

Chapter V

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Fragmented Identities in *Fugitive Histories*

Fragmentation of identities is the most frequently discussed theme in postmodern literature. *Fugitive Histories* discusses the fragmented condition of the minorities in the Indian society due to persistent religious bias. “. . . Our very identity, the notion we have of ourselves, is at issue when we are affected by discourses of power” (Butler 50). Identity goes hand in hand with historicity and is formed through social relationships. In the Indian context, identity is politicised on the basis of class, caste and gender. When nationalism is equated with religious identity, the identity of the citizens stands fragmented. When an individual feels to be insignificant or as a foreigner in the well acquainted existing community, the problem of identity crisis crops up. “Loss of identity is a specifically human danger and maintenance of identity a specifically human necessity” (Lichtenstein 78).

Erik Erikson, an American-German psychologist coined the term ‘identity crisis’, he proposed identity to mean a “mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others”(109). He propounded the theory of psychosocial development of an individual’s self-identity. Bauman, a sociologist explores the uncertainty of identity in his book *Identity* thus:

As we grapple with the insecurity and uncertainty of liquid modernity, Bauman argues that our socio-political, cultural, professional, religious and sexual identities are undergoing a process of continual

transformation... In a world of rapid global change where national borders are increasingly eroded, our identities are in a state of continuous flux.

Githa Hariharan being a socially committed writer gives an authentic portrayal of the political and social milieu in *Fugitive Histories*. The novel is set in the post-Godhra riots of 2002 that happened in Gujarat. The novel realistically presents this sensitive issue based on factual documents. “Godhra is a ‘Muslim locality’. In the days and week that followed, the Muslims of Gujarat became the target of brutal violence. The statement of survivors, eyewitnesses and relief workers suggests that state officials and the police connived with the attackers” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 42).

Fugitive Histories is a grim tale of a time when some people allowed themselves to be swept away by the pleasure of giving pain and exulted in the meticulous planning that went behind the destruction of entire communities. It is set against a backdrop of administrative apathy. It gets grimmer, as the survivors talk of their lack of preparedness and of what they would have done had they been warned even a couple of hours before they were attacked. But the darkest note in the book is a subtle undercurrent, which suggests that people have lost their will to fight the forces of negativism. (Zaheer)

The novel, not only throws light on the trauma of a few riot-affected people, but also proposes the necessity for restructuring the lives of women victims. As Bauman states, “You have to create your identity, you do not inherit it, not only you need to make it from scratch, but you have to spend your life redeciding your identity.” The victims carry within them the deep imprints of violence and hatred. Their sense of nationalism

was shattered and their identity stands fragmented as the nation suffers due to religious discrimination. These divisive forces crumbled the sense of belongingness among the victims who had to survive in the troubled sea of violence and religious hatred. Women became easy targets and they were doubly victimized, "...a kite Akbar used to fly once upon a time...this cheerful kite had some advice written on it the same advice that was on the charred wall outside the shop. It said —Muslims Quit India-or we will fuck your mothers" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 138).

Indian history has witnessed a never ending religious intolerance between Hindus and Muslims. Politically motivated communal hatred jeopardizes secular ideals of the country. The novel *Fugitive Histories* is based on the communal riots at Godhra and its aftermath. This issue was published in the newspaper 'Dawn' on February 28, 2002.

On February 27, 2002, a fire ripped through a train at Godhra station in Gujarat in western India, burning Hindu pilgrims alive. Blaming Muslims for the blaze, furious Hindu mobs rampaged through Muslim neighbourhoods in several cities seeking reprisals during three days of bloodshed. The cause of the train fire remains a chief area of dispute between the two religious communities... On February 28, a day after the train fire, rioters packed in trucks breached the boundary wall of the complex and set houses ablaze. They dragged people out and burned them alive. (Dawn)

The novel begins with the death of Asad. Mala is depressed with the loss of her husband and gradually comes to terms with reality. Mala, a Tamil Brahmin marries Asad, a Muslim. When she disclosed her intention of marrying Asad to her parents, they were perturbed, "You are killing us! You'll marry this man, this foreigner, and you'll be lost to

us, you'll kill us!" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 69). Her parents blackmail her emotionally and try hard to make her understand the consequences of an inter-caste marriage. They also make her aware of religious differences. "Think of the difference! ...it will always be a problem, the difference between us and them. It will not go away just because you are married" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 69). They both marry much against their parent's wish and live a happy life crossing the barriers of religious dogma.

Mala and Asad follow the ideals of secularism and take up their identity as Indians foregoing their religious identity. "One's self gets acknowledged within society" (Stryker), but Mala discards her Brahmin society for some higher reality. Since childhood she wanted to follow her desires. She could not withstand the biased treatment of elders towards boys and girls, who made her feel as an alien within her community. Mala after the death of her husband feels completely isolated, lonely and shattered. Mala works as an Assistant Librarian in a school. When she comes home after work, she gets involved in his sketch books and becomes nostalgic.

