CHAPTER IV

MOVING TOWARDS INDIVIDUATION

'Self' as an autonomous creation has been scrutinized by various critics. Critics like Derrida and Foucault relates its interaction with socio-cultural ramifications. Jung, however, treats the subject in the psychological light. He has viewed 'selfhood' in terms of individuation. He defines individuation as the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is, a separate, indivisible unity or whole. The psychological wholeness includes evaluation, organizational development and establishment of one's personality. In order to attain this, one has to make a balance of the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious and the unconscious do not make a whole if either of them is suppressed. Consciousness is built on reason and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given a chance to make its way. There is conflict and struggle between the conscious and unconscious which is also reflected in the course of human life. To attain the psychological wholeness or to realize the self, one has to pass through various stages. Various archetypes between an individual's reality and society hamper the movement. The ego, the shadow, the anima and animus (the male and female principles) have to be assimilated with the conscious for realization of true personality. A number of writers affirm that the individuation process is the conscious realization and integration of all the possibilities congenitally present in the individual. It shows that everyone can have his own direction, his mission, and it can make meaning to the lives of those people who suffer from the feeling that they are unable to come up to the collective norms and collective ideals.

While engaging in the process of individuation one has to face odds with both his own self assessment and with society's expectations for which one requires a certain strength and courage. Existentially this is associated with confusion, depression, loss of energy or serious reflection. It is never a pleasant experience. If one has the courage to face it, one can achieve success in the form of transformation as the true realization of 'self'. It happens so when the uniqueness of individual merges with the collective unconscious, whereas in Indian concept of self-realization, the individual merges completely with the absolute.

In the post modern age of high capitalism, the mystic and the irrational find it difficult to have its space. With the intervention of Western Academy in third world literature, the selfhood
is downgraded as primitive. However, it is ironic because selfhood exists in some other mysterious and ostracized corner. The suppression of self as primitive is the most atrocious intellectual suppression. Whether one deals with the meaning of ‘self’ ontologically or genealogically, it can better be understood in the social and cultural codifications of their own experiences and philosophy. These specific experiences are of paramount importance in analyzing the impediments on the way towards individuation. Writers like Githa Hariharan have given expression to this scenario in their works.

Be it any society, the third world or the western, the women are trapped in different realms of oppression. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders* criticizes western feminism for ignoring a cross-cultural feminist project that bestrides the two different worlds and becomes a forceful site for different forms and realms of oppression on women. She not only speaks of the oppression but also manifests historical complexities and the struggles to change the oppression. This chapter examines *Fugitive Histories* to reach the fundamentals of self seeking to find roots of balance and equilibrium. Githa Hariharan’s female protagonists like Mala, Bala, Sara and Yasmin struggle and progress in their quest for self as they try to make a balance with their conscious and unconscious. The novel describes the life of Mala, Sara, Bala, Yasmin and other women who suffer due to Godhra riots. Githa Hariharan deals with this social event very effectively and encapsulates the soul and the spirit in *Fugitive Histories*. The writer has portrayed the terrifying face of riots by recollecting the traumatic and agonizing memories of victims, especially women. With the introduction of complex characters, Hariharan has woven a tale of contemporary society in India. The women in this novel are significant in terms of the theme of the novel. Their very presence enhances the meaning of the novel in its own peculiar way. Hariharan in this novel not only makes the reader aware of the gender exploitation but also pierces through the complex situations in the society that lead to mayhem on such a larger scale. The self knowledge and the moving towards individuation is a long journey that can be charted at specific stages. Bala is the character who comes in the trap of unconscious due to existential anguish and suffering. The other three Mala, Sara and Yasmin struggle to accommodate but do not let themselves fall in the trap of unconscious. It has been convincingly written about this novel:

*Fugitive Histories* is a melancholy book. It is a narrative which works through images retrieved from memory. Mala’s artist husband, Asad Zaidi, is dead: the novel opens with
her eminiscences as she pulls out sketches and drawings from a trunk hitherto left untouched. Sifting through its contents, her mind moves back and forth into the landscape of the past into which the lives of her son, Samar and daughter Sara, are woven. The movement ebbs and flows as the focus of the narrative shifts from Mala’s memories to Sara and back again. From Mala’s crazed grandmother Bala to Asad’s broad-minded mother and from Sara’s adult friend Laila to Yasmin’s ammi; Hariharan reveals them all in broad brush strokes, keeping Asad’s paintings as the backdrop to create links for the reader and “themes” for the creative mind.1

Mala, a Hindu Brahmin woman, marries Asad, a Muslim, even after a strong disapproval of her parents. Though her parents use admonishing words, ‘You’re killing us! You’ll marry this man, this foreigner, and you’ll be lost to us, you’ll kill us!’2 she does not give up the idea of marrying Asad. Mala and Asad defy social conventions for love and optimism. They crave for true freedom throughout their life. Their daughter Sara and Samar are confused to seek their identity and are the sufferers of the same Hindu-Muslim dilemma. In the beginning of the novel, Mala is a widow. All that is left of Asad are his sketchbooks which are explained to us through the eyes of Mala. Asad, an artist, leaves the stage when he sees that his ideals of life are destroyed in Godhra riots. Utpal Borpujari writes:

For Hariharan, the juxtaposition of various characters, times and spaces has been as important it was “In Times of Siege”. The multiple and deftly interwoven narrative in the novel, which is set primarily in the aftermath of the 2002 Post Godhra riots in Gujrat, takes a look at how such incidents not only change histories but also alter lives of ordinary people so much that they sometimes become unrecognizable to themselves.3

From the very childhood Mala wants to do something different from being ‘she’. She wants to enlarge the small space in which she is confined. She wants to be something different. But in her heart of hearts, she does not want to be a failure as she feels that the incompetency to perform well lead to failure.

Being her seemed to mean being inept, her fear of failure making her taste failure even before she had actually failed. Failure tasted like a chalky peanut, or an overripe orange that spurted rotten sour juice into her mouth (p. 14).

This clearly indicates Mala’s first step to attain self, her need to get her identity as ‘what she really wanted was to be someone else’ (p. 15). It can be said in view of this that the childhood experiences are very important in every one’s life. They remain in the consciousness that appears and reappears in the individual’s peculiar moments. If the person is fully or partially under the
control of this unusual mental process he is subject to neurosis or hysteria according to the force of the experiences that is inside the mind.

Bala is Mala’s grandmother. She is hysteric and branded crazy by her despotic husband. Mala realizes that being different does not suggest to be Bala though both are close to each other. Bala loves Mala and identifies herself with her. But the way Bala is treated in the family, Mala is scared to be like Bala. Her insecurities due to the condition of Bala take refuge into hiding her real emotions from the family.

Bala, Mala. Mala knew how dangerously close the two words were, glued together with rhyme. She had secretly tested the strength of her M, writing one line of it after another, more offhanded as she went down the page, to see if a carelessly written M could keel over to its right side and become a 3 made of two humps. Then it would only need a line to make it a B (p. 19).

Jung says that it is dangerous to suppress the unconscious as it can result in neurosis which seems to be gripping the psyche of Bala. Everyone is alone in this world. No one has the time for other’s grievances. To solve the problems one has to be in consonance with one’s own consciousness. Mala is an observer. Initially she accepts the secondary position in the home. She is ruled by the dictates of others in the family. Her world is defined by others, by her parents and society. But she is well aware of her role in the family and she embarks on the search of her ‘self’. She is a social visionary with a keen observance into the society and the position of women in it. Even as a child she is quite conscious of observing the conflicts that are lying inside and she feels the same are present in Bala. After getting punishment from her mother in childhood Mala feels:

Mala was the only one who remembered both the sadness and the tears, because she was the only one who knew about her life sentence. Or maybe she was not the only one. There were some moments when at least one other person saw the strangeness and the horror of having to be yourself, while the rest of the world was someone else. Or so it seemed especially when Bala gave Mala a shrewd wink as if they shared an unspoken secret (p. 18).

