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Religion, Tradition and Modernity: Peace and Conflict in Gita Hariharan's Fugitive Histories

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Abstract: The women writers of India are efficiently and aggressively bringing before the world the rise of the New Woman in India who facing all odds in a patriarchal society has set herself towards confronting and uprooting the fundamentalism which has been growing largely under political shelter. Githa Hariharan is one of the most prolific woman writers of India. She was born in Coimbatore in 1954. She was brought up in Bombay and Manila and got her education in these two places besides the U.S.A. She has been an editor, first in a publishing house and then as a freelancer. Githa Hariharan is also a social activist known for her care and concern for women. In 1995, she challenged the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act as discriminative in the Supreme Court of India and was accorded victory. In this Research Paper, we throw light on her one of the finest works "Fugitive Histories" and its different aspects.

Keywords: Tradition, Modernity, Religion, Peace, Conflict

I

During the past twenty-five years, the English novel of India has transformed histrionically in its panache, its subjects, its principles, after the release of *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. According to Khushwant Singh, 'Hariharan writes with anguish, pain and anger about what is happening to our country'. Githa Hariharan, born in Coimbatore, travelled among cities along with having rather a long pedigree accorded by her. Publicized texts by Githa Hariharan comprise short stories, novels, theses, newsprint editorials as well as articles. In 1993, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) which is her foremost novel, earned the

Prize of Commonwealth Writers. Her additional works comprise *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003), and *Fugitive Histories* (2009).

Her novel, *Fugitive Histories* reveals the vestige of bigotry which, occasionally deviously, at times noticeably, carries on influencing, contrasting livelihood in contemporary India. Githa Hariharan depicts the mesh of human relations which connects similarly as it is divisive. As declared by Githa all her novels and stories look at power politics in some way or the other. Fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations.

II

The influence of the uprisings at Godhara, Gujarat (2002) has been portrayed in *Fugitive Histories* (2009). A dogmatic issue has been undertaken by Gita Hariharan which indicates a defining moment in Gujarat's history. The Sabarmati Express was assailed in Gujarat, at the Godhara Station, on 27th February 2002 along with two of its coaches being set ablaze. Hindu activists were being transported by this train, on their way back from Ayodhya. Godhara was a Muslim locality. Through the weeks and days that ensued, the Gujarati Muslims faced ruthless ferocity. The accounts by survivors, eyewitnesses and support workforces insinuate that national officers, as well as the constabularies, were in cahoots with the assailants. The novel's apprehension is strictly doctrinal and is supposed to emphasize the inconsistencies in the strategies by the administration, the two faces which might otherwise be invisible to the general public. There is a forgetful propensity among the folks, even the occurrences of the grisliest kind, such as the massacre at Godhara thus it is the works such as *Fugitive Histories* which will not ever allow these matters to be erased from the minds of the common folk.

'Missing Persons', 'Crossing Borders' and 'Funeral Rites' are the three divisions of the novel *Fugitive Histories*. The text concentrates on the transforming appearance and part played by ladies presently. Asad was placed at a fundamental podium by Gita Hariharan along with the different main characters- Samar, Sara, and Mala, pivoting around his existence. His principles influence every member of his household yet their responses are quite diverse. The effect by Asad on Sara as well as Mala may be observed throughout the story. He is a dissident follower of Islam, wedded to a Hindu, studied Marx, and sustained his livelihood via his artistic talent in addition to questioning everything which the world

accepted without question. His nature was idealistic yet comes to a halt following the uprisings at Godhara. His life's journey has been symbolized in his drawings. He has left his journals behind, along with his remarks to his own self, passionately worded headings, a random passage, the thorough illustrative poetry, a random outline, watercolour, charcoal, pencil, or pen. Secularism had always been at the core of Asad. He wedded a Hindu, christened his kids Samar and Sara, along with being opposed to the stringency of his faith.