Readers are introduced to Asad through his sketchbooks which throw light on the psychological trauma that he underwent due to religious intolerance in the country. Asad was a visionary artist, but his ideals were shattered during the Hindu -Muslim riots. Samar, Azad's son considers himself as a Muslim as he accepts the necessity of taking up a specific religious identity as per the demands of the society.

Mala remembers her grandmother Bala, who plays a key role in changing her perspective of life. She has been subservient to the patriarchal set up. Bala becomes a stereotype of the women victims of patriarchy. Bala was married at the age of twelve. Though her husband was just five years elder to her, he exercised full command over the

house as well as over her. Bala had never developed a sense of belongingness in her husband's house. She had never stepped out of the house; she was deprived the freedom of even visiting her parents. She does not hold any identity of her own. Once Bala went to the balcony to dry her hair, she felt happy looking at the unknown streets. The moment she saw her husband she immediately rushed down and locked herself in the store room. Her alienation affects her behaviour and she suffers from hysteria.

Bala always liked to grow long hair, but her husband did not like to let her hair loose and untied. Not only her beautiful, lustrous mane but he also wanted her to keep her emotions suppressed. She used to cut her hair, make a nest of it and places it in the backyard on a low-hanging branch of a tree. She feels that one day a baby bird will sit in this nest and eventually will learn to fly whereas she has lost her liberty and identity. The nest made of her beautiful hair symbolizes Bala's desire for freedom. One day she even scrapped parts of her scalp which indicates the void she feels within. After the death of her husband Bala properly oiled and combed her thin hair, as there is no one to pose threat to her liberty, but irony is that, she couldn't enjoy her freedom as she is in the final stage of life.

Bala accepted her plight but wanted Mala to be independent. She wants Mala to be brave enough to break the norms of patriarchy. While Mala informed her decision of marrying Asad Bala says, "Her eyes fill with fear. That one time I went away, he found me", Bala says. "He brought me back, didn't he?" She pushes Mala away. 'Run', she says. 'Run' before he catches you" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 67). She expresses her joy and tells, Mala that they both emerged as winners in the end. "You and I beat them, she

gloats. You married him. I couldn't escape this place but I've lived longer than that old bastard boss. We've won" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 76).

Thus Bala's search for identity remains unfulfilled and she becomes the symbol of fragmented identity. Bala never uttered a word when her husband was alive. She was only supposed to listen to him. Now, in his absence, she inhales the serene air of freedom and abuses everyone with abusive terms, "that could keep a team of linguists busy for the rest of their lives" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 75). Mala's grandfather was an epitome of male domination that Bala called him as the prison warden. Bala's character brings out the plight of several women who are not allowed to enjoy any priorities after marriage. Male dominated society fails to provide freedom to women. They are deprived of all their valuable unique identity except being subservient to their husbands. In such a state of affairs women face severe identity crisis like Bala.

Having witnessed Bala's sufferings, Mala does not want to be caught in the web of the patriarchal set-up. She developed an aversion to towards the oppressive cultural setup and developed a sense of rootlessness and alienation, right from her childhood. Mala's great fear was the orthodox environment in which she is born will never permit her to live an independent life which she desires to. "Women, who refuse to accept the prevalent codes, question the injustice, assert to seek fulfilment, and are grouped under the title of non-conformists." (Bai 43)

Mala, after the death of her husband recollects how they both had got rid of the rigid rules of the society and decided to live a life on their own accord respecting each other. Mala accidentally finds the last sketchbook of Asad; his paintings exhibit his frustrations and disappointment as he witnesses his secular ideals crumble down as the

society was torn apart due to communal riots. Mala thinks, “May be ideals get dented, bent, even broken. Just like an ageing body. And if it can’t be mended, it’ll be born again. It will be born in someone else, may be somewhere else” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 93). The sketch showed a happy couple and the other a man who is hanging from a hook. Both the pictures are drawn by Asad indicates that he felt defeated and lost while on the other hand there is a hope of a better world.

Asad wanted to put the discriminating forces at bay and spread humanitarian zeal throughout his life. Asad never wanted to be recognized as a Muslim but as an Indian. He never welcomed Mala’s socializing with other Muslims. He was scared that their relatives will convince Mala and his children to take up a religious identity. Asad’s sketches reveal that he was perturbed by the communal riots. Throughout his life, Asad believed that secularism was deeply rooted in the Indian ethos. After the Gujarat riots, Mala understands that the quintessence of Asad’s ideals was shattered and he was left heartbroken, as his inner hues faded his sketchbook disappeared gradually. Asad says, “There’s a battle going on, a war. The enemy wants to tell people whether they are Muslim or Hindu or Christian or something else, as if people no longer know themselves” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 100).

During one of their visit, to Mala’s village Asad experienced religious discrimination. Nobody eats with him except Mala. The Cook gives him food on a white enamel plate, which looks like a plate used to serve pet dogs. Asad gets this special treatment just because of his marginalized identity. Asad is not upset with the treatment meted out to him. He believes that one can create one’s own identity in society but neglects the point that personal identity gets strengthened only through reciprocation. He does not believe in religious identity and this is the major cause of his identity crisis.

