He used to hate all equally. History praises the great Emperor Akbar, who established relations with the Rajputs, despite being a Mughal and even wore Hindu dresses. He rose in his glory by marrying Rajput girls. He

tried to balance both religions by founding a new religion, Din-i-Ilahi.

(*Never Together Never Apart*, 3)

The novel opens with a philosophical inquiry into what truly differentiates human beings. The author challenges the irrationality of differentiating people solely based on religion. By referencing historical figures such as Emperor Akbar and Sufi saint Sarmad, Prof. Sharma builds a case for religious unity and mutual respect. He emphasizes the deep rooted coexistence of Hindus and Muslims in Indian society and refutes the notion that religion should divide humanity.

Through vivid descriptions and rhetorical questions, the author critiques both historical and contemporary instances of religious discord. He illustrates how daily interdependence among communities—Hindu employers and Muslim workers, Muslim artisans creating Hindu idols—proves that love and cooperation transcend religious boundaries:

Every day, in every corner of the country, Muslim workers work in Hindu factories. The brave martyr Abdul Hamid fought bravely with Pakistani soldiers for India's safety. Bareilly's Chunna Miyan built a Hindu temple which was inaugurated by the then President. Muslim doctors have Hindu compounders. The greatest miracle is that all the statues of Hindu temples are made by Muslim artisans. In Makrana, thousands of Muslim artisans make Jain Teerthankar's idols daily. They bring these statues to life and earn their livelihood. For every Aurangzeb, hundreds of Akbars were also born. So I can confidently assure you that there is no danger to Hindus from Muslims or vice-versa. Yes, there are disputes, but only among Hindus themselves and Muslims themselves. Shias and Sunnis fight, but Punjabi Hindus and Muslims live together in one community. They don't have any fear of each other. (*Never Together Never Apart*, 3-4)

At the heart of the novel is the love story of Chinta and Sabir, two individuals from different religious backgrounds—Hindu and Muslim—who grow up together in Moradabad. Their relationship is symbolic of India's composite culture and shared heritage. Despite the socio-religious differences, they remain emotionally connected, considering marriage as a natural progression of their bond. Their love is portrayed with poetic intensity. Sabir compares Chinta to the sun, illuminating his world, and cherishes her presence as a source of strength.

However, their love is kept secret due to societal pressures. When riots erupt, the strength of their relationship is tested as external events threaten their world:

Chinta's love was deeper than the ocean. She was very kind and her love for Sabir grew even more. Sabir also thought of Chinta as the Sun to his Earth. The Sun which removes the darkness of the night in one moment by rising in the East, lightens the world. What is the Moon? The yellow satellite of separation and his Chinta were more beautiful than the Moon. He thought that Chinta's eyes could lighten the world in the night. Just as the lighted mercury bulb has no significance when placed against sunlight, in the same way, stars in the night have no value when placed against Chinta's beautiful face. (*Never Together Never Apart*, 7)

The turning point in the novel is the depiction of riots in Aligarh and Moradabad, triggered by political rivalry during elections. The narrative captures how a minor electoral incident leads to a violent spiral of communal hatred. The unrest spreads rapidly, affecting trade, disrupting daily life, and instilling fear in the minds of ordinary citizens. Communal mouths open just before the election. The spread communal sentiments and pollute the whole atmosphere. And exactly this happened before the Lok Sabha elections. The election gave new poisonous energy to Aligarh's dead life after three or four years:

The result of Aligarh's sneezing is that Moradabad also gets a cold. This means that the riots of Aligarh didn't spare Moradabad. Here also, looting and killing started. People's daily life came to a standstill. There was anarchy in the whole city. Hindus and Muslims were getting killed in broad daylight. Properties were being looted and houses were set on fire. A lot of government properties and buses were burnt. When the situation was out of control for the government, then a curfew was imposed. (*Never Together Never Apart*, 20-23)

Prof. Vikas Sharma vividly portrays the destruction of businesses, loss of lives, curfews, and shortages of basic necessities. These events profoundly impact the psyche of the characters, especially Sabir and Chinta, who begin to fear for their relationship and the deteriorating inter-community bonds. "Here Sabir was also disturbed. He always thought about the impact of the communal riots on his love affair." (*Never Together Never Apart*, 24) The novel effectively captures how

macro-level political events deeply influence micro-level personal relationships. Both Sabir's and Chinta's families are shown as representatives of secular India—sharing festivals, maintaining cordial relations, and practicing mutual respect. Rahmat Miyan, Sabir's father, symbolizes wisdom and rationality. He understands the importance of social harmony and fears the long-term impact of the riots on interfaith relationships.