III

Githa Hariharan's novel *Fugitive Histories*, set in 2002 following the turmoil of Godhara uprisings. The mesh of associations among humankind which connects folk along with being divisive has been portrayed by Hariharan in this novel. Each of the six protagonists in the story, that is the daughter Sara, her mother Mala, Yasmin (a survivor of Gujarat uprisings in 2002), Asad (Mala's spouse), Bala (Mala's grandma), lastly Samar (Mala's son) encounters the predicament regarding themselves in several manners. During the opening sequence of the story, Asad is deceased. Mala wishes to understand her identity at the absence of Asad. Her part in the story is that of a widowed woman, adjudicates her life in the absence of Asad, and it is because of this that there is a need for her to comprehend Asad as a person along with what transpired with him. Following the demise of her father (Asad), Sara, is unsure regarding continuing her occupation or leaving for Ahmadabad for creating a documentary movie about the Gujarat uprising sufferers. She wishes to figure out what truly entails being a half-Muslim and half-Hindu in contemporary India (Asad being Muslim along with Mala being Hindu). Yasmin, the adolescent lost Akbar, her sibling as well as her house in 2002 along with being emaciated by the riot, simply hopes to go back to being how she was prior to the calamity. After that, there is the character of an old hysterical lady who is Bala (Mala's grandma). Her life has been spent being submissive to the society rife with patriarchy. She has not stepped outside her house ever, thereby making her introverted. Asad is introduced to the readers via his drawing books revealing the causes for his turmoil with life. Asad being idealistic as he was, was a gifted illustrator, reveals the facade of Hindu-Muslim uprisings. Finally, there is the character of Samar, who comprehends through his individual methods quite quickly in life, that there is a need to have certain individuality for relying on as the world asks the sense of belonging to a specific philosophy or creed.

It chiefly pivots around three major metropolises- Ahmadabad, Delhi and Mumbai. Every city is characterized by Sara, Mala and Yasmin correspondingly. The initial sequence narrates to the reader regarding every key character as well as their existences. The following sequence exposes Yasmin meeting Sara along with different riot sufferers. In the novel's third sequence the three chief roles of Mala, Sara as well as Yasmin make an effort to reconcile with livelihood along with finally reclaim the identity they lost. Once the narrative moves forward, the action sequence in the primary phase is at Delhi, in which the reader views Mala's desolate house following the demise of her spouse, Asad. Her kids (Samar and Sara) are absent as well as preoccupied because of their occupations. She carries on reminiscing folks and in one scene we find her remembering Bala, her grandma rather frequently, who has a key part to play in the development of her individuality along with altering her attitude regarding life. She realizes through Bala, how life simply throws tears and melancholy in case one fails to pick the correct choices at the proper time. Bala, who is the grandmother of Mala, suffers from hysteria and remains at a fixed and ensnared at a home which is her own. Her marriage was done when she was only twelve years old. Even though her spouse was just five years older than her, he still had to take up the responsibility of the household along with taking Bala's responsibility. Since Bala's first day at the household- she became a possession of not just to the house, but rather more of possession of her spouse. She did not ever go outside of the home, nor did she ever visit her parents' place, her self-identity being next to non-existent. She was not even allowed to visit the house of her own terrace. In the prime phase of her younger years, Bala visited the rooftop once for drying her hair and experienced great happiness viewing the unfamiliar roads, various homes full of diverse individuals, a novel kind of existence. Yet on noticing her spouse, across the road returning to the home, she instantly descended and bolted herself inside the storage chamber. She had an idea that according to her spouse, the storage chamber is the most suitable abode for a decent lady.

