Fugitive Histories
Fugitive Histories is the novel by Githa Hariharan set in 2002 after the upheaval of Godhara riots. In this novel, Hariharan portrays the web of human relationships that joins people as much as it separates. All the main six characters of the book namely Mala, her daughter Sara, Yasmin (one of the victims of 2002 riots in Gujarat), Bala (Mala’s grandmother), Asad (Mala’s husband) and Samar (Mala’s son) face dilemma of identity in various ways. When the novel opens, Asad is dead. Mala wants to know what she is without Asad. She is a widow who has to come to terms with life without Asad and for this reason she has to know who he was and what happened to him. Sara, after her father’s (Asad) death, is not sure about staying at her job or going off to Ahmedabad to make a documentary film over the victims of Gujarat riots. She wants to know what it really means to be a half-Hindu and half-Muslim in modern India (Mala is Hindu and Asad Muslim). Yasmin, the riot ravaged teenager lost her brother Akbar and her home in 2002, only wants to be what she was before misfortune struck. Then there is Bala (Mala’s grandmother), who is an old hysterical lady. She has lived her life in submission to the patriarchal set up. She never went out of her house and therefore became an introvert. Readers meet Asad through his sketchbooks which reveal the reasons for his tumbling out of life. Idealist Asad, an intelligent artist, breaks in the face of Hindu-Muslim riots. Last but not the least, there is Samar, who very soon in life, realizes in his own ways that one must have a particular identity to rely upon as society demands belongingness to a particular religion or ideology.

The novel has three parts- 1). “Missing Persons”, 2). “Crossing Borders” and 3). “Funeral Rites” and it mainly revolves around three main cities- Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad, each city is represented by Mala, Sara and Yasmin respectively. The first part tells the reader about all the major characters and their lives. The second part reveals Sara’s meeting with Yasmin and other victims of the riots. In the third part of the novel
the three main characters Sara, Mala and Yasmin try to come to terms with life and eventually regain their lost identity.

When the novel opens up, the scene of action in the first part is Delhi, where the reader sees Mala’s empty home after her husband Asad’s death. Her children (Sara and Samar) are away and busy with their jobs. She keeps on remembering people and one finds her recalling her grandmother Bala quite often, who plays a major role in her identity formation and changes her outlook towards life. Bala makes her realize how life gives only sadness and tears if one does not take right decisions at right time. Bala is caught and trapped in her own home. She is the grandmother of Mala. She is suffering from hysteria. She got married at the age of twelve. Although her husband was only five years elder to her, but he had full command over the house as well as over Bala. The day Bala entered the house- she belonged only to the house, even more she belonged to her husband. She never stepped out of the house, not even to visit her parents’ place. She does not hold any identity of her own. She could not even go to the terrace. Early in her young age once Bala went to the terrace to get her hair dry, she felt very happy to see unknown streets, so many houses full of different people, a new life to live. But when she saw her husband down the street coming to the house, she immediately came down and locked herself in the store room. She knew that her husband considers store room to be the best place for a respectable woman.

Bala aptly identifies with existentialist philosophy when she starts alienating from everyone as she sees her life totally purposeless and full of despair. She feels isolated and behaves in a strange manner. This alienation aggravates her dilemma of identity. This only shows the miserable and helpless state of Bala. How Bala can think about identity when she does not have any right to move on freely even in her own house? Bala hardly interacts with the members of the house. She loves Mala the most in
the same way as she loves store room the most in the house. In one of the sketches of Asad, Mala sees her picture painted as a lunatic. This only makes clear to the readers that since the day she stepped in her husband’s house, she loses her mental balance.

Mala recalls how Bala used to cut her beautiful hair very often. She always keeps on searching for some sharp object so that she can cut her hair. No doubt, like every normal woman, Bala liked her long and loose hair very much but her husband wanted her to comb them properly to make a tight bun. Not only her hair but he also wanted her to hide her emotions as well. In short the portrayal of inner as well as outer beauty was prohibited to her. This cruelty is the main reason why Bala starts cutting her hair, making a nest of it and placing it in the backyard on a low-hanging branch. When Mala asks the reason, she replies that instead of combing them to make a tight bun, better cut and make a nest. She feels that one day a baby bird will sit in this nest and eventually will learn to fly.

Bala suffers all this silently as in Marcian terms she is in the stage of “identity diffusion” and is an example of stereotype woman. She does not have any type of choices in life and does not want to play even the un-chosen roles expected from her. Here, “the hair nest” is a symbol of Bala’s desire for freedom. She does not have any freedom in her life but she wants others to achieve it. She understands the value and worth of freedom. As she grows older, she does not let her hair stay on her head. One day she even scrapped parts of her scalp which indicates absence of every desire from her heart. Her loose hair signifies freedom. When she is not free, she feels no point in letting her hair stay on her head. After the death of her husband the readers see Bala with long rat tails, properly oiled and combed. Now there is no one to check her freedom, but ironically at this stage of life she does not need it. She has no place to go out. She stays indoors.
Like Mala, her father also understands Bala well. On many occasions when Mala’s mother gets irritated with Bala, he tells her how Bala’s life is full of miseries and hardships. He tells her that when she entered the house, she was a happy little girl but circumstances and her husband had not only changed her but also suppressed her.