During the communal riots, he could not handle the situation as he loses his sense of self-identity. He is deeply troubled by the communal riots:

After few years, there is a political disturbance caused by communal riots in Delhi. Don't tell me we're now going to turn into earlier Muslims overnight. Moderate Muslims, modern Muslims, reasonable Muslims... Asad's voice sounds like he's bringing back order. His words sound like he's bringing them back to themselves. But actually he's agitated, more agitated than all of them. (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 201)

Another sketch reveals two contrasting images of 'Mulla' in Asad's sketchbook. One image speaks about his ideals, his faith in God's mercy, his principles, and his warnings against temptations. Here one sees 'Mulla' as a firm follower of God, a head of the community of the faithful, who was once forced to go in exile, but he handled the pressure and did not leave his homeland. "He chose to stay his home; he gave up the land of the pure for Bombay, land of the impure" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 180). The second image reveals 'Mulla' who has now fallen from the pedestal from where he could really see the road to salvation. Through this contrasting image, Asad makes it clear that the real battle is not for salvation but for the safety of mankind, families and homes, a battle to live quietly and peacefully. The painting depicting the 'Mulla' symbolises the present day crisis. Mulla in the picture seems totally fragmented and perplexed on seeing his faithful crowd speaking of faith and hate with the same tongue. Mala affixes Asad's face in the image of the 'Mulla' and thus understood Asad's psychological dilemma.

Asad feels alienated and he always remains in his studio. His identity crisis begins the very moment he realizes that he cannot fit in the society, where people are

acknowledged only on the basis of religion. When Samar told his father about his plans to go to America for pursuing his career, Asad said, “Go, go to America and become a jihadi if that’s what you think the world needs” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 99). He encourages Sara to uphold the spirit of humanism in the society where religious bias rules high. He reminds her about Indian freedom struggle when people were moved by the spirit of patriotism as they stood united as Indians foregoing their petty differences. Asad is unable to see the country being torn apart by communal bias. He is psychologically upset because of the violence meted out to his fellowmen.

Mala happens to see Asad’s sketchbook dated 2002. She is stunned to see a drawing with a title ‘Broken Home, February 2002’. It is obviously the date of Godhra riots. He has depicted an image of some dead bodies lying on the floor and the painting reflected the crude reality. She feels the voice of Asad asking, “Can we do nothing but record the desecration of human faces?” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 206). Asad starts reflecting the chaos in the society as well as his psychological turmoil in his paintings. “The last few months Asad has been working with exaggerated energy, as if his paintings can do what rallies and protests and talks can’t. But he is also throwing out as much as he draws and paints” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 209). Asad presents realistic portrait of the sufferings victims during the riot. Asad being a creative artist was very sensitive and deeply affected to see secular ideals getting shattered.

The picture in the sketchbook depicts five men standing with iron rods, sticks, and butcher’s knife in their hands about to kill an unarmed naked man kneeling down, with hands on the floor. Mala observes that the unarmed victim in the picture is Asad. The sketch reveals the cause of Asad’s depressive syndrome. Mala compares this helpless

image with the youthful Asad who was a happy, cheerful person ready to take challenges, argumentative, a firm advocate of his principles and always alive. This sketch explains Asad's feeling of helplessness as he is unable to stop the divisive forces butchering the spirit of unity.

Asad's psyche is completely enveloped by anxiety and uncertainty. His last sketch portrays him as a frozen man. The man in the picture is without any body and his head is hanging upside down.

... a long steel like cord hanging from nowhere. The cord makes a loop at its lower end, a loop to which is attached an evil looking hook. The hook is not quite around the neck of the hanging face, but it's awfully close. The man's eyes stare at the hook. It's almost there, it's about to encircle his neck. How else will it keep him from falling into the sheer drop of space below? (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 219).

Asad's identity crisis leads to depression. He spends his last days in a hospital trying to regain his mental poise and his lost zest for life. After coming home from hospital he is inside the studio but he had stopped painting. His sketch books are kept clean as if he has forgotten painting. An unknown sense of fear engulfs Asad that he had stopped using colours. Asad suddenly ceases talking and if at all he talks it is only about the violence and communal riots. He becomes totally upset that he never opens the windows of the flat, symbolic of his fear of accepting reality. Asad is deeply disturbed by communal violence and dies as a symbol of a fragmented personality. Mala notices that after his death Asad's face is without tension and is full of grace, the joy of approving eternal sleep.

Asad's daughter Sara is also suffering from identity crisis. Sara, after her father's death, moves to Ahmedabad to make a documentary film about the suffering of the victims of Gujarat riots. Sara suffers due to her hyphenated identity; half-Hindu and half-Muslim as she shares mixed parentage. Sangeeta Barooah, from *The Hindu*, in her interaction with Githa Hariharan comments:

It is one of life's ironies. You have zero roles in choosing your name and yet all your life, you have to mind it. Worse, based on your name, the world draws a rough draft on you. North Indian, South Indian, easterner, north easterner, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh...in an increasingly polarised society like ours, like it or not, your name today can be a weapon or a catch.