Mala's spouse Asad firmly had his conviction in the faith of egalitarianism as well as mortality, thus all through his livelihood, he carried the principles of status, religion and colour far from him. In her conversation with Mala Asad asserts that "I can't believe we are all same. That all these people – all of us are supposed to be Indian" (62). He wedded Mala- a devout Brahmin, south Indian despite the

unwillingness of his household. Asad was six feet in height, a good-looking man having a bushy dark beard causing him to appear as a perfect painter. Asad was completely unlike his father whom he addressed as the 'junior commie' along with addressing his greater granddad 'the senior commie'. Each of them had absolute religious belief very different from Asad. Asad sought recognition as an Indian instead of as a Muslim. He happened to address his mother as 'Lady' along with addressing his grandfather as 'Mulla', thereby he instructed Samar and Sara as well, to address him as Asad and not 'Appa' Rabba'.

An 'image of Ganesh' was discovered by Mala among the sheets of sketchbook owned by Asad. Yet this picture appeared to be a human being transforming into Ganesh having a trunk of an elephant, with big ears for flapping away from the air of ill fortune. Though astonishingly in this image of Ganesh, there was only one eye, opened wide with a bewildered gaze while the other one was shut as if winking with exaggeration. Even though Mala thinks this painting to be slightly ridiculous as well as incongruous, it still provides her with solace. Figuratively, Mala observes the facets of a human being, an animal as well as a Deity- together combined in this picture, feeling like it is her own. This drawing evidently displays beliefs held by Asad. He drew this further resembling a human being for showing the Divinity's connection with the humans overall. Simply this connection allows Deity to go wherever he chooses, whenever, devoid of giving a thought to the caste and religious restrictions. As supposed by Asad, there is only one God. The narrative does not simply handle the individuality troubles on the personal plane, rather on the worldwide plane as well. It concentrates on broken individualities of religion, overall as well. During Sara's visitation at Ahmadabad, listening to the plights of several sufferers, it is fairly obvious that religion has an influence on the identity of an individual along with their societal position.

IV

The broadminded author of high rank, Githa Hariharan, has opposed the conventional structure. Her intelligent courageous rational treatise may be encountered within the story of Fugitive Histories. Writing by Women presently relishes an exclusive as well as preeminent rank in writings, being connected closely as it is to literary researches. Particularly, literature of English language that claims to be among the biggest as well as lushest bulks of fictional works, particularly conveying a swarm of feminine declarations wielding the author's pen for depicting fiction that

does not just emphasize the predicament of ladies within the civilization rather developed the arena with vivid descriptions, panaches, methods as well, along with subjects, captivating cohorts of readers as well as commemorating their personal itinerary by notating their writings. Two deviating opinions exist which are articulated on the feminist prospect: 'progressive' and 'conservative'. Githa Hariharan epitomizes the secondary sentence. Her writings of fiction accurately handle the reformist feminist gospel that is revolutionary along with being beyond its eras. A vigilant examination of *Fugitive Histories* depicts that Githa Hariharan raised objection opposing the conventional, traditional system along with trying to institute a novel lifestyle founded on freedom, fairness as well as communal righteousness. The novel studies such subjects, chiefly the ones relating to relegation as well as subjugation of the voices of women in the conventional communal structure.

The story concludes on a tone of optimism as parents of Yasmin unenthusiastically approve to let her go to Bombay [Mumbai] for enrolling at a university being under the care of Sara. The victorious instance of the story occurs once the mother of Yasmin announces that Burqa would not be donned by her daughter even though it is worn by other ladies in her cohort: "She is not going to be like us... The angry ones on both sides want to put our daughters in Burqas so they can prove their point. Did their Burqas keep our women safe five years ago?" An unfettered and liberated life has been imagined by her for her daughter. The method opposing convention has continued to lead to the development of humankind. The institution of feminism is advanced echoing entitlements of humankind. Githa Hariharan composed a thesis for relishing those principles of humankind in a methodical manner. Those facets divulge the opposition further remarkably. The daring rebellion opposing the conventional communal structure is a significant aspect in the novel by Githa Hariharan. Her notions are not just an emblematic objection rather an undeviating communal activity as well. *Fugitive Histories* is truly an instance of Githa Hariharan's authentic display of liberal communal rational along with her portrayal of several services: social, political, as well as religious, functioning within the medium of society.