Mala wants to make her identity by creating a place for herself. Observing the condition of her grandmother and the despotic rule of her grandfather, the seeds of revolt slyly simmer in her child mind. She does some misdemeanors which show a hidden rebellion against the traditional and cultural boundaries of the society. A woman is considered inferior because of her biological
make-up. Her menstruation event is again considered to be a reason for impurity. She is not allowed to visit the sacred places and is forbidden to participate in the religious rituals. Mala seeks enjoyment by breaking the rules of the society symbolized by her grandfather as if she is furtively taking revenge for the maltreatment done to her grandmother.

In the first few days, the only high point is the childish thrill Mala gets from going to the temple with her grandfather while she has her periods. If only she could make Bala understand how she, timid little Mala, has gone where Bala couldn’t, and polluted the temple the old man thinks he owns! (P. 67).

The quest for emotional interaction with the animus can be seen in Mala’s relation with Asad. Through this interaction she seeks to relate to her urge to blossom with the accommodation of male part of her psyche. So Asad is Muslim and she decides to marry him against the social conventions and her family members. She enters a culture that is quite different from her culture. It is the culture where she tastes meat for the first time in a samosa and where other ladies wear burqa. Hariharan describes the socio-cultural environment of both the religions with dexterity while explaining the functions held in their homes as well as the attitudes of the families towards marriage in different communities. Asad calls marriage ‘one more womb colonized’ (p. 70) especially when a Hindu and Muslim fall in love.

The family invites Mala after marriage leaving Asad behind. When Bala is on death bed, Asad also visits the family. He is described as ‘Asad, the barbarian’ (p. 76) by the family. She feels twinge in heart when she notices:

The cook has been instructed to serve Asad’s food on a white enamel plate, not the usual stainless steel ones. Mala recognizes this plate instantly. It’s an old friend–or enemy; it’s the plate reserved for any woman in the household who has to eat alone because she has periods. The plate is almost basin-shaped; it has always reminded Mala of the kind of plate people used to feed their pet dogs. (p. 76)

Hariharan successfully pictures the gulf between the communities by analyzing the social trends and conditions. These explanations tend to form a bond between the society and literature and depict the fears, hopes, passions, prejudices, emotions, beliefs and thoughts of the people living in a particular society.

Hariharan says she spent a lot of time on research but consciously decided not to let the riots override everything else about Gujrat. “It is the relation between Mala and Asad that is the focus of the novel, says Hariharan.”
Mala writes to Asad about her boredom in the village. Asad inspires her to enjoy the village life by observing fields, open sky and the people working in the fields. Her inspiration evokes in Mala a surprise feeling as everything is seen by her in a new way so that it can be explained to Asad. It is the result of her animus breaking through egotism. It is the effulgence of the self where the complexes dissociate to show bare the beauty of psychological assimilation.

From the viewpoint of emergence of selfhood, Mala takes a conscious decision of marrying Asad which is not without problems. She undergoes a strong disapproval from her parents and the society in order to have ‘a quiet and peaceful life’ (p. 81). She refuses to give in and becomes more acutely aware of what she wants. She is prepared to face the consequences of her choice. Sharing her feelings with her friends Seema and Ravi, she snaps at Ravi that they are not marrying ‘for national integration’ (p. 71). She wants to marry Asad because she loves him and is quite aware of the implications of this marriage. She makes her own choices not only in relation to Asad but also the rest of the characters in the novel. She is clear-sighted and knows the socio-cultural inferences of taking the step of marrying in a different community.

*Fugitive Histories* shows a time when only a few people allow themselves to cross the border and terrorize the whole city and they do all this in the name of religion. Their unconscious mind under such conditions is insane. For such conditions not much is needed. Only a strong emotion is enough to reverse the relation between the ego and the consciousness. It leads to the destruction of communities. Hariharan makes a conscious attempt to make the reader view the Godhra carnage through its women. She probes culturally sensitive topics such as rape and its psychological and social effects on the victim as well as on those who witness the incidents. Asad, being an artist, is overwhelmed by the circumstances. The imaginative sympathy of the artist makes Asad one with the oppressed.

After his death, Mala tries to rediscover the man with whom she has spent her life through his sketches. The restless artistic soul is vivid in the sketches by Asad which Mala acknowledges after his death. She also tries to discover the meaning of self. While describing a story to Sara and Samar, Mala says:

That’s how the ant not only shows what she can do, but also makes them all part of a living chain, so they change from creatures indifferent to other people’s stories to creatures changed by other people’s stories. That’s the way Samar and Sara also saw it
once, a game in which everyone is linked. What happens to one also 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 (p. 13).

The Godhra carnage has broken the dream of Asad. He is so grief-stricken that he finds himself unable to get by with the life. While talking about his grandfather, he says:

A stern fellow, I suppose. There is an old photo of him somewhere in this house, he looks exactly as a mulla should. Sharp eyes in a frowning face, looking for something to disapprove (p. 79).

Asad has disaffiliated himself from his roots, relationships for the sake of achieving idealism. He gives in as the very base of his principles has traumatized. He leaves the world with a pain in his heart. On the other hand, he is also set up as a wisdom figure:

Is Asad’s dream also gone? The dream that made him say you didn’t have to worry about whether you were Indian Muslim or Muslim Indian, or part Hindu, or atheist by default, it was enough just to be you? (p. 102).

Mala, knowing the reality, suffers but does not give in. She has the ability to face the odds of life. The children leave the home to make a space for them in the world. She tries to get on with her life. The writer writes: “Not long after the children left, Mala decided to prove to herself what she had told them: Go back to your work, I can manage. Get on with your lives” (p. 3). Asad, though dead is a presence in her: “Free to look, the way Asad knew how to look” (p. 61). She wants to explore the real meaning of life. She is now without Asad and also without the twin that her grandmother once told her about as dead. She muses: “He was her other self; or she was his. They were going to learn to breathe in the world outside at almost the same instant, then proceed to battle its mysteries side by side” (p. 29). It was the part of her as Bala says ‘You came together. That’s why he helps you to see’ (p. 24). She realizes that she has to struggle for her identity as ‘everyone is born alone, even someone who has a twin (p. 29). The realization of this other part ‘that’s missing’ (p. 23) and as Bala says ‘once you’ve found him, you’ll never lose yourself” (p. 23) is the step towards individuation in Mala’s life.

Mala shows the courage to face the society but her own son is ‘tired of being different’ (p. 205) and wants to live in a more ‘organized way’ (p. 205). He is craving for his identity as he
is a sufferer of the belonging to different communities. Asad's idealistic dream shatters to see Samar's dilemma who is now trying to resurrect 'his comatose muslim half' (p. 205).

All said and done, you can continue to be what you are. What you have chosen to be, an ex-south Indian Brahmin. Don't you see, there's no room for an ex-muslim any more. Whatever I am, whatever I believe and however I live, I am an M. Samar too is just another Muslim, a potential terrorist (p. 206)

By describing different characters Githa Hariharan expresses the anguish underlying in the heart of the people who try to change the world with their idealistic dreams. Asad's grandfather and Mala's grandfather are both alike-despots. Mala remembers an incident that gives peep into the male consciousness:

You read English books,' he says. Mala can smell his disdain; it smells of the puja room, male sweat and something else, possibly the smell of pleasure. 'You're still a skinny stick, you have no breasts, and you read poetry?'

She looks at his arm. It's a dark pole with bristling grey hair. She picks out one patch, magnifies it till she can see the pores at the roots of the hair. The pores open their mouths.

'Look at me,' he barks. 'Tell me where this comes from, it should be easy for you.' His eyes glow. They hold her in a locked, intimate space. 'To sigh a thankful prayer amid the glee, That hailed the Despot's fall, and peace and liberty! He loves the word despot as he recites the line. He lengthens the s in it so it makes the saliva peep out of the sides of his mouth (p.82-83).