Seasoned author Githa Hariharan's latest roll-out, *Fugitive Histories* quite skilfully draws on what your name can entail, how it can lead to a volley of prejudices-scornful, long established. But Githa delves deeper here. She peels the mindsets by comparing the times, the generations, the idiosyncrasies 'theirs' and 'ours'.

Sara works with an NGO named 'Sangam' in Delhi. She shares a room with Nina her friend. Sara is in a live-in relationship with Rajat Shaw, who is of half-Christian and half-Hindu parentage. Rajat lives in Mumbai and after the day's hectic schedule Sara makes a visit to meet him.

During her childhood days, Sara used to be very happy and fun loving girl. At school, she encountered identity –crisis as she felt that she is totally different from other girls. In her early school days, her friend Tripti enquired about her caste, Sara is helpless and

could not give a definite answer. Here begins the problem of identity crisis. Both the little girls remained friends but there was something missing between them. Years after Sara realizes that “perhaps she was born knowing who she was and what sort of life she would live” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 179). Being inspired by her father’s ideals, she becomes a social worker. She shared a very close bond with her father and his death came as a great blow to her. She too realized that Hindu-Muslim communal riot has affected Asad’s sensitive mind-set.

Sara decides to follow her father’s ideals and fulfil his ambition of reinstating humanitarian zeal in the society. She doesn’t want to be confined to a particular religious identity and wants to spend her life in service to society. She feels that working with the NGO ‘Sangam’ will not be sufficient to accomplish her ideals. She decides to move on in search of her identity, she takes up the job of writing script for a documentary film about Gujarat Carnage-2002. Nina the director of the film plans to visit Ahmedabad for a week. Nina wants Sara to observe the pathetic situation of Muslim victims, so that she can write the script for the documentary based on authentic data.

Sara was initially reluctant to visit Ahmedabad as the riots left an indelible blow to the secular tenets of the nation. She feels very disheartened to meet the victims who have suffered a lot just because of their religious identity as Muslims. Sara is haunted by her childhood memories of the communal rage during the Bombay Riots of 1992-93, when her friend was murdered because her name disclosed her Muslim identity. She recalls Asad, who once told her that there is nothing in a name, but now Sara thinks that a name can change a person’s destiny.

Sara realized that visiting Ahmedabad is essential as she has to rise up to the occasion and contribute towards building enlightened future citizens who would uphold the spirit of unity along with pluralistic spirit. She agrees to accompany Nina to Ahmedabad. They meet some of the riot affected Muslims in their new relocated colonies, Sara felt for the first time that India is not a safe place for Muslims. Her very first visit to the riot hit area aroused mixed feelings in Sara. “They call this a border, Nina tells Sara as they cross a highway, reach an area that is a bizarre mix of bungalows, short and tall buildings, many hovels, too many hovels; and some call this area ‘mini Pakistan’“ (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 110). Sara musters courage and meets some of the families. Her fear to meet the victims shows her troubled state of mind.

In *Fugitive Histories*, Hariharan exposes the entangled human relationships as the religious tolerance is at stake and the minorities face dilemma of identity. Yasmin, one of the riot victims carries with her the deep scars of communal hatred. Yasmin looks very thin and carries a stern look. After the riots Yasmin’s life takes a drastic change, “Every night Yasmin waits for sleep to find her. She lies as still as possible, eyes shut tight. It should be easy then, the easiest thing in the world for sleep to come to her, settle on her like a warm old blanket. But, like Yasmin, sleep too is afraid of the dark” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 115).

Yasmin lost her brother Akbar and her home in 2002, she is nostalgic about her happy past before the misfortune struck and expects a happy reunion with her family whose whereabouts were unknown after the riots. She is a seventeen years old girl who lives with her father and mother. Like all the other Muslims, after the riots, Yasmin moves along with her family to the new religious border in the city with the best hope to survive. Her father owned a big shop earlier, but after losing the house as well as the shop during the riots, he sets up a small shop.

Yasmin, seventeen years old. Yasmin's father had a shop downstairs in the house where they used to live. Yasmin's mother used to be a housewife, now an NGO helps her and other women in the area sell the skirts they stitch and embroider. Yasmin's brother was in college when the trouble started, he did not come back home. He's still missing. Her father was forced to sell their house for whatever he could get and move to a safe area. He's trying to set up a small business, but is often sick. Yasmin is in the last year of school. She wants to go to college, but she failed her boards last year. (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 114)

Yasmin's brother Akbar was a very intelligent science student. Now, he is no more with them. His death was not confirmed in the earlier phase of riots, later on he was declared dead, and the family did not get any clue about his survival. Now, Yasmin is the only hope to her parent's. Her mother keeps working day and night on the sewing machine-cutting and sewing skirts so that she can help Yasmin complete her studies. Yasmin knows if she gets through, she can take admission in a college and later can get a job. She has to economically support her parents as Akbar is not alive.