V

Individuality has predominantly faced a predicament in modernism due to the multifaceted association among the multiplicity of personalities along with the broader civilization. A person who is aware of his

individuality recurrently seeks constancy, safety and the sense of belonging, whereas the person that fails to understand his individuality in his communal setting turns out to be reclusive from civilization as well as the sufferer of an individuality crisis. This situation is full of a feeling of segregation, estrangement as well as a sensation of existential crisis. In fact, this is quite a critical situation for an individual for deciding his origins in addition to his individuality. Geetha Hariharan, as a modern author, handles the predicament of the crisis of individuality or mission for identity in her narratives. Through the introduction of the roles of Mala, Bala, Yasmin and Sara, the readers are taken on a journey of diverse cohorts by Hariharan along with making them perceive the altering circumstances which have been occurring throughout the civilization. These days, each person goes through a lot of suffering for declaring his eccentricity in this aggressive society. The modern works mainly the literature dealing with noticeably emotive subjects evidently replicates the persistent complaint of the contemporary man. Seeking individuality is inborn in each person. So, seeking individuality is a representative and widespread theme in the writings of every era. Longing for individuality along with endeavouring for contentment is an ordinary predisposition intrinsic in each fellow of the humankind and consequently of collective importance and perpetual awareness. *Fugitive Histories* by Githa Hariharan handles the Indian individualities of religion along with queries regarding if an individual is able to be religious. The writer has carved some unforgettable parts such as Asad, a painter that passed away broken-hearted as he observed his corresponding residents murdering one another because of their religious beliefs. His wife, Mala, is among the significant part to play in the story that trusted the philosophy of humanitarianism and through distorting the religious on adrenal aspects existent within the civilization. Their daughter, Sara, seeking individuality, discovered her draw towards in assisting others, Yasmin in particular, who is an expatriate sufferer of the Gujarat uprisings. Hariharan personifies the sorrows of womenfolk through struggle as their frames are represented as battlefields. Mala wishes to create her individuality through fashioning a status for her own self. Detecting the circumstance of her grandma along with the tyrannical control of her grandfather, the roots of rebellion craftily seethe in the juvenile cognizance she carries out few transgressions that display a concealed revolt opposing the conventional as well as social limitations of the community. The pursuit of emotive communication with the

disposition may be viewed in the relationship of Mala to that with Asad. With this communication, she looks for relating her impulse for blossoming with the space of the male portion of her essence. Mala feels that "all the time she has a guilty sense that she is doing the wrong thing. She can feel the air of anticipation in the empty rooms, the sense that someone is waiting for her. She has to finish what she is doing so she can get back to him"(11).

Although Asad is a Muslim yet she chooses to wed him despite the oppositions of communal concords and the members of her household. Life of Mala faces a fresh alteration once she looks through Asad's final drawing book accidentally; she understands that Asad was attempting to reclaim his individuality. She recognizes the reason for Asad's pursuit of tranquillity in death. Because he was completely dissatisfied and brokenhearted, he was awaiting his own demise. When Mala comprehends the troubled psychological condition of Asad along with his need for death, she allows him to relish his everlasting slumber. She realizes that following his demise, Asad, wandering at liberty, will certainly discover everything which he was unable to discover in his life.

The mind of Githa Hariharan is quite imaginative using which she is geared up to create a hushed rebellion or alteration in the outlook of a woman of contemporary India. As English is her language of composition, her audience might have been restricted to the higher along with higher middle strata of erudite ladies, yet her participation in diverse assemblages, her mindful effort of questioning the prejudice of gender demonstrates that she is a woman of substance, a communally dedicated author along with being a proper resident having mindfulness regarding her privileges. Formerly the subject of the anguished women folk at society's hand has been deliberated suitable for authoring novels, yet presently the contemporary writers are making an attempt at raising few matters relating to politics along with the lady's contribution in these doings as well. As an example, during the arrest of Gandhiji in the Salt Satyagraha, where he was leader, the Satyagrahis were headed by Sarojini Naidu. Therefore, an Indian woman's momentous part to her individual capability certainly delivers an alternative auxiliary structure. A successful attempt has also been made by Hariharan to contribute in this field via her writings.