Mala reflects how such incidents not only change the outer scenario but also the inner landscape of the mind of the individuals who undergo the bitter experiences and also its effects on their relations. After Asad's death, while watching his sketchbooks, Mala hears Asad's voice: "Can we do nothing but record the desecration of human faces? Where is the change we've been waiting for all our lives?" (p. 206). She regrets if she 'could have convinced Asad of how useful, how sane this platitude can be, he might be survived' (p. 207).

The thought of grandchild makes Mala's eyes moist. Her experience makes her feel the fatigue that comes with intimacy. 'To do it again, to do the battle for a mind once again: it's too much' (p. 236). She has waved through the labyrinth of relationships, the experiences of joy, anger, suffering, confusions. To do it again seems not a cup of tea for her. She no longer thinks over it. Musing over the answer that she has given to Asad regarding the shattering of their ideal, she decides that 'she will keep the faith' (p. 237) and 'May ideal get dented, bent, even broken.
Just like any ageing body. And if it can’t be mended, it will be born again. It’ll be born in someone else, maybe somewhere else’ (p. 237).

Mala’s realization that every individual is an isolated being on this earth but must continue to believe in the possibility of social relations as well as in her/his belief rings the note of optimism. The process of individuation is achieved with the feeling of oneness and realizing the self. Mala, after undergoing confrontation with the world outside, tries to find out the real meaning of self. The painting of a happy balancing couple drawn earlier by Asad and the drawing of a man hanging upside down from an iron hook screaming in either anguish or joy, makes her realize that ‘this drawing is no longer paperbound. It’s in her (p. 238).

Mala comes out of the flat and sees Mr. Trivedi who is not able to unlock his scooter garage as in the right hand he is holding a paper packet containing prasad from his evening visit to the temple. She has noticed how regularly Mr. Trivedi visits temple bearing tilak on his forehead. She offers her help to unlock the door but:

The man is so startled he almost drops the packet. Her offer to help also seems to have deprived him of speech. All he can do is shake his head. He turns the key again, almost in panic; it works. He waits for Mala to move away before he opens the door and escapes to the safety of the dark little chamber. Mala can hear him ring the puja bell as she walks away. The bell sounds shrill, as if it’s calling for help (p.239).

Traditional religion is being satirized through this incident. People do not get enough time to communicate each other as man has reduced himself to a machine only. Erich Fromm on humanistic devotion writes:

Modern man has transformed himself into a commodity; he experiences his life energy as an investment with which he should make the highest profit, considering his position and the situation on the personality market. He is alienated from himself, from his fellow men and from nature. His main aim is profitable exchange of his skills, knowledge, and of himself, his “personality package” with others who are equally intent on a fair and profitable exchange. Life has no goal except the one to move, no principle except the one of fair exchange, no satisfaction except the one to consume. What can the concept of God mean under these circumstances? It is transformed from its original meaning into one fitting the alienated culture of success. In the religious revival of recent times, the belief in God has been transformed into a psychological device to make one better fitted for the competitive struggle. In the hope of a better world, Mala feels that though she has not been able to visit a temple, every thing she is doing now feels almost like a prayer. She feels pleasure and contentment in this
One of these trees is a mango tree, but to Mala's surprise it has small purple blossoms sprinkled on its body. Mala looks at the tree more carefully, almost laughs when she sees how easily she was fooled. It's only bougainvillea that's draped itself on and around the tree. The flowering creeper has cunningly colonized the tree and is now pretending it is the tree (p. 240).

These descriptions given by the writer are to be viewed as the description of one's own self. Individuation leads to self-awareness. While living in the outer world of ego and whims, one feels that this world of consciousness is the whole reality and does not realize that we call unconscious nothing and in fact it is the whole reality in potential. The unconscious is the mother of the conscious but we remain ignorant about the fact. Cogitating over life one feels that all the paraphernalia of thoughts that one carries throughout life is in reality nothing but to understand the real meaning of self. The circumstances, the environments, the socio-cultural conditions may be different but still there is likeness of objective.

Hariharan also throws light on the character of Bala who is Mala's grandmother. The generation gap as well as the change in attitudes of women towards life is apparent while studying these characters. Though one has somehow spent her life in the grasp of the socio-cultural codifications, the other tries to flout these conventions after observing the ill effects of these bindings on her grandmother. The dissatisfaction with her role of submissive wife makes her life chaotic. Bala is declared hysterical and crazy by her despotic husband as she is a 'thinking woman' who is not accepted to a 'feeling less' husband. She has lived her life in submission to the male dominance of her village life. She lives in the 'prison conditions' (p. 15) laid down by her bully husband who is only 'sometimes human' (p. 15). She was hardly twelve when she got married. Under the rule of her despotic husband, she has suppressed her desire and things have moved from order to disorder, from normalcy to neurosis. The patriarchal domination was made explicit in the following lines:

Bala was barely twelve when she came to the house, a week after she began menstruating. Her husband was only five years older, but already he had firm ideas on who fit where in his household and his life. It didn't take long for him to decide that this childish, flat-chested, chattering girl was not the bride he deserved. But still she was his; he had to make the rules, she had to follow them. Bala was never allowed to step out of his house, not even to visit her parents. She belonged to the house (p. 15).
Smitten with pangs of isolation in matrimonial domination, Bala undergoes a split in her personality. This fearful environment in which she lives not only shuts her out from the outside world but also isolates her from her roots. A woman who always propels her man to achieve great heights, realizes that she is not even allowed to go upstairs because of the fear of strangers or to protect her from the hungry eyes of monsters or because he himself is ‘afraid of heights’ (p. 21). It is the fear in the mind of man that has chained the feet of woman. It is his fear of insecurity that needs the proof of a woman’s chastity. Bala is not allowed to do what she wants and is treated no better than animals.

When Bala goes upstairs to comb her ‘untangling knots’ (p. 21), the ‘enraged disbelief’ (p. 21) of her husband locks her in the store room as it is ‘the best place for her to learn how to be a respectable woman’ (p. 22). A woman is expected to put aside her individuality in marriage. One finds so many examples in history when women were locked up and beaten. Violence against women is endemic in India because of lack of education and societal mindset about women. Violence is perpetrated on women both inside and outside her home. Bala is never allowed to go out. She goes within. One can easily assess the abiding conflict between the restrictive social norms and articulated yearning to achieve selfhood in Bala. The inner landscape of her mind is explored remarkably by Hariharan.

The relationship between a grandmother and a granddaughter is another pair that is explored in the character of Bala and Mala. She says to Mala: “No one in this house knows him, but he’s part of you that’s missing. Once you’ve found him, you’ll never lose yourself” (p. 23). When she sees Asad, she at once approves of him and hints naughtily that he is the long-lost part of her self. The experiences of Bala never let Mala imagine everything at ease. The half that can make Bala whole has in reality reduced her to half. She feels terrified to imagine the life that Bala has led.

Asad too connects with Bala easily and makes a sketch of the ‘beloved lunatic’ (p. 24), without a piece of jewelry on her that makes her the wife of the ‘bastard boss’ (p. 25), the title that she used to denote her husband. M. Rajeshwar speaks about the condition of women:

In the rigidly-formed and tradition-bound societies like India the repression one has to put up with is usually very severe and the resultant suffering often assumes pathetic proportions for sensitive individuals. Among Indians again the women happen to be the
worst sufferers as the social norms and moral codes have been so framed as to be particularly disadvantageous to them. This is perhaps why the Indian English women novelists encouraged to a certain extent by their historical and cultural context, consistently treated the neurotic phenomenon in their fictional works, thus without any express intention aired the secret wishes of the vast majority of Indian women whose lot it has been to silently suffer repression for ages at the hands of the establishment.