Though Bala could do very little for herself but she wants Mala to break the norms of patriarchal set-up and live freely. When Mala decides to marry Asad, she comes to her village and tries to tell Bala everything. The old insane lady listens gravely as if it all makes complete sense to her. She advises Mala to run away. “Her eyes fill with fear. That one time I went away, he found me,” Bala says. “He brought me back, didn’t he?” She pushes Mala away. ‘Run’, she says. ‘Run’ before he catches you” (67).

Like the activists of “the first wave feminism” Bala does not want a woman to obey the rules and dictums of patriarchy unconditionally. She wants Mala to rebel. She wants her to do what she could not do during her life time. She is the only member of the family who does not react to Mala’s marriage with Asad. After marriage when Mala comes to know about Bala’s critical condition, she along with Asad goes to see her. Mala finds the house completely changed. She realizes that now Bala is able to do whatever she likes. Her grandfather is no more to dictate Bala the rules of living. But, unfortunately she is now an old bundle of bones. Her room smells of urine, shit, vomit, old age and madness. Bala’s body as well as her room portrays decay and sorrow.

Now Bala abuses each and every one. Many caretakers come and go. No one is able to handle her madness. Mala feels that Bala wants to throw everything out of her chest which she even could not speak during her life time. When her husband was alive, she hardly spoke. She was only supposed to listen to him. Now, as he is no more, Bala enjoys each and every type of abuse “that could keep a team of linguists busy for the rest of their lives” (75).
Bala despite of being on the verge of death seems more powerful to Mala, as she was never in her living. She invents new words daily to scream and abuse. No one can punish her now as there is no punishment left for her. They can only starve her but since she never feels hungry, so it is of no use. Before leaving the village, when Mala finally enters her room to say good bye to her, she suddenly becomes normal and active. She feels very happy to see Asad with Mala. She tells Mala that they both are winners in the end. Mala defeats the family by marrying Asad and Bala by living more than her husband. “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” (76). Bala’s life might ideally be different if the circumstances in society were otherwise.

On hearing this Mala could not stop her emotions. She hugs Bala and in return Bala tells her to leave the ill-fated house. Bala considers this house a ruin. She advises Mala to run far from the house as she will die soon, and none other than her is able to understand Mala’s feelings in the house.

Here, Bala identifies with the kind of women, Millett had already discussed in The Second Sex, who are not able to find an appropriate place in the society or in their homes. They are considered second to men. They can be a mother, a daughter, a wife or a sister but not an individual. Bala’s character portrayal uncovers the fate of several Indian females who are not allowed to cross the threshold of their houses after marriage. They do not have any identity other than of a subject to their husbands. They are considered a thing to use, enjoy and throw if not liked at any time. Male dominated society cannot give freedom to a woman. In such a state of affairs many females face severe identity crisis.

The next major figure is of Mala (granddaughter of Bala), who is a widow. After the death of her artist husband, she looks into the sketches drawn by him and recalls the
past. After the death of Asad, she feels completely shattered and lonely. To pass her
time, day after day, she cleans the cupboards, his trunk and classifies his clothes by type,
textile, age and condition. She goes through his files and papers and manages them. She
never thinks of giving his possessions away. It is the kind of work which keeps her busy
and close to her husband. Asad was an artist and now Mala is left with his sketchbooks-
his lifetime savings. Mala tries very hard to show normalcy in her daily routine after
Asad’s death but she does not seem to be normal. She works as an Assistant Librarian in
a school and joins back after taking a break due to Asad’s death. Every day when she
comes back from the school, she feels as if Asad is waiting for her or at least his
sketchbooks. She looks into each and every image drawn in the sketchbook and conjures
up all the sweet and sour memories.