VI

Githa Hariharan made an attempt to analyze the Indian social structure with the help of a family on the basis of multiple theories in Fugitive

Histories. Her novel attempts to focus mythical aspects and actual things and elaborates a fresh social structure depending upon human morals of harmony and peace. So, such arguments are helpful in understanding the fantasy and actual picture in the novel *Fugitive Histories* portrays. In her explanation for Hindu nationalism, Githa Hariharan intended to safeguard female rights and authorities by means of 'Fugitive Histories'. This is her exclusive innovation where she attempted to build a fresh socio-cultural harmony in the modern contemporary Indian context. Her objective is the emancipation of women of India from the shackles of orthodox cultural norms in the name of social tradition. She wants to introduce a novel valued cultural structure which is rational and practical for emancipating women. A struggling condition is present in the community groups which are prominent in the social communication of these characters; however, Githa Hariharan has made an attempt to build a synthesis of these groups. Studying these characters presents that Githa Hariharan's effort was to highlight various dimensions of the modern socio-cultural scenario of India. Her idea about society is appropriate and she wanted to represent actual social scene by means of her characters of the novel. Indian society has different ingredients and components like family and relatives, marital bonds and different occasions as well as festivals and these are well-documented in her novel.

All her protagonists and antagonists showcase serious class conflicts and class warfare. The character named Asad challenges the preconceived notion of society and faces the ultimate fate, the death.

The protagonists of *Fugitive Histories* recommend the aforementioned fate in an accurate manner. Two characters from two communities of Hindu and Muslim, 'Sara' and 'Asad' respectively portray their lives. All the dialogues of this novel reciprocate and signify the idea of feminism organically. During writing her craft in this novel, the writer has protection her advanced liberal ideologies apart from propagating her objective. The representation of such socio-political aspects symbolically speaks of its importance in modern Indian society. Therefore, all the characters of this novel are true to their respective features and are real and liberal. They utter the author's own progressive and feminist ideology. The characters are intricate and have complicated aspects to suit the context of the fiction. When people's thinking and idea about a person or a community transform positively or progressively, then only true social transformation can happen.

The 'Fugitive Histories' strikes many chords. Among the characters of the novel, Mala who is Asad's wife is a vital one who is humanistic and is against the discrimination and divisional propaganda of the social system. Sara, another protagonist is a daughter who is in her way of exploring her true self. She believes in being others help and finds Yasmin, who have been displaced after the communal riots of Gujarat.

Githa Hariharan not just focuses on the misery of the Muslim minority during the riot; she portrays the women's distress during this time very minutely as well. She wants to disseminate peace and humanism through her fiction. With compelling narrative, intricate protagonists, stories and under plots, Githa Hariharan is successful in teaching the society a true, humanistic and liberal lesson. Moreover, it touches several other aspects tactfully. The novel, across the entire narrative, explores many complex dimensions of our society, questions the societal norms and complexities and effortlessly advances towards the solutions of such problems through creating a humanistic formula on the basis of Indian functionality of liberal, personalized feminism as suggested by the authors herself.

VII

Githa Hariharan represents different facets of relationships, especially the father-daughter through peaks and troughs. Her fictions can make the reader understand various complexities of this relationship. It's important to place a strong women character in order to fight against the dominant characters spreading across the well-known cultural scenario as well as for raising awareness in the society regarding women's misery. Apart from portraying the real picture of the society, these powerful and positive women characters are idols to nurture and cultivate consciousness and enthusiasm among women so that they can voice their opinions loudly. The women of today's society have been successful in all spheres.

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