The psychological trauma faced by the characters is indicative of the broader societal cost of communal violence. Sabir's increasing anxiety about Chinta's acceptance, and Chinta's concerns about defying social norms, illustrate the deep emotional toll exacted by such conflicts, "Chinta couldn't understand why there is so much misery in love. She loved Sabir. It would have been much better had she not fallen in love. She became the victim of such circumstances, which compelled her to think about communal narrow-mindedness." (*Never Together Never Apart*, 25)

Prof. Vikas Sharma's *Never Together Never Apart* is more than a love story—it is a call for peace and unity in a fragmented society. By portraying the romance between a Hindu woman and a Muslim man against the backdrop of communal unrest, Prof. Sharma encourages readers to question societal prejudices. His emphasis on mutual respect, historical coexistence, and the irrationality of hate makes the novel a significant contribution to the discourse on religious harmony.

As fate continues to play with the lives of Chinta and Sabir, new challenges arise to separate the two. Chinta's father, aware of the growing affection between his daughter and Sabir, decides to send her to England to break the attachment. The move is an attempt to protect familial honour and prevent a union that crosses religious lines. Meanwhile, Sabir is struck with misfortune. His business suffers a major setback—a shipment drowns, and his clients from Italy and France block payments worth five crore rupees. This economic collapse forces Rahmat Miyan, Sabir's father, to send him to Mumbai to meet his friend, Nafees Ahmed, a businessman who deals in exports of carpets and has promising leads in Canada and the United States.

Unknown to Sabir, there is an ulterior motive behind this trip. Rahmat Miyan and Nafees conspire to introduce Sabir to Saira, the daughter of Tahir Hussein, a respected friend of Nafees. Sabir, though still emotionally connected to

Chinta, is encouraged to meet Saira under the pretext of business expansion. Nafees overpraises Sabir's character and potential to Tahir, prompting him to consider Sabir the ideal match for his daughter. Rahmat Miyan, desperate to see his son settled and to move beyond the forbidden love affair with Chinta, agrees without Sabir's consent.

Upon reaching Mumbai, Sabir is impressed by Saira's beauty and intelligence. Although his initial hesitation is evident, Saira takes the initiative to grow closer to him. She invites Sabir to include her in his business meetings and offers valuable assistance through her extensive connections. This professional proximity soon turns into emotional intimacy. Their physical relationship, sparked after a walk on Marine Drive, marks a significant turn in the narrative. Sabir, though guilty for moving on, finds himself entrapped in the warmth and companionship Saira provides. This blossoming relationship takes a serious turn when Saira proposes a marriage alliance between Sabir's sister, Farida, and Sagar, a friend of Sabir's in Mumbai. The families meet, and both marriages are soon solemnized. Sabir and Saira move to Moradabad temporarily for business, where Saira, despite falling ill, insists Sabir return to Mumbai for work. However, the couple has to rush back when a fraud involving one crore rupees is reported in Saira's office.

While Sabir is dealing with new beginnings, Chinta's world is falling apart. The Zari Gota business of her father, Lala Lakshmi Narayan, begins to suffer. With his health declining and financial worries mounting, he urges his son to take over the family business. Deeply troubled by Chinta's advancing age and unmarried status, he seeks astrological advice, only to be told to wait. Dissatisfied, he turns to his brother-in-law, Govindram, a powerful politician, for help in finding a suitable match.

Tragedy strikes when Lala Lakshmi Narayan suffers a fatal heart attack. His sudden death devastates the family. Rahmat Miyan, despite the past, extends help to Chinta's grieving family. In the absence of a male breadwinner, Chinta and her brother begin teaching to support the household. Though their economic condition slowly improves, fate once again intervenes with the untimely death of their mother due to complications during a pregnancy. Chinta is forced to

embrace adulthood in its cruelest form, leaving behind the days of innocence and longing for Sabir.

Meanwhile, Saira announces her pregnancy, which brings joy to Sabir. However, the bliss is short-lived. As her pregnancy progresses, Saira's health deteriorates. Her liver and pancreas are severely affected, leading to medical complications. During this difficult phase, another tragedy strikes—Saira's father, Tahir Hussein, dies of a heart attack during a stormy night when no doctor can arrive due to waterlogging in Mumbai. Saira is now burdened with emotional and managerial responsibilities.