Married at the age of twelve, under the rule of despotic boss, the suppression of Bala’s desires is fatal to the growth of the personality and self-fulfillment. *Fugitive Histories* not only describes the Godhra carnage but also the lives of those women who become fugitive in their own families. Bala is a fugitive as she is forced to escape from her own consciousness to the unconscious and is, therefore, under the trap of hysteria.

Bala fails to enjoy her life while her husband is alive and when he dies, the society comes to take his position. Her head has been shaved. The misdemeanors of cutting her hair that she used to enjoy when he was alive, reveals the twinge of her heart. She used to hide anything sharp edged so that to show revolt to the ‘cruelty rooted deep in her husband’s gravelly voice’ (p. 25). In a frenzied state of mind, she sometimes proves to be self-destructive. Hariharan gives a tear-jerking incident throwing light on the suppressed rebellion as:

That day, when everyone woke from their afternoon naps, ready for the business of making tiffin, eating it, then emerging into the evening social life of the village, there was uproar. The children ran immediately to the place of action, the threshold of the storeroom where Bala had locked herself in. She had spent the afternoon cutting, chopping, practically scraping parts of her scalp. But when she finally opened the door for them and was led out, whisked up the stairs to be made decent, she was completely calm. She gave up the scissors meekly as if she didn’t have a desire left in the world (p. 26).

Hariharan presents an account of hysterical sufferings of a woman protagonist. The novel presents a fine psychoanalytical expression of her inner self. Bala’s hidden desires and qualities are not allowed to develop freely. The vent of her emotions can be seen in the misdemeanors which she does slyly. After cutting her hair off, she makes a nest of those to be set in the backyard. Hariharan writes:

Mala had asked her once if she thought a bird or a squirrel would make use of the hair-nest. ‘My hair falls down to my thighs,’ said Bala. She looked so reasonable stating this simple fact. ‘But what’s the use if it has to hide in a tight bun? Bala looked at the nest with a fierce longing. ‘May be you’re right,’ she said, taking Mala’s hand and kissing it. Maybe a baby bird will be born here and it will learn to fly (p. 25).
Bala unconsciously gives way to her emotions through Mala. Her persona has never been given the atmosphere to be bloomed. Rather she is branded despotic and her desires are suppressed. She wants her desires to be fulfilled through her granddaughter. Learning from the experiences of Bala, Mala may learn to fly in her life. She may be able to carve her own sky. Bala is the only member of the family who has not offered any reaction to Mala’s marriage as she has attained that height of understanding. Mala can imagine Bala saying ‘your Asad can really look’ (p. 69). When she tells Bala about Asad, Bala listens to everything very carefully and seriously but another moment her eyes fill with fear saying,

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.’ Mala tries to reassure her that that there’s to be no running away, no being found out. But it’s too much for her grandmother; for now Mala has to be satisfied with coaxing her into being the old Bala again (pp. 67-68).

Bala feels afraid that her granddaughter may not suffer the same destiny that she has faced. Mala has to do efforts to coax her into being the old Bala again. The conscious and unconscious do not make a whole if one of them is suppressed. One finds certain insane ideas which are not the contents of the conscious mind as they are deprived of consciousness, like something forgotten, repressed or habitually neglected and, therefore, the unconscious takes the role of the ego. The result of this exchange is chaos and destruction. Fears which are deeply rooted in Bala’s mind keeps on haunting her time and again and whenever she is alone, she gets afraid of the incident itched deeply on the plate of her mind. These fears are so intense that while talking to someone else, if any reference of these fears comes or anything related to her life surfaces the mind, she gets disturbed. This also shows her love and concern for her granddaughter. Her mind seeks liberty to sow her indignation, grief, resentment and anger. She has no inhibitions in expressing what she feels and how she lives. Mala remembers:

Sometimes Bala did it out of spite. Sometimes it was a lucky accident that made chaos around her, just like what was in her mind. You could see her gloat then: Now see what it’s like living where I live! (p. 27).

Bala feels that things ‘will never change no matter what’ (p. 17) whereas Mala is progressive and feels ‘dizzy with the sameness of it all’ (p. 17). Mala wants to be different but finds:

The thought makes her a little sick, because she knows she can never be someone else. All her life she has to be Mala, all the days till the day she dies. And in between, home
will be like this big room, the people in it her family. When she grows up she will be one of them. (p. 17)

Bala ‘rattling bag of bones’ (p. 75) has transformed into ‘a barbarian’ (p. 75) for the people. Her suppressed desires overcome while dying. She is able to say and do what she wants because no one can stop her from leaving the house. She is bedridden but is powerful in a way she never is in living. No one can stop her ‘from screaming as many swear words as she can invent’ (p. 76).

Asad recognizes Bala’s goodness by presenting a ‘fragrant champak flower’ which she accepts with shyness or ‘by covering her face with her hands and peeping flirtatiously through the gaps between gnarled fingers’ (p. 76). Remembering the hostilities done by her husband which are deeply ingrained in her mind, makes Bala identify herself with Mala as she feels both of them. At the time of the departure of Mala and Asad, She says: “‘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” (p. 76). On hearing this Mala easily understands the trauma that Bala is passing through. She, too, identifies herself with Bala and the expression of her emotions gives way to her feelings through her tears. By making ‘the curtain of language swung aside’ (p. 209) Bala makes Asad understand her feelings for Mala and seeks for her ultimate departure in her own ‘Bala-style’ (p. 77).

No one is there to take care of old Bala as ‘even the modest-income family members are resisting the bribes they’re being offered to take care of her’(p. 75) due to the abuse that she screamed that could ‘keep a team of linguists busy for the rest of their lives’(p. 75). In these circumstances the visit of Muslim son-in-law is almost acceptable to the family. One can notice that for comfort an individual, a family or a society can fluctuate to the extent which is quite opposite to doctrines and traditions set by the orthodox society for centuries. This adjustment depends upon the volume of force behind the reason involved in the process. If an individual is weak and doing something which is contrary to the interest of the persons, who are sitting at the helm of affairs, he is suppressed and made to follow the lines set by these traditions. This can be seen in allowing Asad to adjust in the family of his in-laws when the question of serving Bala arises.

Bala’s hysteria reminds us of the dark side of our society. The conflict and trauma become too difficult to bear for her that the part of her psyche refuses to submit to the repression.
Hariharan seems to suggest that these dark corners in the form of value systems should be revised to make life more acceptable to women.

Another character, Sara, the daughter of Mala and Asad, is a social worker. She is progressive and optimistic, 'a true child of hope' (p. 19). Sara and her brother Samar is a team of two facing the odds of the world. They are the children of the mixed parentage, for Mala is a Hindu and Asad, a Muslim. They crave for their own identity. Samar, however, is fed up of being different and finally decides to be a Muslim. He says: “Asad may have told us we’re not Muslim or Hindu, but the rest of the world only has to hear our last name. Anyway, I'm happy to be seen as a Muslim. I want to be one” (p. 99).

Man and woman are assigned different roles in a society as a well-defined gender division which is a deep-rooted cultural-conditioning. Patriarchal law is instilled in the very childhood during socialization. Identity formation is the result of social influences. In Freudian sense, an infant has no sense of self and its gender. The crisis comes when he (Freud speaks of the male here) comes to learn ‘that he must reject his mother and accept the authority of the father.’ Sara, too, realizes that her brother expects her to submit and also takes her submission for granted. Without being aware of it, she submits herself to his orders in the name of love as she feels ‘how difficult it is to have a brother, a person you can’t help loving and hating at the same time’ (p. 101). Samar is only eleven months older than Sara and always behaves as a ‘boy’. In the Muslim community where Samar in his very childhood realizes that he has to go to the other side of the hall with his uncle, leaving Sara and Mala behind, makes Sara believe that she always has ‘to receive further orders’ (p. 91) from her brother. Sara remembers:

Samar is eleven months older than Sara, and he has never let her forget that. When they were children, Sara would often wait for him in the balcony of whichever flat and city they were living in then. Samar liked to see Sara waiting for him. She had to be still and very patient, as if she was an inanimate thing till he ‘gave her life’. ‘Training her’, he said, showed that he took his role as an elder brother seriously (p. 90).