Nina and Sara speak to Yasmin for some time and later meet some other Muslim families. Sara understands the difficulty of being normal under such grave situations. Yasmin wants to pursue her studies in a college, so that she can get a job later and shoulder her parents' burden. On being asked about her identity by Yasmin later, Sara says with a deep sigh, "But most of the time I'm just Sara" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 167). Sara realizes that the riots had left behind indelible scar beyond rectification in the minds of the victims. Sara interviews a lot of women who share their misery, Sara's mind travels into a new world in which she visualizes different scenes:

Sara's eyes are intent on Nasreen. Looking at her, listening to what she's saying. Sara can almost see a pair of invisible arms pulling Nasreen into a pit. And suddenly, even as Sara imagines this pit, they are past all preludes. All of them, not just Nasreen, are being pulled into the pit or pushed into it. Now they are in the deep smoky pit of the story. It's not a pit with imaginary terrorists or imaginary Pakistan. There is nothing invisible or imaginary in this pit...It's a pit in which everyone is running, the pit is only a pit, there's nowhere to run. It's a pit where long hard things falls on soft flesh, long sharp things pierce soft flesh. It's a pit that calls fire to it like a magnet. It's a pit diet blazes so bright, so hot; you may think the hungry orange fire will never be done with filling up its stomach.

(Hariharan, "Fugitive" 157)

Sara observes the socio-political atmosphere, dragging the victims to a state of non-existence. Sara clearly sees that the victims had no options to escape from the 'pit', which refers to the current victimized state of existence.

Sara boards the train to Delhi and she happens to meet an aged couple who enquire about her caste and religion, which makes Sara realise that religious bias is deep rooted in the social fabric of the country though politically we are a secular democratic country. Sara answers she is half-Hindu and half-Muslim and her parents come from different parts of the country. Sara thinks, "I have Muslim relative and Hindu relatives. I'm neither. Sometimes I think I'm Indian. (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 167). Her answer leaves the couple embarrassed. They suddenly keep themselves silent and show no more

interest in her. After passive introspection, Sara answers that she had chosen to be an Indian without any religious identity attached to her. She recalls her father's words,

When Sara came home with questions about what she was, or what she was supposed to do with forms that asked her to fill in the blanks next to *Religion*, Asad told her, 'Don't be ashamed of who you are. Don't be ashamed of who you're not' ... But for the moment, all Sara can be is a woman, she has no name or religion race or caste or natives land.

(Hariharan, "Fugitive" 180)

Thus Sara breaks the shell of fragmented identity and makes a mighty leap into achieving self-identity, standing firmly without any particular name, religion, race or caste. When Sara reaches Delhi, she is happy to see her mother waiting for her with lots of questions. She does not want to share anything to Mala regarding the riot affected victims as it was difficult to witness other people's misery. Sara is very empathetic towards the agony encountered by the victims. Sara realizes that she should represent the entire issues of the community to the public and work towards reconstructing their broken lives.

Mala seems worried as she does not want Sara to feel and act like Samar, who is critical of his parents' choices, who opted to be a Muslim as he wanted a clear cut identity. But to Mala's surprise, Sara tells Mala about her experience and her journey of realization of a new self.

Sara considers her mother with a surge of pure affection. 'They have monitoring cells to keep track of inter religious marriages,' she says.

'Good thing Asad and you married when you did.' Mala smiles; they look

deep into each other's eyes. 'How lucky I am,' Sara says. She's already moved back from their past to her present, thinks Mala. But she gamely prompts Sara. 'Lucky? 'Yes, I'm beginning to realize how lucky I am. How glad I am that I'm a hybrid.' Sara drops her gaze, adds almost shyly, 'I wish I could tell Asad that'. (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 184)

Sara is in a dilemma to pen down the documentary film script. Sara's own identity does not permit her to write the script as she has never asserted herself as a Hindu or a Muslim. Yasmin is in the last year of school education and after finishing her school she wants to go to college. Sara offers to help Yasmin if she is interested to join college in Mumbai. She knows that, "the difference she can make in Yasmin's life is nothing compared to the difference Yasmin can make in her life" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 235). Sara understands the severity of the riots and the plight of Yasmin and all the other Muslims. Yasmin considers Sara as a saviour who has come to remove all her innumerable problems and obstacles. Yasmin expected that a heroine of Hindi films will come to save her as well as the other victims. "She's seen all her pictures, she thinks Shabana Azmi will come and save her from here" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 236). In spite of the injustice meted out to Yasmin and several others like her, she is very optimistic and still waits for God to help them.

Yasmin learns to face all difficulties and becomes very independent. She does the household chores, helps her Ammi. She made a promise to her Ammi, Abba, to herself and even to her dead brother Akbar that she would emerge successful in securing a reasonable job. Being safe during her school days was a big deal because the school was situated in the Hindu area and an unknown fear engulfed her whenever she walked through the street.

They can't see the feeling trapped inside her, fighting its way out. This is not a simple feeling. It does not have a name, something small and easy to say, like fear or anger or sadness. It is a little of this a little of that. Sometimes the feeling changes so fast from one to the other that she needs to check the dupatta around her head shoulders again tighten it once more.