Mala is born in a South Indian Hindu Brahmin family of Madras. At the tender
age of twelve years, she, for first time realizes that she wanted to live life on her own
terms. Someone who can live life according to her desires and wishes. Stryker opines
that one’s self gets acknowledged within society but Mala discards her Brahmin society
for some higher reality. Since beginning she was bestowed with heightened
consciousness and feels as an alien within her society. Since childhood she wanted to be
different, to be someone else who could fulfill all her desires. She wanted to climb a tree
or ride a bicycle like her cousins in the village but being a girl she was not allowed to do
all this. She wanted to be someone who is not dominated by male supervision like the
other ladies of the house. She remembers her childhood days spent in the village during
her summer holidays. She recalls her stay in the village and realizes that it was more or
less a prison for her, as she was not allowed to pursue any activity of her choice. She
could see totally different treatment given to a boy in her house as compared to a girl.
This clearly shows that since beginning she was not happy with her Brahmin identity.
Mala starts facing dilemma of identity as she does not want to see herself framed into a particular set-up. She wants to create her own world. She had seen Bala’s sufferings and does not want to live the same way under patriarchal set-up. Mala’s grandfather is an epitome of male supremacy. Her grandfather was a bully and she called him the warden of the prison (her village home). She remembers the daily post-lunch conversations of her joint family members during her stay in the village. These conversations only made her realize that she belongs to a particular Brahmin class—which is totally different from other religions like Punjabi, Parsi, Christian or a Muslim. They all are other people. Mala feels a sense of alienation when she understands that things will never change even after her growing up into an adult. She feels that she could never be a different person in the orthodox atmosphere of the family. She could only live and die as Mala- a pure Tamil Brahmin. She wants to reborn as someone else after her death so that she can live according to her desires.

One finds that Mala’s sense of alienation gets deep rooted largely because of her grandmother Bala. As the readers know that Bala was not a normal person. She had no interest in her life or one can say that she did not have a life of her own. She was a prisoner in her own house since the age of twelve years. Mala’s early visits to the village make her realize the sadness and loneliness of Bala. Like Bala, Mala knows what it means to be a prisoner. Whenever she looked into the eyes of Bala, she felt something in common- an unspoken secret.

Although with the passage of time Mala’s visits to her grandparents’ house declined, but even years later, she can still feel the shadow of her grandfather in her life. She was pretty sure that her grandfather will never accept any decision taken by her independently. This again shows the helplessness of a woman in a male-dominated society. The story tells the reader about Mala’s entry into a college and her friendliness
with Nasreen (sister of Asad). Mala meets Asad for the first time in his house during a birthday ceremony of his nephew. Asad is a secular Muslim and only wants to be that. Mala feels attracted towards him in the very first meeting when she comes to know that Asad feels happier to speak on equality rather than reading Namaz. Asad and Mala start dating each-other and decide to get married.

Mala recalls how they both had broken the rules of society and decided to live a life of their own, a life which defies all social conventions, and was full of certainties, but she equally realizes that after Asad’s death time has snatched away all those certainties they had taken for granted. After falling in love with Asad, she intentionally visits her grandfather’s village to give comfort to Bala by announcing her marriage with a Muslim. It is a sort of comfort which makes Bala realizes that like her Mala is no more a prisoner of her husband’s house. Unlike her grandmother she is free to move and live her life as she wants. When her grandfather comes to know about the love affair of Mala and Asad, he immediately sends her back to Madras and tells everything to her parents. Mala finds herself caught in a trap. Her parents blackmail her emotionally. They even try to make her understand the consequences of an inter-cast marriage. They talk about their religious differences. His father asks, “Think of the difference! ...it will always be a problem, the difference between us and them. It will not go away just because you are married” (69).

Mala’s family cannot connect with Asad who he is a muslim. He, as Beck suggested in his theory of individualization, is in the state of cultural destructuring process. His social identity does not match up with the requirements of a pure Hindu Brahmin family. This clearly indicates that even in a secular country like India religious identities cannot co-exist. For Mala’s family, Asad is a foreigner, a muslim- who does not fit in their framework of a son-in-law. Mala feels puzzled and perplexed. She tries
hard to make her parents understand their complex relationship. Finally when she is disappointed by their reaction, she elopes with Asad to Mumbai. She gets married to Asad. Soon her parents call her back for a ceremony, just to show the relatives that Asad is a modern Muslim - not a religious Muslim. The reaction of the family was not in favour of Asad. They are not able to accept him as their son-in-law, but as they love their daughter, they somehow try to digest this bitter truth that now Asad belongs to the family.

Soon after marriage, Mala starts facing problems being Hindu. The customs of a Muslim household were totally different from a staunch Tamil speaking Brahmin family. She tries to search her identity. Though Asad supports her fully but when he is not around or out of the city, she feels the pressure of being a Muslim daughter-in-law. Mala gives birth to Samar. Her mother wants her to name him Ramakrishna. May be she wanted to compensate for his half-Hindu and half-Muslim parentage, but Asad and Mala names him Samar. Her mother wants a naming ceremony and wants to invite her relatives just to show them that the child will be brought up as a Hindu. She even tries to convince them that society does not approve you only by being a human, one need to belong to somewhere. She snaps at Mala, “First you come up with a strange name we’ve never heard before...then you don’t want a naming ceremony. What do you think this boy is going to live in a world all by himself?” (32).