Though Sara knows that she has to ‘set herself free on her own’ (p. 93) and finds ‘it’s worth breaking the rules sometimes’ (p. 96) or she has found that it is an adjustment as she has never wanted conflict in her relations as:
Sara resists argument. If possible, she'd rather avoid any discussion with Samar that will turn into an argument. She knows he will always win their arguments, even when he is wrong, and she will then hate him for it. (p. 98)

However, Sara is encountered with a baffling question as to which religion, culture or place she belongs. Multiple identities and hyphenated existence make her puzzle about her real self and place. She feels that if she ever wants to change her last name dropping Zaidi adopting Vaidyanathan like her mother or the surname of her lover Shaw whose father is a Christian or to carry, all she thinks is:

She could carry as much baggage as possible, call herself Sara Vaidyanathan Zaidi Shaw. Anyway, it’s not as if she and Rajat Shaw are that serious about each other; at least she’s not, or not very often. And luckily he hasn’t spoken of marriage, so she hasn’t had to make any big decisions yet (p. 40).

Hariharan throws light on the fact that a girl has to change her surname and even her first name after her marriage. Though in some places it is not imposed but in most of the traditional societies it is a custom which has to be followed. A girl loses her identity, her individuality, her very being which is another proof of a step towards losing her ‘self’ when she gets married, and a custom which is found absent in case of boy. A boy does not get his name or surname changed when gets married. The modern world is going ahead lagging behind the important pillars of society like marriage. Hariharan throws light on the relationship of Sara and Rajat:

His lips brush the hollow of her throat. His hands help his lips check the nape of her neck, the curve of her breasts and their weight, the depth of her belly button, the texture of her pubic hair. He feels his way like a blind man reassuring himself that the landscape is still the same, there are no new landmarks to be learnt by feel, taste, smell (p. 54).

Sara is not much interested in marriage but likes her company ‘deeply restful’ (p. 49). She feels secure in her company rather ‘lets Rajat lead her as if she’s a child who may get lost if not watched every minute. The past in her mind, represented by the picture of her brother, has conditioned her to find a male partner to secure her but does not want her to be completely lost in the relationship. She is a liberated woman and so is Rajat, a liberated fellow.

The multiplicity of Sara’s circumstances projects several aspects of her personality which makes her unique in various ways. The mother instinct in Sara can be seen in her relation with Rajat:
Sara returns to the room, considers waking Rajat. He’s still fast asleep; his body, realizing the whole bed is available, has spread itself out. There’s nothing childlike about his naked body, given all the non-toxic stress-free pampering it gets, but Sara feels protective of him. Why do so many sleeping men look like they want their mothers? Sara mothers him with a light kiss on his hair, then looks for paper to write a note (p.89).

Sara is an independent girl, facing new challenges every day. Sara lives in Mumbai as a paying guest in a room that she shares with Nina. They both work in an NGO and also want to make documentaries no one has ever heard of. Sara writes the film scripts and also works at a documentary on Gujrat riots. Githa Hariharan says about Sara: “I visited Ahmedabad in 2004 spent a lot of time there. In a way what Sara feels and says is closely related to what I heard and saw. That grounding was important.” She is economically independent, writes film script and also does not want to leave the job. She is also aware of the competition in career in this modern society. Therefore, she does not want to take risk of losing the job. She is aware of the fact that ‘there are too many people in Mumbai forever putting their hands into their pockets like shifty peddlers, pulling out film scripts’ (p. 38). By introducing her character, the writer explores different faces of womanhood. To write a script on Godhra carnage, Nina reads the objective of the documentary to Sara as:

The documentary will tell the stories of some of these people in their own voices. What happened to them in 2002, what the state government did (or didn’t do) to rehabilitate them, and how these people are now trying to rebuild their lives (p. 42).

Sara accepts the challenge to ‘tie these diverse experiences together into a national movement’ (p44). However, the challenge does not seem to be so promising. But when she looks at the photographs of the victims of Gujrat riots, the call from her unconscious makes her sense that these people are waiting for her to ‘discover their silent thoughts’(p. 45), sufferings and to give words to them. Nina advises her to accompany her to Ahmedabad as she feels that there is something that is ‘keeping her from visiting the city for the first time’ (p. 46). Later on she decides to visit Ahmedabad to write a script on the Muslim families affected by the Gujrat riots. She is a woman who finds herself in different social environments and adapts herself to the new situation.

It is clearly sketched in Sara’s case that to find meaning in one’s life, one has to look beyond one’s own needs and desires and distinguish between the two. This drive gives the purpose in life that is bigger than one’s own needs. One can see Githa Hariharan’s observation of
human behavior which she presents with disarming simplicity. Her prowess as writer with adequate grip on her characters and situations is obvious from the way she has the power to keep the reader engrossed.

When Sara remembers her childhood she feels Asad presiding over the family. Asad is set up as a wisdom figure. He feels so concerned about their being happy that they ‘not only learnt to believe in happiness, they also discovered what it felt like to be happy’ (p. 47). After the death of her father, she seems to be endowed with inner strength which sustains her not only in the crises but also to fulfill the incomplete dream of her father. She, only after visiting Ahmedabad, comes to realize the reality that has broken her father.

Sara has lots of challenge to face. She has to face mounds of problems. She has to bridge the gap between her ‘self’ and the vast world. She has to identify the personal ‘I’ with the generalized ‘other’ and the influence of this ‘other’ which is society on ‘I’ that is her self. She feels the pain of the angry challenge that Asad gives which are also his last words to her. He says:

There’s a battle going on. A war. The enemy wants to tell people whether they Muslim or Hindu or Christian or something else, as if people no longer know themselves. Let’s see how you do in this new war (p. 100).

Asad is in pain due to break of his idealism, the dream of ‘just to be you’ (p. 102). His heart has broken and could not live more. Sara has inherited her values and idealism from conscientious father. She decides to go to Ahmedabad to hear the stories of the people who are broken by other people. She is in quest to explore the answers ‘that lie curled deep in this city’s core, or in herself’ (p. 107).

After visiting the city and looking the filthy conditions in which the broken families live, Sara feels that her writing is incapable of mentioning exactly what has actually happened to those people. She feels ‘If she reads it now, maybe it will help her particularize the general or generalize the particular’ (p. 114)). Mohanty while talking about feminism believes “in the importance of the particular in relation to the universal—a belief in the local as specifying and illuminating the universal.”9 The specifying stories of the victims bring home the universal stories of oppression on women. She is overwhelmed by the narratives of the victims as her father Asad is but unlike Asad, she finds a way to intervene in the devastated life of at least one
family. Her plan to write a script falls through when she realizes that she can’t become a mute observer staring the grief of the people around. As a woman, she can feel the bond with other women who are telling the stories of rape and violent attacks on them. She can extend an image all the way till it becomes a symbol- the pit becomes a hell hole, “It’s a pit full of black smoke, stinky smoke. It’s a pit full of corpses, the maimed dead. It’s a pit full of the maimed living” (p.157). Hariharan has depicted a lively picture of the deprived and dispossessed victims of Godhra riots. The unbearable conditions in which they live are described pathetically by the writer:

Anyone can see that real houses would not have half their insides spilling out, or the toilets outside in a row like a goods train, or garbage mounting and toppling over so it can get swallowed by the open mouth of the drain. The swampy drain itself runs down the middle of what should be the road, expect this road hasn’t had the time or the heart to become one. The houses look like they’ve been built by children or by crazy adults. Or by people desperate enough to hope that scraps of tarpaulin and canvas or sheets of plastic and filthy cloth will make a roof over their heads, and a few poles, bricks and stones, even some stray crates and old tyres, will keep this roof standing in place (p. 120-121)

When Sara comes back to Mumbai she finds herself unable to write. Both Sara and Nina are reduced to their recording machine as the ‘embryonic script’ (p. 161) is making its place in their mind. Women, who are the survivors of the carnage, tell the details for the documentary. Their words recreate the horror evident in riots. While describing, Zulekha, a female figure at Godhra, says:

Those girls were screaming, 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 (p. 160).