(Hariharan, "Fugitive" 149)

Many Muslim parents who were very frightened refused to send their children to school prioritising their safety. "The feeling of hatred poisons not only the minds of the religious fanatics but also those who involve in the field of education" (Priya 278).

Students are ill-treated even by the teachers. One of the victims explains:

We wanted him to study in the English medium school so he could be an engineer, Zainab was saying. But the principal was doing 'partition work'. He'd ask Nasir in front of everybody else, "Aren't you from Pakistan?" or he'd say, "You're not fit for an English medium school," though Nasir did all his work. He kept calling my Nasir a terrorist till the child couldn't bear it anymore. (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 156)

Yasmin is more determined to get educated so that she can chart a bright future as she is the only ray of hope to her parents. "It shows that even after the riots are over, a woman's life and safety cannot be taken for granted. It is as though Yasmin's already fragile and makeshift existence was under constant threat of being destroyed" (Sundaram 133).

She has to do it all alone somehow. Then everyone who tells Ammi and Abba she shouldn't go to school will never be able to open their mouths again. They'll know they're wrong, they won't say it's not safe for girls

anything can happen. They won't say it's no use, its better she goes to sewing class like Sultana, its better she does some work right now. Its better she helps you. (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 116)

Yasmin develops a sense of self, takes accountability for her flaws and limitations as she has to overcome all hurdles. Yasmin wants to be known as an individual and not as a Muslim. She feels that her family has paid a big price for being Muslims. "They had to quit their neighbourhood, their India. They found a safe house in a Muslim neighbourhood but in return the safe house made them give up their home, their old life. It made them give up on Akbar" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 138). The psychological trauma Yasmin is going through makes her an introvert. Time fails to heal the pain of Yasmin who keeps waiting for her brother. She always trains her mind and keeps reminding herself that she is alone, no matter even if she is surrounded by a huge crowd.

Yasmin becomes a foil to several Muslims who were pressurized to leave their homes. The announcement was made in the loud speakers, "Go to Pakistan! Go back to Pakistan! (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 157). Githa Hariharan, through Yasmin shows the grim side of religious identities. When people lose their sense of belongingness it paves way for crisis of identity. The victims found it difficult to survive; as they were psychologically traumatised. Restructuring their life's required reinstating hope and positive attitude.

Yasmin is thinking too hard. She's thinking: we're lucky we have two rooms even if they're dark and small. We're lucky we have two rooms in a safe area. We're lucky we've a tap in the bathroom; we've to use the water tank outside only once a day. We're lucky we have electricity. You're lucky you go to school. You're lucky your father got some money at least

for the old house. You're lucky you didn't have to see your brother's dead body or see him killed. You're lucky you can remember him as he was. You're lucky, we're lucky. They have to say it often, in as many ways as possible. They have to say it as often as possible because in their hearts they don't believe it. Now Yasmin has to believe it. She's lucky.

(Hariharan, "Fugitive" 122)

Like Yasmin many other Muslims lost their loved ones and kept bereaving. Yasmin tells Sara about the perturbed minds of the victims. Yasmin tells Sara her mother's words, "There's more than enough room for Abba, you and me. But the simple truth is that this place will never be big enough for them. They are crowded out by too many ghosts; the dead, the wounded and the maimed take up more room than the living ever can" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 150). This only highlights the unfortunate victims who don't feel secure in the new so called safe place. Yasmin recalls to Sara her parents' visit to the police station to trace their missing son Akbar became an excruciating experience as they were ill-treated.

"The first policeman leans back in his chair and stares at Ammi as if she is naked. As if she is not wearing a Sari, a burqa thrown over it so only her face and feet are visible"

"The second policeman snarls:

'What's your son's name?' 'Akbar', Ammi says again, thought they have given their son's name at least ten times.

'Akbar what? Mohammad? Ahmad?'

‘The names become ugly taunts in the policeman’s mouth’.... and when Ammi says, ‘He’s in college, second year BSc’..... then, there is a terrible smile on his face.

‘College? Why didn’t you say earlier?’..... ‘he growls with satisfactions. Too many of you in college it seems,’..... and adds sarcastically: ‘Has he eloped with a Hindu girl?

Or left home to join the terrorists?’.....When Ammi adds: ‘He’s just a boy’s.... ‘Just a student. He does not know anything about politics’ ‘The policeman look at each other and burst into laughter.’ With rock respect the second policeman says, ‘Begum’, ‘this is probably what Osama Bin Laden’s mother says of him’.” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 134)

The above scene demonstrates the psychological crisis of Yasmin as well as of her parents. Yasmin thinks “missing is not so bad, it’s better than dead” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 136). She lives with the memories of her elder brother Akbar whom she loves so deeply. She has a photograph of Akbar which gives her comfort as Akbar was once a part of her life. She retains his biology notebook with her with neatly drawn diagrams as a remembrance. These unforgettable memories of the dead or missing persons harm the victims more than the actual riots. Every now and then, the past disturbs and the ghastly memories of the riots trouble her. “Akbar, the house, the stop, and their lives-these can’t be memories because they are with her, with them, all the time.” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 144).