Saira's condition worsens rapidly. One evening, she suffers intense pain and is rushed to Dr. Desai's nursing home for an emergency cesarean. Doctors warn Sabir of the grave risk to both mother and child. The baby is saved, but Saira cannot survive. Her death leaves Sabir utterly devastated. Farida and Sagar stand by him during this crisis, and condolences pour in from across social, business, and political circles, yet Sabir finds no solace. Saira's absence is overwhelming, and grief envelops him like a shroud. He feels as though her memory lingers and refusing to fade:

Doctor Desai, his wife, the Mayor, and his wife, CA Mohit Jain, and his wife, Kiran, and Dhaniram, all came to offer condolences. The Chief Minister's son came with a condolence letter. Mumbai export forum sent their condolences. Piyush, Kamini, and uncle phoned and paid their tributes. But Sabir felt as if looking at Saira's photo that she was still alive. She will just come and kiss him. But dreams cannot be reality. (*Never Together Never Apart*, 265)

In a parallel timeline, Chinta too is navigating the wilderness of loss. She loses her husband to the coronavirus pandemic and, pregnant and alone, Chinta's hardships mirror those of Sabir, though in a different city. Isolated in Pune, she suffers from unbearable abdominal pain. Her brother, desperate to help, contacts Sabir, who sends Dr. Pandey from Mumbai. The doctor reveals that the child has died in the womb and an abortion is necessary. Sabir, upon hearing this, visits Chinta in the hospital. Their conversation is brief but deeply emotional. Sabir inquires about her husband, to which Chinta reveals she has already divorced him before his death. She speaks with stoic clarity, stating it is better to be alone than

with an incompetent man. Sabir, guilt-ridden, confesses his reasons for abandoning her—his business collapse and the pressure from his father. He has hoped to shield her from a life of suffering.

Their reunion is marked by pain, yet also a rekindling of trust. Chinta, despite all odds, accepts his apology. Sabir, who has now started a university, offers her the role of a director. She agrees and eventually, love triumphs once again as they express their feelings and reunite—this time with mutual understanding and maturity. Their journey becomes a testament to the resilience of love, overcoming every societal and personal challenge:

“Now you are talking. Are you scared to speak the words of love?”

“No, I don't dare to say it. The love is repeatedly swaying in my heart, but I am scared.”

“Don't be scared, Sabir. There would be many obstacles in the path of love. Would you have the courage to face them?”

“Yes, definitely. My courage will be coming back if you are with me.”

“Then it's fine. I have accepted your offer. Even though late, but you have accepted my love.” (*Never Together Never Apart*, 278)

Professor Vikas Sharma's novel is not merely a love story—it is an exploration of social constructs, familial expectations, religion, caste, and gender roles that dominate Indian society. Through the tumultuous lives of Chinta and Sabir, Sharma crafts a compelling narrative that reflects the injustices and contradictions of real-world relationships. The characters do not conform to societal expectations blindly—they protest, they endure, and eventually, they prevail. Their love story transcends the superficial boundaries created by man. Despite being separated by religion, social status, and circumstance, the gravitational pull of true love brings Chinta and Sabir back to each other. Their journey is filled with heartbreaks, losses, betrayals, and despair. Yet, in the end, what emerges is a pure, unfiltered affection that triumphs over prejudice and pain.

In a world that often celebrates temporary desires and transactional bonds, *Never Together Never Apart* stands tall as a literary celebration of destiny-driven love. It validates the emotional truth that some souls, no matter how far apart, are eternally connected. The novel concludes on the note that true love, though delayed by fate and challenged by society, ultimately finds its way. The research

concludes that literature plays a pivotal role in initiating dialogue, fostering empathy, and advocating for communal peace. Prof. Vikas Sharma's novel is a powerful testament to the capacity of fiction to address real world issues and inspire social change.

Works Cited and Consulted

Khurana, Monika. *Socio-Ethical and Moral Concerns in The Novels of Vikas Sharma*. Doaba House, 2024.

Sharma, Vandana (ed.). *Critiquing the Novels of Vikas Sharma*. Diamond Books, 2022.

Sharma, Vikas. *Never Together Never Apart*. Diamond Books, 2023.

Poorvi Garg

Poorvi Garg is a research scholar currently pursuing her Ph.D. under the guidance of leading Novelist, Poet and Academician Prof. Vikas Sharma at Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut. With two years of experience as an Assistant Professor, she has taught English language and literature, showcasing her expertise in the field. She has also contributed as a co-editor for Pratibimb, the annual magazine of the HLM Group of Institutions. Presently, she is serving as the member of Editorial team for HLM Journal of Applied Research. Her areas of interest are Indian literature, Linguistics, Communication Skills and Personality Development.