A heartwarming trend in women’s writing is that the writers are now dealing with these situations as an act of violence, born out of criminal exercise of power. The condition of rape victims is shown by Hariharan as seeking justice without any feeling of guilt and shame in them. Mohanty while telling the new directions for feminist methodologies speaks:

Conversely if we begin our analysis from, and limit it to, the space of privileged communities, our visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges. Beginning from the lives and interests of marginalized communities of women, I am able to access and make the workings of power visible- to read up the ladder of privilege. It is more necessary to look
upward-colonized peoples must know themselves and the colonizer. This particular marginalized location makes the politics of knowledge and the power investments that go along with it visible so that we can then engage in work to transform the use and abuse of power. 10

The stories of victims unveil the cruel face of our society. It narrates the social, cultural and political situation of the times. The violence has corroded the long cherished values of Indian society. Paradox can be analyzed in the way these victims describe their stories. "There is no end to the number of places in the world to hide. There’s no end to the number of unsafe hiding places" (p. 163). This slur on the name of society has been transformed into a powerful drama enacted not only in Gujarat but in the theaters of the mind and soul of the people throughout the nation. With the decline of moral values, one can see the break-up of human values. Sara can feel the similarity of her emotions in Yasmin’s tears. She feels pain in the voices of women who are leading their everyday lives, nursing their joys and sorrows unaware of the turbulent period that they had to face. She feels the dismal condition of the victims in words:

Cut and burnt, cut and burnt. It’s shorthand chant, a chant that echoes in Sara’s ears because it’s trapped there. But as often as she hears it, Sara knows the chant is leaving something out. There’s an empty space before and after, between the cutting and the burning. Maybe no one wants to fill up that awful space. Maybe that minute of space is too long, longer than any other minute, because that’s when a living person felt the breaking blow. Or the piercing stab. Or the burning lick of a tongue of fire (p. 163).

The role of police and government is quite disappointing. This reflects the adverse impact of power on human values. The administrative apathy makes the things worse. They treat them like orphans. The anger in the minds of people like Zulekha who wants to seek revenge makes Sara scared and also forces her to think the excess of any emotion. It is the anger in the minds of the people that can worsen the situation. The consequence of this violence is nothing but the aggravated emotion as well as the cold-blooded murder of thousands of innocents especially women and children:

It chills Sara, hearing what anger is turning into in this warm, stuffy room. It’s strange, this learning to hate. It swells you with a smoky poisonous gas till you’re bloated, you’re shapeless. You’re no longer a real person. Both the hated and the hater are no longer real people (p. 165).

The hope to live peacefully again is beating like heart in some others. Spirit of acceptance can become a source of strength in adversity. They are striving hard to learn a lesson of peace and
goodwill from the days gone by. It is better to live in peace than indulge in touchy issues. It is the need to live again which gives them new hope. Sara visits Sabarmati Ashram and remembers Gandhiji, the man ‘who found it possible to smile’ though everything around is full of chaos. Even Gandhiji returns to his home state to witness what it has become. Even he is sorry to see the animosity in the heart of mob. One can see the mob whose sole purpose is destruction. The writer describes:

*It’s a diverse crowd. It’s brought together doctors, goondas, housewives looking for god, policemen, real-estate agents in search of a killing, priests in search of new converts and ministers in search of votes. But they must have something in common. They have worked hard together; they have just finished with Nasreen’s dargah. They have just lit the matchstick in Zaika’s little neighbour’s mouth so he can burst like a firecracker. They have just shot Sabiyya’s sister as she was drying clothes in her courtyard. They have just finished gang-raping Zainab’s sister as her little son cried. They have just left Zulekha’s girls with stumps of woods in their vaginas. They have just given Abeda all those bodies to wash, some of them burnt, others split down the middle. They have just brought down the pipe on Naseem’s arm to leave a cucumber-sized mark. They have just burnt Noorjahen’s husband and father and son. They have just converted Mahrukh’s neighbour’s corpse with kerosene and cremated it (p. 175).*

A mob has no face but a collective decision to outrage, rampage and destruction. Whether one talks of Sikh riots in Delhi or the Godhra riots in Gujrat, the common feature remains the destruction only. The mob is not concerned about the peaceful co-existence or non-violence practiced by Gandhi. Sara hears the restless voices of hate as well as the ghost singing ‘Ishwar Allah tere naam, sabko sanmati de Bhagwan’ (p. 175). Though Gandhi’s ghost tries to make the mob teach that there is no enemy or defeat in his dictionary but Sara can feel the pain in the voice of ‘human ghost’ (p. 177). Hariharan has used the images of the pigeons and Gandhiji to prevail the message of peace.

Hariharan throws light on the question of identity through various characters. The most important characters who are in the clutches of the society to answer about their identity are Sara and Samar. While coming back by train, Sara is asked by a family about her native place. She feels lost. She feels that she has lost herself in the confusion of multiple identities. The writer says:

*Sara decides it’s best to be literal. ‘I don’t really know,’ she says. ‘I live in Mumbai, but I’ve lived in other Indian cities. I was born in Chennai, and my parents are from different parts of India. And my father’s family is Muslim, my mother’s family is Hindu (p. 179).*
In the past also when Sara was a school going child, she realized that by revealing her identity ‘a thin clear glass window slid into place between’ (p.179) her and her friends. After so many years, she finds herself on the same pedestal brooding over the same question ‘who she is?’ (p. 179). On being asked by Yasmin about her religion whether she is a Hindu or Muslim, Sara answers: ‘My grandmother was,’ says Sara. ‘I have Muslim relatives and Hindu relatives. I’m neither. Sometimes I think I’m an Indian. But most of the time I’m just Sara’ (p.167).

Yasmin finds it very difficult to imagine that she needs be nothing but Yasmin. Leaving aside all the identities, Sara feels that there is another more important category of being ‘a woman’ (p. 180) as she has to go to her home alone without any company or security. She feels:

The city’s abrasive body, made up of hairy arms, legs, itchy balls and other equally demanding bulges in between, welcome her home passionately, at the closest quarters possible. Such a welcome demands pressing hard against her buttocks in the packed bus; it means pinching, or grabbing, or brushing against her breasts, neck, arms, shoulders. It means Sara can agonize about this identity and that as if she’s living in an endless seminar, but really she’s nothing but a helping of creamy butter chicken, a titbit of female flesh (p.181).

By showing this feeling of insecurity in the mind of the modern independent woman like Sara, Haiharan proves that she is a keen observer of the present conditions existing in the society. After talking hours on the women empowerment, they are not still safe in the society. A number of examples in the society throw light on the dark spots of mind that still need improvement. Mala, too, has experienced the same throughout her life. She feels one with her daughter as she has fought with this dilemma of being a woman of multiple identities. She feels the misery of Sara’s confusion when she talks to her on phone as well as when they both meet:

Mala doesn’t ask for an explanation. They look at each other, mother and daughter. They feel an empty space open between them. They feel this despite the tug of the iron chain tying them together, holding them just a little too close (p. 183)

After going through the phase of confusion Sara manifests the newly achieved integration of warring tendencies in her psyche. While explaining this phase of confusion, the inner layers of her mind are laid bare by the writer. In the process of individuation, a balance is to be sought. A person who is in search of individuation finds such thoughts even in the dreams. When Sara visits Sabarmati Ashram she finds Gandhi’s ghost and later again she dreams of Asad and Gandhi. She realizes that away from the haters and the hated, she is now in the place where she
can feel proud. She says to Mala, ‘Yes, I’m beginning to realize how lucky I am. How glad I am that I’m a hybrid’ (p. 184). This suggests that her soul has been awakened and enlightened with the realization. She realizes that real happiness lies in helping others. She sends a good-luck card to Yasmin as well as decides to help her with the admission and fees. It is her unique manner of asserting her individuality. Her decision not to write the script is not her defeat; rather, her determination to help Yasmin is a positive step towards humanity. The theme of sisterhood between Sara and Yasmin is another aspect that hariharan brings forth. Sara realizes that in order to improve the world, individual steps are to be taken. Only by being a mute observer and writing scripts, which are of no use other than getting fame will not do. Though the path is difficult, but the training of the youth to be socially involved is a necessity. ‘She is her father’s daughter after all’ (p. 231) and she decides to make it true along with the newly acquired belief that all can be friends. She finally identifies herself with Yasmin.