Once Yasmin confronts Zeihida-Khala one of the victim who was mentally deranged, as she had lost all her family members in the riots, “She wouldn’t know how to kill an ant, but every time she sees someone on TV who looks Muslim and who looks like he’s

angry or fighting, she gets up and kisses the screen” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 158). Women became easy prey to the ruthless rioters. The rioters molested women and looted their belongings.

Yasmin is flat on the floor, its smoky dark though it’s not yet night. There must be something sharp in his hand. She can feel it on her inner thigh like a nail tearing the cloth of the salwar, piercing the flesh underneath, and then sliding down. Everything smells of smoke, blood, sweat.

Then someone is on her Yasmin can hardly breathe.

But it’s not him, it’s Ammi. Ammi covers Yasmin’s body with hers and begs. Ammi’s begging words make a breathless mess of a prayer.

(Hariharan, “Fugitive” 145)

The victims were waiting desperately for someone to come and recover them from their present state. Yasmin tells Sara that the victims are only voices speaking but with no listener.

Yasmin thigh throbs; it’s only a scar, there is blood running under the skin, there’s no piece of wood jamming up its flow. But how strange it is, being hated. It means old scars pain all over again. And how strange it is to hate. It opens up an old wound, it makes it throb so you think it’s a fresh one, you have been wounded all over again (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 160-161).

The victims have lost their individual identity. Yasmi recounts the horrific situation of the wounded victims screaming for help. “Yasmin can no longer see which

voice in the room belongs to which body, or whether the voices have bodies at all. They are just voices, nothing else because if they were really bodies, really people, wouldn't someone have heard them by now, given them some justice in five long years?"

(Hariharan, "Fugitive" 162).

The victims get adjusted to life, but they are not able to regain what is lost.

"The culture of violence against women is extremely pernicious for their growth and consequently for the progress of the country itself. If and only if the country can free its women from the clutches of violence can the women citizens call themselves truly free and the nation call itself progressive in the real sense of the word." (Sundaram 134-5)

Yasmin stands firm on her beliefs and achieves her identity. No doubt, Yasmin had to pay the price for her religious identity. She never feels protected and safe. The words which always come into her ears are "careful, alert, guarding against, taking care, anything can happen" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 123). She visualised people with swords, pipes, iron rods, sticks and hockey sticks in her dreams. In spite of all these Yasmin comes to terms with life. She learns to manage and live her life on her own accord and surpasses all the obstacles. The support extended to her by Sara helps her in regaining the lost confidence and her true self.

Samar is the elder son of Asad. Mala's mother wants to have a naming ceremony and invite her relatives to show them that the child will be brought up as a Hindu. Mala's mother tries to convince Mala that society does not acknowledge one only by being a human, one need to belong somewhere. She says, "First you come up with a strange name we've never heard before...then you don't want a naming ceremony. What do you think this boy is going to live in a world all by himself?" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 32). His grandmother

wants to name him as Ramakrishna but his parents did not accept to thrust any religious identity on a new born baby.

Mala goes down the memory lane and thinks of an incident. When Samar was a young boy, he did not like to share his tiffin box as they often complained that Samar's tiffin smells of meat. He tells Mala that every day he cannot open and show his tiffin to the Hindu boys to prove that it does not smell of meat. Samar wants to tell them that being Muslim he eats meat. He feels as if he does not have any identity because of his mixed parentage. Samar, wants to hold on to some religious identity. He wants a surname, a name which tells about his roots. Since beginning, he was somehow against his father's secular vision of self-identity. He realizes that society does not accept such half-Hindu, half-Muslim people. Samar feels that taking up the religious identity of being a Muslim will provide him a sense of belongingness. Samar says: "Asad may have told us we're not Muslim or Hindu, but the rest of the world only our last name. Anyway, I'm happy to be seen as a Muslim. I want to be one" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 99). He makes up his mind to settle in Dubai after the death of his father. Samar strongly believes that in any country people get recognized not by their beliefs but by their caste and religion. He overcomes the dilemma of identity-crisis and much against his parent's dream, chose to be a Muslim. He no more believes in the ideals of his parents.

Identity provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one's life. Identity is also a way of preserving the continuity of the self, linking the past and the present [. . .] at the same time that our identity is fundamentally

interwoven with others' to gain meaning, contrasting ourselves with others heightens our sense of what is uniquely individual. (Martin 10)

Sara recalls an incident when both of them were enjoying kite flying. She sees her brother holding the kite loosely. His eyes were carefully watching the movements of the kite. He was aware that blowing of breeze may spoil the game and his kite will no more fly in the sky. He wants his kite to fly without any hindrance in the sky. This indirectly hits the desire of Samar to excel in life. Like the kite, he wants to soar higher and higher. Samar determines the direction his life will take.