Now after Asad’s death, suddenly Mala feels a pain of rejection by the society or at times she even feels that heartbroken Asad (due to riots) had also rejected her. She feels so because she does not have any religious identity, which is generally demanded when a person wants to adjust in society according to cultural categorization. Every night she tries to sleep but in vain. Asad does not let her sleep. She feels broken without Asad. Daily after coming back from work, she hesitates entering her bedroom. She only finds
comfort outside her bedroom, where Asad’s memories cannot haunt her. She does not have a long list of relatives with whom she can share her feelings, and the few she has, unlike her, belong to a particular religious identity. During her free time she roams all around the city. She visits all her favourite places which she had already visited with Asad many times. This again shows that she cannot imagine a life without Asad.

Mala’s life takes a new turn when she accidently goes through the last sketchbook of Asad, she realizes that Asad was trying to regain his identity. She understands why Asad wanted to find peace in death. Being heartbroken and utterly disappointed he was waiting for his death. Once Mala understands Asad’s disturbed mental state and his longing for death, she lets Asad enjoy his perpetual sleep. She understands that after death, Asad, roaming freely, will definitely find all that he could not find while he was alive. Next morning, she gets up refreshed. She realizes that “may be ideals get dented, bent, even broken. Just like an ageing body. And if it can’t be mended, it’ll be born again. It will be born in someone else, may be somewhere else” (93). It gives her a new strength. She goes to his studio and decides to put away all his works. Out of the two selected sketchbooks she just tears a page off each and places them together. She watches them carefully. One sheet has a happy couple and the other carries a man who is hanging from a hook. Both the pictures are drawn by Asad but at different times speaking different languages. Mala, besides keeping them carefully in a paper bag, also learns from them that time changes and with changing time if on one hand, one finds defeat and loss, surely, on the other hand, hope of a better world lies. In the end the readers see Mala throwing Asad’s palette knife and paintbrushes in a nearby pond. Throwing off Asad’s palette knife and paintbrushes symbolizes that Asad died in absence of the true colours in his life. He could not find appropriate colours to complete his sketches. Mala threw them as they were no longer of any use. By dumping them
forever, she pays a last tribute to Asad and decides to manage her life without Asad by keeping his ideals alive.

Asad, Mala’s husband strongly believed in the religion of equality and humanity and throughout his life, he kept the standards of caste, colour and religion at bay. He got married to Mala— a pure south Indian Brahmin against the will of his family. Asad was a six feet tall, handsome man who had a thick black beard giving him the look of a pure artist. Asad was totally different from his father whom he used to call the ‘junior commie’ and his great grandfather ‘the senior commie’. They both had firm faith in religion unlike Asad. Asad never wanted to get recognized as a Muslim but an Indian. He used to call his mother ‘Lady’ and her father as ‘Mulla’, and also told Sara and Samar to call him not ‘Abba’ or ‘Appa’ but Asad.

From beginning one sees Asad with a cloth jhola on his shoulders which contains booklets like ‘On People’s Struggles’, ‘On the Fascists’ Designs’ etc. After getting married to Mala he stayed with the family for some time in the Dilkhush Mansion, but disapproved Mala’s socializing with his mother and every other Muslim. He was afraid that ‘the lady’ will try to get hold of her and then her relatives will try to convert Mala and his children to pure Muslims. When the novel opens, Asad is dead and Mala is left with his sketches. As Mala goes through Asad’s sketches, the readers come to know about the identity and perception of Asad which changes with time. One calculates why after the communal riots Asad gives way to the inner turmoil. Throughout his life, Asad believed in his ideals, he loved them, stood for them and thought them to be indestructible. But after the Gujarat riots, Mala understands that Asad felt heartbroken, his inner colour faded and his sketchbook had gone blank gradually.

Mala recalls how once during a rally in Madras, Asad buys a standing Ganesh, “... holding a little umbrella as if he was going to set out on a journey the minute he
found an amusing travelling companion” (58). He tries to give this Ganesh to his mother-in-law, who prefers a sitting Ganesh on her doorstep to this ready to move Ganesh. This shows that she could not digest an image of Ganesh in a Muslim’s hands. Later Asad gives place to this Ganesh in his studio in Mumbai, in a godless house.

Mala finds this “image of Ganesh” in one of the pages of Asad’s sketchbook. But this image looks like of a man turning into elephant-trunked Ganesh having large ears to flap the air to swat bad luck. But surprisingly this Ganesh has one eye wide open in bewilderment and the second closed in an exaggerated wink. Although Mala finds this drawing a bit absurd and grotesque but this gives her comfort. Symbolically Mala sees the features of a man, a beast and God- all in one image and feels as if it belongs to her. This sketch clearly shows Asad’s belief. He has made this figure more man like to show the God’s bond with the humans in general. Only this bonding makes God move anywhere, at any time without considering the limits of caste and religion. Asad believed that God is one.

After their marriage, Asad visits Mala’s house in the village to meet the dying Bala (Mala’s grandmother). Being a Muslim, Asad is given a different treatment in the house. No body eats with him apart from Mala. The cook serves him food on a white enamel plate, reserved for any woman during her periods. It just looks like a plate used to serve pet dogs. Asad gets this “special treatment” just because of his marginalized identity.