The stories of other sufferers make Sara think who she is. Sara also experiences different moods of sea which also symbolizes the reflections of her own moods. Githa Hariharan throws light on this in the image of sea as:

But the sea is waiting for Sara like a patient mother. The kind who knows from experience that a child may turn cranky at the end of a long day, say things that are boastful or hurtful or simply untrue, throw a tantrum, turn her face away from her mother, deny the past they share. Or challenge past to catch up with her (p. 85).

Indian society stresses on individualism instead of collectivity under the garb of modernism. Earlier Indian society used to believe in collectivity which ultimately resulted in the collective growth of society and was able to protect the base and identity of the society. However, modernism or neo-liberalism is directly attacking and affecting the hinges of various values and traditions in the name of progress and all this is compelling the individual to live in isolation. This isolation is resulting in the so- called growth of the society compelling one to live under constant fear and psychological disorders leading to a rising number of suicides in the society. Be it the people living in rural areas or urban areas, both have lost their affinity to self and thus hinder the process of individuation. The past is to be stored and with this something new, if it is relevant, is to be welcomed and the remaining irrelevant must be smashed. Such a society can be progressive and liberal. On the other hand if a society does not allow the new to creep in and flourish, it would be cut off from the stream and stagger behind.
The images of the outside world are used to express the inner world. After Sara’s coming back from Ahmedabad, the sea makes her eyes water which shows how anguished her soul is after hearing the painful stories. Now she wants to be one with the sea. Then she finds out that she needs to know about its expanse.

But the sea is just like everything else, it’s worse than everyone else. It tells Sara that all she has to do is go down nine floors, climb the wall by the sea, jump down its side, hop from one sun-baked rock to another like an agile goat, and she’ll be there. She’ll be in the sea’s arms at last, not drowning but living. She’ll find out everything she needs to know about its expanse, its restless movement, its cleverness at grabbing her and holding her tight. Then she’ll never be afraid of seeing anything up close, or being part of it (p. 235).

In religious traditions around the globe the pathway of the soul after this life is initiated by the crossing of water. This sea which Sara looks at is nothing but the symbol of vastness present in the individual which is called a collection of various past impressions which one is carrying in the psyche. To swim across this sea is to reach the ultimate harmony. Sara wants to achieve peace and happiness. She has the ability to look within herself as she feels that by alleviating the sufferings of others she can find solace and peace for herself. So, in order to find peace in turmoil she extends her heart and offers to solve the problems of the victims.

Whenever there are riots, a woman is the worst sufferer. Women become the easy targets of charged fanatics and are brutally slaughtered in the name of religion. The horrendous atmosphere and conditions that prevail during the riots of Godhra are presented through the lives of various victims and Yasmin is one of them. She is a Muslim girl who, as a victim of riots, loses her brother and is struggling to make a position in the society. She is a survivor and fighter. Hariharan presents the forms of violence women experience in their different cultural and cross-cultural settings. She portrays the terrifying faces of violence by recalling the painful memories of that period through Yasmin. Yasmin has lost her brother and has to vacate the home like many other women who are the sufferers of the same situation and try to live somehow.

Yasmin is about sixteen to seventeen years of age having a thin, pointed and watchful face. Some NGO helps the family of Yasmin and other victims to establish in the area to sell the skirts they stitch and embroider. They do not get much but work hard day and night to establish themselves. When the riots started, Yasmin’s brother was in college and never returned thereafter. Her father had to sell the house in which they used to live so that they could move to
a safer area. Presently her sick father is trying to set up some business so that they can make both ends meet. Owing to the circumstances that have compelled the family to live in such filthy conditions, courageous Yasmin gives a ray of hope in the dark continent of pessimism. Compromising the conditions in which the families of Yasmin and Sultana live, they try to console each other in order to make the life move.

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 have a tap in the bathroom, we have 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 atleast 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 (p. 122).

Yasmin symbolizes thousands of women who are trying to learn to live after losing the male relatives of their family. Though all aspects of culture and society try to make her feel inferior, Yasmin is trying to find her niche professionally. She is in the last year of school and wants to go to college. She is a positive note of strength and resolution that lets her state:

She has to pass because her mother is working too hard and her father is getting sick too often. It doesn’t matter how much housework Yasmin does, they still have a hard time earning enough, sending her to school. If she passes, she can go to college, her mother has already agreed. Then maybe she can get a job (p. 116).

Yasmin tries to overcome the fear of ‘anything can happen’ (p. 116), and gathers courage to ‘do it all alone’ (p. 116). She always remains careful on her guard against men and also of fire that burns people and homes to ashes. Though her experiences are different from Sara, but whenever the question of the security of women comes, both suffer the same fate. If Sara suffers from the dilemma of multiple identities, Yasmin struggles to remain alive in the atmosphere of terror. All the time living in the same fearful conditions, Yasmin takes extra care to be safe and alive. The words ‘careful, alert, guarding against, taking care, anything can happen’ (p. 123) keep her distressing all the time. She feels:

“Most of all, being careful means choosing to live. There isn’t a moment in the day or night she can forget that, because then she may forget how to remain safe. Safe and alive (p. 123).
The colonial rule of the Britishers was put to an end and the Indians got freedom after years of slavery in 1947. People from all sects of society joined the freedom movement and uprooted the British rule but the partition created a gulf between Muslims and Non-Muslims. Love was converted into hate and communal frenzy arose out of the unfathomable abyss of human mind. The horrendous atmosphere did not allow the girls to go outside and get education. Even after more than half century of getting independence, girls still are not safe. To which religion or caste they belong to is another issue. Freedom of women as well as the freedom of human mind from the narrow walls of communalism go hand in hand in *Fugitive Histories*. Yasmin’s parents nurture her spirits rather than suppressing her. Her other relatives warn her parents not to send her to school rather they advice, ‘it’s better she helps you’ (p. 117). She wants to prove all those wrong who stop her from going out to get education. All this is conveyed by Hariharan through her role in the novel.

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, it’s better she goes to sewing class like Sultana, it’s better she helps you (p. 116-117).