When Sara interacted with the victims, she understands the role religion plays in shaping one's identity and social status. Political parties instigate religious bias for their political gains. The victims of Godhra riots were all unmistakably Muslims. This collective identity of belonging to a religion, which happens to be a minority community, affects their personal as well as social identity. The victims recount the horrors of the communal riot to Sara. Women were raped and then burnt. A little boy was forced to drink petrol and then he was burnt alive. They were forced to leave their place as they kept branding them as terrorists.

Farida asks Neena, "And what happened to us, that's not terrorism?" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 157). Zulekha tells about screaming mothers, sisters and daughters, "...they were begging us to remove the stumps of wood that had been pushed into them. Each one was crying, "me first, remove mine first." I'll never forget their screams. Even now, when I tell you this, my blood boils" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 160). Noorjahan's father, brother, husband and son were burnt alive. She was heartbroken and upset as she could not perform their last rites. "They burnt my husband, they burnt my father, they burnt my

son. His name was Shafiq, he was just fifteen years old. If only I could have buried them properly, with some dignity ... if only I could have given them the respect everyone should have in death” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 162).

Hariharan portrays the plight of the victims. Even some good policemen were stopped from coming forward to help. When people sought the help of the police, the police replied, “Snakes that are not poisonous should keep the enemy away by hissing once in a while” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 160). The police just stood passively watching their homes burning and people dying one by one. There were some good people who helped the Muslims. “The text thus speaks at different levels of representation of the personal lives of Mala, Asad, Yasmin and Sara, on the one hand, and the political, historical, social and the cultural on the other” (Aruna 31).

It’s an irony that riots took place in the state where Gandhi was born. If Gandhi happened to witness the riots which were against his principles of Ahimsa, he would have said, “I can’t watch the destruction of all I’ve lived for. I would rather drown myself in the waters of the Sabarmati than harbour hate or animosity in my heart” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 176). Irony is that the quintessence of Indian ethos which is steeped in Gandhian philosophy of ahimsa has no power to end the current wave of religious fundamentalism.

Religious riots take place when people of different religion deny accepting each other. The pages of history has never failed to highlight that religious fundamentalism, has affected both Muslims but Hindus. *Fugitive Histories* is written from the perspective of the Muslim victims of Godhra riots of Gujarat in 2002. Hariharan presents a stark reality of the religious tension that devastated life of riot-affected people. The novel highlights the religious fundamentalism that promotes religious discrimination in the country.

Identity implies both uniqueness and sameness [. . .] one cannot be defined in isolation: the only way to circumscribe and identity is by contrasting it with other identities [. . .] It gets its meaning from the other: like a word in a crossword puzzle, it is located in a place where uniqueness [. . .] meets a sameness which needs an “eliveness” to exist.(Martin 5)

The novel explicates that everyone’s life is interdependent in this world and every action leads to a chain or reaction that influences the lives of others either directly or indirectly. “What happens to one also that happens in some way, to the other. That’s how all those fragments that pass for different lives forge a cunning chain. The interlocking links may not always be visible, but still they’re made of iron. And the ending in a chain story can’t really be the end. To make sense of it all, you have to go back to the beginning” (Hariharan, “Fugitive” 13).

Through the story of the ant the novelist symbolically represents the efforts taken by the victims in shaping their own identities and rise up like phoenix from their downfall.

...the ant’s baby falls into water and is in danger of drowning. The ant asks the frog nearby for help, but the frog says, what do I care if you baby is drowning? ‘The ant swears revenge and goes to the snake, but the snake too doesn’t care about her baby. The ant goes on like this, finding one creature after another, all bound by their common lack of caring, till she decides to bite a little boy who has refused to help her. The bite does the trick. He picks up the stick, which hits the dog, which runs after the cat, which chases the rat, which gnaws a hole in the snake charmer’s basket, so

the snake inside escapes and is about to eat up the frog ,but the frog jumps into the water and rescues the baby ant.(Hariharan, “Fugitive” 13)

The crux of the novel is based on the social unrest due to the communal clash instigated by religious fundamentalist for their political gains. “The novel ends on an optimistic note as Yasmin’s parents reluctantly agree to send her to Bombay to join college under Sara’s care. The triumphant moment of the novel is when Yasmin’s mother declares that her daughter will not wear the Burqa as women of her generation did.” (Sundaram 133). As a writer with social concern, she is affected by the prejudices that divide the pluralistic society which has been remarkable for its spirit of patriotism that had kept them bound together in spite of various differences.

The novel expresses the writer’s anguish regarding the loss of humanism and sense of brotherhood in the name of religious fundamentalism. The crumbling failure of the progressive ideals of Asad and Mala is a sad reality that an egalitarian society can never be established. The grim situation is that nationalism and patriotism is being replaced by fundamentalism and fanaticism. Though the world has progressed in science and technology, human society still remains barbaric as it holds on to petty difference unwilling to realise the ultimate truth that the motto of all religion is to spread the spirit of humanism. It is pathetic to note that the country that spread the philosophy of ahimsa and nonviolence is brooding with ruthless violence instigated by religious fanatics. Social change is possible through such literary works as it instigates the readers towards progression by instilling the spirit of acceptance and tolerance.