Asad only believes in having a personal identity. He does not consider it important to have a social identity as well according to cultural categorization. He believes that one creates one’s own identity in society but neglects the point as suggested by Stryker that other selves also exist in society and personal identity gets strengthened only through reciprocation. He does not believe in religious identity and this is the major
cause of his identity crisis. In the time of communal riots he could not handle the situation and loses his identity. After the communal riots, happy and peaceful life of Asad in New Delhi suddenly changes. He is deeply perturbed by the communal riots:

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

Another sketch reveals two contrasting images of ‘Mulla’ in Asad’s sketchbook. One image speaks about his ideals, his faith in God’s mercy, his principles, and his warnings against temptations. Here one sees ‘Mulla’ as a firm follower of God, a head of the community of the faithful, who was once forced to go to Pakistan, but he handled the pressure and did not leave his homeland. “He chose to stay his home; he gave up the land of the pure for Bombay, land of the impure” (180). The second image reveals ‘Mulla’ who has now fallen from the pedestal from where he could really see the road to salvation. Through this contrasting image, Asad makes it clear that the real battle is not for salvation but for the safety of mankind, families and homes. A battle to live quietly and peacefully. Mala can clearly see Asad asking ‘Mulla’ about the present day crisis. Asad makes ‘Mulla’ look shattered and perplexed on seeing his faithful crowd speaking of faith and hate with the same tongue. Mala sees Asad’s face taking place of ‘Mulla’ in the image and talking to her. Mala feels as if Asad is helpless. He is unable to witness the destruction and disappearance of his ideals and foundation. How does it matter any longer whether it is an image of the Mulla or Asad. Both in their respective times faced the problems of dislocation and inter-caste prejudices.
In Kierkgaard terms, he attains knowledge which he thinks, is required for personal growth but when he experiences that knowledge, he realizes the loss of his identity. He alienates from the society and always remains in his studio. Slowly he becomes an introvert. He starts hiding emotions in his heart. His alienation starts when he does not find himself fit in that society, where people are figured out on the basis of name and religion. Like many others Asad tries hard to locate his lost identity, an identity which makes him only human. Asad encourages his children also to chalk out their respective identities. Mala recalls how once Asad gave a lecture to Samar on the anti-Vietnam war movement, when the former told him about his plans to go to America for job. He said, “Go, go to America and become a jihadi if that’s what you think the world needs” (99). Once he tells Sara how he feels when humans are categorized as Muslim or Hindu or Christian or someone else. He wants Sara to fight for her place in this new religious war. He tells her about the various battles people fought for one or the other thing like Freedom Struggle, the Emergency; and all the Old Movements for Rights. This clearly shows his inner turmoil, his state of pain after the communal riots. Being born as a Muslim, Asad is wounded deeply because of the violence against fellow Muslims and most of the time he stays indoors.

Mala finds a new sketchbook with the date on the cover-2002. She sees a drawing with a caption “Broken Home, February 2002”. It is the date of “Godhra riots”. This image portrays some dead bodies on the floor. Mala realizes the depth of Asad’s sufferings. On the other page of the sketchbook, she witnesses so many faces wearing masks. These faces portrayed by Asad talks of a different world, unlike Asad’s world of love and belief. This new world seems frightening to Mala. She hears Asad asking, “Can we do nothing but record the desecration of human faces?” (206).

Eventually Asad goes within. “The last few months Asad has been working with exaggerated energy, as if his paintings can do what rallies and protests and talks can’t.
But he is also throwing out as much as he draws and paints” (209). Through the sketches of Asad, Mala realizes the sufferings of the victims. She understands why Asad, being an artist, could not close his eyes to such news. She ascertains the reason why Asad broke down. She comprehends that he had made “their stories” his own, and hence, there was no room left for Asad’s feelings and emotions.

The next sketch discloses a naked man kneeling down, with hands on the floor. Mala identifies that he is Asad, asking for help from anyone. She feels shattered. She contemplates how a man like Asad can have this type of look! Mala looks baffled when she compares this helpless image of Asad with the old image of Asad- Happy, cheerful, ready to take challenges, argumentative, a firm advocate of his principles and always alive. She interrogates herself how can a person have so many faces? Soon she gets the answer. She concludes that once he no longer could differentiate between his story of life, their story (Mala, Asad and their family) and other people’s stories, he gave up. Now most of the time he feels sick. He spends his last days in a hospital trying to find out the real disease. But ironically this disease is more concerned with his mental state and not only physical. His heart starts hurting him. He suffers from heart disease. After coming home from hospital Mala sees him almost inside the studio but actually he does not work at all. He keeps his sketchbooks blank as if he is unable to paint or he is ashamed of painting. All the time Mala sees fear on his face which stops him using colours.