Yasmin remembers her house in a clean street where there were no piles of garbage and is different from the dark house in which she now lives with her parents which ‘make them feel as safe as a hidden cave would’ (p. 118). Even the neem tree becomes a symbol of her house, “It’s the kind of tree that invites passers-by to sit under it, feel at home, say whatever they want to each other” (p.125). She has to shut her eyes so that she can go home in secrecy ‘because on the land she would have to cross a border that’s manned day and night’ (p. 127). Hariharan has given the title ‘Crossing Borders’ to Part Two of the novel. The border is not only on the land but the border has been created in the minds of the people. The writer has depicted the hatred, distrust, violence and suffering and their effect on human relations. The transformation of human relations abruptly and adversely is shown through the family of Yasmin and their neighbours. The important message they have got during adverse times is to leave the neighbourhood. To cross that border one has to rise above the man-made boundaries which Yasmin can achieve only by shutting her eyes, in her dreams where her house is not charred yet. Dreams that can travel, dreams that can make her imagine the most beautiful which is not present in reality. The real world is too harsh, difficult and unpleasant. The reality is that her Abba and Ammi cannot get the
missing son’s report registered in police station. Every morning, instead of going to the shop, her father sets out for the police station, full of hope to find his son, and gets back disappointed daily. The Corrupt government officials have arrested even the innocents for their own benefits. Britishers have left India centuries ago but our minds are still blocked up in the narrow walls of selfish reasons. Had we be free of these narrow walls, there would be no communal incidents of Godra riots. The bias, inherent in Indian society gets magnified many times over, when it comes to the functioning of the police force. Hariharan has explained these poisonous plants and their effect in a diverse manner. The callousness of police is thus described as:

For the two policemen on duty, it’s a game. The first policeman pretends he has never seen them before. He keeps Abba and Ammi standing there for ages while the second policeman dumps files on the chairs, raising dust. The second policeman grins. The mischief in his face is almost light-hearted as if he’s only trying to cheer them up; it’s just a little joke before they get down to business...The first policeman leans back in his chair and stares at Ammi as if she’s naked. As if she’s not wearing a sari, a burqa thrown over it so only her face and feet are visible. He lights a cigarette and blows the smoke into her uncovered face. But Ammi stands there like a statue he has to break if he wants to move it (p.133).

Human beings have been reduced to numbers in the callous atmosphere and have become only a ‘part of action and reaction’ (p. 135). They have been warned to quit their home. In the new place they have to adjust themselves. They have been treated as subjects and not as citizens. They cannot forget what has happened as it has become the part of their life. Yasmin describes the trauma thus:

Memories are what she remembers now and then, what makes her sad for a while when she remembers. But Akbar, the house, the shop, their lives- these can’t be memories because they are there with her, with them, all the time. They are part of them, they have become Ammi’s tight heart and Abba’s coughing lungs. And the long curving scar on Yasmin’s thigh that no one can see though she knows it’s there (p. 144).

Everything has changed including sleep since they crossed the new border. It is but natural that if one has to leave the surroundings under compulsions where he has spent almost half of the life, the life becomes unbearable. Moreover, the family has lost their son, their home and business. The painful memories do not give them respite. Yasmin feels emptiness, a vacuum in her life as she feels:
Something is missing; if it's not a body part, could it be her soul that's gone missing? It's terrifying, this sitting inside yourself and still losing yourself. No amount of thanking Allah for her luck sends away this terror (p. 144-145).

Yasmin has escaped rape somehow that day but the incident left a scar not only on her thigh but also on her soul. The suppression of this feeling brings revolt in her mind and places her on the verge of psychological stress. The colonial practices, feudal mind-sets and patriarchal modes of governance evoke an upsurge of protest in her mind. The people who stare her are not aware of the feelings trapped inside her, “It’s exhausting, this having to be careful; it’s even harder to learn than the board exam portion” (p.123). Sometimes this feeling made her insecure and at other times revolt. Hariharan describes it as:

But at other times she resists doing this- because she’s afraid that if she touches her dupatta, she may tear it off. And once she has done that, who knows what she may do next? She may undo the neat plait that hangs down her back. She may throw her school bag on the garbage by the side of the road. She may run like a bareheaded wild animal to the middle of the road, stop the traffic, and scream. Just thinking this, that such a thing can be done, makes her sweat. She holds her school bag close to her body, bends her head and walks home as fast as she can. But she can still hear her voice in her head, shouting out questions as if the people on the road are hiding the answers from her (p. 149).

Yasmin is a sensitive person caught in the web of uncertain values of society and culture. She tries to overcome the gulf of dividedness and separateness and also tries to relate her to the world to feel at home. She has such a rich sensibility, feeling and imagination. The upheavals in the life have made Yasmin so insecure that for a moment she does not want to dream again. She does not want to forget that she is alone in the place where ‘anything can happen’ (p. 136).

This temporary phase is soon triumphed over when Yasmin comes back to the classroom again where her only aim is to pass the school exams. The trauma and the experience that break her down the most is also the one that builds her up and encourages her to be something. Her identity is formed not only through the support of her near and dear ones but also through the ordeal that she has faced in her life. That trauma was the destruction of her existing self out of which she has constructed her new identity. Her identity is based upon the desires and perceptions of others. She wishes to recreate her self as her surrounding environment influences the formation of her identity. The devotional element in her is stronger as she says: “Teach me to be patient, Allah. The wall is getting higher, it’s getting harder and harder to see what’s on the other side” (p. 224). She symbolizes thousands of women, who are trying to learn to live after
losing the male supporters of their family. Though all aspects of culture and society try to make her feel inferior, Yasmin tries to find her niche professionally. Sara decides to help her in her studies by sponsoring her education. Urvashi Butalia writes about Hariharan:

Githa Hariharan’s writing has, over the years, come to inhabit a very distinct space: that of the creative writer responding to political events, which she makes no attempt to allegorise. Rather they are present in all their starkness, irony, and tragedy. Beginning with The Thousand Faces of Night and working her way through The Ghosts of Vasu Master and When Dreams Travel, Hariharan finally seems to have found the exact tone and language that she is at home in. The somewhat oblique irony and humour of the tale told in In Times of Siege transforms itself into the Spartan, elegant and nuanced prose of her latest work, Fugitive Histories.11

The novel displays panorama of forlorn and collective lives. The stories of other victims seek to unsettle perceived notions and force a rethinking of accepted social frameworks. Hariharan deals with the social issues but the core of her work comes through individual values that make social structure. She penetrates:

What do you call what happened here in 2002? Just communal violence, the bland, zipped-up phrase the government prefers? Or danga, riots? But it’s all too obvious these were not riots. Then there are those slightly desperate phrases journalists cooked up. Dance of death. Season of hate. Inferno of hate and horror. But we have to call it what it was, we have to use hard words even if they’re frightening. Pogrom. State-sponsored terror. Carnage. The Gujrat carnage (p.234).

Though the great changes cannot be placed at once, yet piece-meal changes can be the step towards great changes which can be beneficial for the society. Fugitive Histories is a step further in this direction.

Hariharan is in a leading role among other women writers who penetrate social issues. The wind that moves throughout the novel is the thin hope of survival. Mala survives with the sweet memories of Asad and her firm belief in life. Sara understands the idealism of her father and relives her father’s ideas by trying to support others. Yasmin tries to survive in this world by creating a space for her self with the help of Sara and her Ammi. Ammi works hard to help Yasmin so that she could get a job. Then there are all those victims, who belong to different age groups and trying to learn to live again, facing all the odds of life. Facing crisis of identity Mala lives with the Hindu-Muslim dilemma in marriage, Sara suffers mixed parentage. Sara has to
choose one identity from so many choices that come her way like her brother. Samar has chosen one identity, but she feels proud in her multiple identities and follows the path of humanity.

By introducing the characters of Bala, Mala and Sara and Yasmin, Hariharan takes the readers on a ride of different generations and make the readers notice the changing conditions that have been taking place in the society. Lives of Bala and Sara are quite different in the outer style but their internal journeys are alike. One is achieving the heights by talking to oneself and screaming all alone in the room, where she is kept captivated, while the other keeps herself busy writing the experiences of the Godhra riots and deciding to help others after meeting the victims. One experiences the pains and pangs of life through her own stings while the other feels it through the sores and anger of others. Mala keeps her belief in the idealism intact even after facing the hardships of society. Mala and Bala have firm faith that the sapling that they have planted will surely bear fruit one day. They face different impediments, hindrances and experiences in their journey towards individuation. All the cobwebs in the novel show that though the circumstances, processes and journeys are different, yet the ultimate experience is individuating with one’s self.
NOTES


(All further references in this chapter are to this book and they have been incorporated in the draft with page numbers).


10. Ibid, 231.