The next sketch completely reveals Asad to Mala. Mala feels the same fear and shame as felt by Asad when she notices five men standing with iron rods, sticks, a butcher’s knife in their hands. They wanted to kill an unarmed man, crouching on the ground. She feels terrible when she finds one more man standing on one side. He gives an eerie look to this unarmed man who can only stand and stare but do nothing. This
man, Mala realizes is Asad- an artist. This sketch describes the inner feelings and helplessness of Asad who can only see and portray but cannot do anything for the victims of the riots.

The talkative Asad suddenly stops talking and if he talks at all it is only during his sleep. He talks about a mob of snarling faces with bared teeth. Now everyday Mala comes early from the school to look after Asad. He, now, never opens the windows of the flat as any terrible news may come in. Asad is totally shattered.

Asad somehow represents “moratorium” stage highlighted in Marcian’s paradigm as he shows a kind of flightiness. He no doubt makes choices but cannot commit to them fully. He enters a complex stage where anxiety and uncertainty surrounds him. His last sketchbook portrays him as a frozen man. Mala freezes when she sees it. The man in the picture is without any body and his head is hanging upside down. It has, “a long steel like cord hanging from nowhere. The cord hanging from nowhere. The cord makes a loop at its lower end, a loop to which is attached an evil looking hook...It’s about to encircle his neck. How else will it keep him from falling into the sheer drop of space below?” (219). Mala feels pity, fear and love at the same time as if it is not a drawing but a real man. She feels the same way placing Asad’s head in her lap during his sleepless nights. Here Mala notices that Asad’s face is without tension. It’s hanging loose after feeling the pain of sudden and intense joy- the joy of approving eternal sleep. Asad deeply disturbed by communal violence and broken dreams chooses to find peace in death rather than living.

Now the focus of the novel shifts from Delhi to Mumbai, where reader meets Sara, another major figure suffering from identity crisis in the novel. She is the daughter of Mala and Asad. She works with an NGO named ‘Sangam’ in Delhi. She shares a PG room with Nina, who has already left Sangam. Sara is in a relationship with a man called
Rajat Shaw, who is half-Christian and half-Hindu. Rajat also lives in Mumbai and at times after the day’s hectic schedule Sara visits him. Sara was a fun loving and carefree girl. When Sara was a small girl, she used to feel happy at home. At school, she always felt that she is somewhat different from other girls. She is not like them. In her primary school, she admired a girl named Tripti- who was a confident and smart girl. Once when Tripti enquired about her cast, Sara could not give a definite answer. They remained friends but a thin clear glass window slid into place between them. Years after Sara realizes that “perhaps she was born knowing who she was and what sort of life she would live” (179). Being a dutiful daughter of Asad and inspired by his ideals, she becomes a social worker. She was very close to her father and his death comes as a great blow to her. She knew well that Hindu-Muslim riots were chiefly responsible for Asad’s untimely death.

Sara enters the stage of “identity foreclosure”. She has not chosen in past. She was happy with her father’s ideals, but once she realizes the reason of her father’s death, she willingly commits to some relevant goals and roles. Her goal of living peacefully in society without having a particular religion and her role of a true and real woman. She feels that working with Sangam is not enough to renew her faith in her parents’ ideals and her own. In search of her identity, she gets ready to write a script for a documentary film over Gujarat Carnage-2002. Nina being the director of the film asks her to leave Sangam office and visit Ahmedabad for a week. She wants Sara to see and know the actual position of Muslims there, so that she can write a real script based on real people. Initially she hesitates to visit Ahmedabad as she does not seem to be ready to face the victims. She feels uncomfortable to meet people who suffered a lot only being Muslims. Firstly, Sara is haunted by memories of a childhood friend murdered in that earlier instance of communal rage, the Bombay Riots of 1992-93, because her Muslim name
was disclosed. Secondly, these riots came as a great blow to her parents’ ideals. But after some time she realizes that this is what she wanted to do.

Now the scene shifts from Mumbai to Ahmedabad when Sara understands that visiting Ahmedabad is essential if she wants to rediscover herself. Being brought up as an Indian it becomes impossible for Sara to digest that people can suffer as they are Hindus and Muslims. She does not want to meet ‘Muslim Indians’. She recalls Asad, who once told her that there is nothing in a name, but now Sara thinks that a name can change your destiny. She makes up her mind and gets agree to visit Ahmedabad along with Nina. She agrees as she wants to make sure that Asad’s dream is still alive and one can survive by only being a human. Sara reaches Ahmedabad. First day, when they hire an auto to meet some of the dislocated Muslim people in their new relocated colonies, Sara feels that India is not a safe place for Muslims. The first visit to the riot hit area arise mixed feelings in Sara. “They call this a border, Nina tells Sara as they cross a highway, reach an area that is a bizarre mix of bungalows, short and tall buildings, many hovels, too many hovels; and some call this area ‘mini Pakistan’” (110). Sara gathers courage to enter the building to meet some of the families. She feels as if she is out of breath. She does not know what to ask; she does not know how to face them. She does not want to study them like specimens. She asks Nina to enter first. This clearly shows the mental state of Sara. Her fear shows her troubled state of mind.

The house they enter first is of Yasmin’s. Sara had already seen the photo of Yasmin in Mumbai when Nina asked her to visit Ahmedabad. Sara notices each and every careful move made by Yasmin and her mother. Sara feels as if they are not real. They have a mask of pretense. Sara knows how difficult it is to be normal under such grave situations. Sara talks to Yasmin for some time and meets some other Muslim families. She listens to them patiently knowing well that she cannot do anything else for
their comfort. She feels afraid of asking any wrong question. Next day, Sara meets Yasmin again in the school during Yasmin's lunch break. As Yasmin talks, Sara sees her releasing her tension. She feels happy as Yasmin interacts with her and gives vent to her feelings. Yasmin talks to Sara about everything. She discusses her emotions and her mental state with Sara. Sara sees Yasmin working hard to pass her twelfth examination. She wants to get admission in a college, so that she can get a job later and share her parents’ burden. Sara realizes that the riots have done a permanent damage on the minds of the victims, impossible to rectify. Sara interviews a lot of ladies and helps them releasing their stress and tensions. When the affected share their misery, Sara’s mind shifts to a new world in which she visualizes different scenes:

Sara’s eyes are intent on Nasreen. Looking at her, listening to what she’s saying. Sara can almost see a pair of invisible arms pulling Nasreen into a pit. And suddenly, even as Sara imagines this pit, they are past all preludes. All of them, not just Nasreen, are being pulled into the pit or pushed into it. Now they are in the deep smoky pit of the story. It’s not a pit with imaginary terrorists or imaginary Pakistan. There is nothing invisible or imaginary in this pit... It’s a pit in which everyone is running, the pit is only a pit, there’s nowhere to run. It’s a pit where long hard things falls on soft flesh, long sharp things pierce soft flesh. It’s a pit that calls fire to it like a magnet. It’s a pit that blazes so bright, so hot; you may think the hungry orange fire will never be done with filling up its stomach. (157)

This scene unfolds in Sara’s semi- conscious state. Here, the “pit” implies a place where people are born and forced to spend their lives. They do not have any option to run away. Sara clearly sees that Muslims also have no options to escape from the “pit”. Sara sees the socio-political atmosphere, dragging the victims to a state of existence.
After spending a week in Ahmedabad Sara boards the train to Delhi. An aged couple in the train offers breakfast to her and she willingly eats the delicious breakfast. After having a good conversation when the man asked about her cast and origin, Sara again could not find a definite answer. She could not say she is just Sara or a proud hybrid, as she knows that some things are a matter of faith. Sara answers she is half-Hindu and half-Muslim as her parents come from different parts of the country. She finds the couple embarrassed on her behalf. They suddenly step back and show no more interest in her. This incident reminds her again of Tripti- her school friend. She once again introspects. After introspection Sara gets a definite answer. She comes to know that like Mulla (Asad’s grandfather) she chooses to be an Indian. She chooses to be her parents’ daughter. She is secular. Even if she is given the last name of a Muslim, she knows she is a human being first. At the time of crisis, she will not accept ‘Jihad’. She is clear about what she is not and does not want to focus on what she is. Sara feels she can be both- Hindu and Muslim, who celebrates all the festivals with equal passion. She sees a good range of choices before her. She recalls her father’s words, “Don’t be ashamed of who you are and don’t be ashamed of who you’re not” (180).

Here, readers see Sara entering the stage of “identity achievement” by choosing and committing to her role of a “woman” only. She overcomes anxiety, tension and fear. She gives strength to Yasmin as well as to Mala Now Sara knows well that she can only be a woman, standing firmly without any particular name, religion, race or caste. She feels like a young woman with a ‘body’ only. When Sara reaches Delhi, she finds her mother waiting for her with a long list of questions. When she reaches home, she sees her mother very keen to know her experiences. She does not want to tell anything to Mala. She knows how difficult it is to see other peoples’ pain or miseries. Mala seems worried as she does not want Sara to feel and act like Samar, who is critical of his parents’ choices, who opted to be a definite Muslim as he wanted a clear cut identity. But
to Mala's surprise, Sara tells Mala about her experience and realization of a new self. “Yes I’m beginning to realize how lucky I am. How glad I am that I’m a hybrid” (184).

Blos has rightly observed that a child wants to have his/her own identity but a continuous psychological struggle is there as absolute autonomy from parents is not possible. Sara feels sorry that she kept her father unaware about her feelings and her discovery of the self before his death, but Mala ensures her that Asad already knew this. Through Yasmin, Sara realizes that one person is supposed to speak or should speak up for others. She can feel the terror which Yasmin must have felt. She can reconstruct what happened to her. The same night in her dream Sara sees Asad arguing with some people about the right way to live. Next morning Sara decides to pay a visit to the grave of Asad. She buys some flowers and goes to the graveyard. She sees so many graves but is not sure about Asad’s grave. She sees a grave with a white goat on it, nibbling the grass. It looks at Sara as if it is claiming its right on the grave. Sara sees a poor woman there and gives her money and flowers. The old poor woman blesses her and promises to look after the grave till she comes again. Sara knows she will never visit again as Asad is not there in the graveyard. Sara knows that Asad is roaming freely somewhere.

Sara leaves Delhi and returns to Mumbai. She posts a good luck card to Yasmin for her examination. Sara gets regular calls from her office. They ask her to make a choice between ‘Sangam’ and her proposed film. Sara recalls everything. She can understand everything but finds herself unable to pen down all the feelings and emotions to make a film script. Sara’s own identity does not let her write the script. She has never been a Hindu or a Muslim but finds that remaining neutral in times of communal hatred is not really an option. One is supposed to stand for one’s beliefs. She knows that all the stories she heard in Ahmedabad has helped her in tracing her identity but does not
exactly know how to make a film based on them. She calls Yasmin and asks about her future plans. She offers her help if she is interested in taking admission in Mumbai. This shows that she chooses to be round Yasmin. She promises herself that she will not let Yasmin down; not for Yasmin’s sake, but for her own sake, Asad’s sake and Mala’s sake. She knows that, “the difference she can make in Yasmin’s life is nothing compared to the difference Yasmin can make in her life” (235). Through Yasmin she discovers herself.

Yasmin— a victim of Gujarat riots is a seventeen years old girl who lives with her father and mother. She has lost her brother Akbar during the riots. Like all other Muslims, after the riots, Yasmin shifts along with her family to the new religious border in the city and hopes to survive. Her father had a big shop earlier but after losing the house as well as the shop to the riots, he establishes a new small shop just to earn livelihood. Yasmin has a thin and serious face. Sara realizes the plight of Yasmin and all the other Muslims severely affected due to riots. Sara recalls her first meeting with Yasmin where she finds her expecting a savior to remove their innumerable problems. Yasmin believes that a heroine of Hindi films will come to save her as well as the other victims. “She’s seen all her pictures, she thinks Shabana Azmi will come and save her from here” (111). Yasmin is in the last year of school and after finishing her school wants to go to college.

After the riots Yasmin’s life is changed completely. She loses even her sleep. “Every night Yasmin waits for sleep to find her. She lies as still as possible, eyes shut tight. It should be easy then, the easiest thing in the world for sleep to come to her, settle on her like a warm old blanket. But, like Yasmin, sleep too is afraid of the dark” (115).

Her brother Akbar was a science student and very intelligent. Now, he is no more with them. He has shifted in their heads from missing list to the declared dead list, as the
family is not getting any clue about his survival. Now, Yasmin is the only hope left in her parent's life. She has to pass the examination as she has already failed once. Her mother is working day and night on the sewing machine—cutting and sewing skirts to let Yasmin study. Yasmin knows if she passes, she can take admission in a college and later can get a job. She needs it at any cost as Akbar is not alive.

Yasmin is trying hard to live up to the multiple pressures. She has to do everything all alone. She does the household work, helps her Ammi. She has the burden of passing the examination or else she will lose the chance of going to college. In spite of the injustice done to Yasmin and several others like her, she still waits for God to help. She is bound to take care of herself as she has made a promise to her Ammi, Abba, to herself and even to her dead brother Akbar. At times she feels burdened with promises. The promise of being safe while getting education is the biggest since the school is situated in the Hindus area. Many Muslim parents denied sending their children to schools considering their safety like Sultana's mother. Sultana daily accompanies Yasmin not to the school but to attend sewing classes on the way. Yasmin is determined to get education to make her future bright and to compensate the loss of her brother Akbar. She daily crosses the border of religion and tries to keep fear at bay.

She has to do it all alone somehow. Then everyone who tells Ammi and Abba she shouldn't go to school will never be able to open their mouths again. They'll know they're wrong, they won't say it's not safe for girls anything can happen. They won't say it's no use, its better she goes to sewing class like Sultana, it's better she does some work right now. Its better she helps you. (116)

Readers find Yasmin going through the process of "individuation". She develops a sense of self as it is important for "individualization". She has to reflect upon relationships
with others, plan ahead, make life-long choices, take accountability for flaws and limitations and has to overcome all hurdles. This shows the crisis going on daily in the mind of Yasmin. She wants to be known as an individual and not as a Muslim. She feels as if Muslim is a stain which daily she needs to cover with her ‘burqa’ while passing the Hindu area before entering the school. She feels surprised how a name can snatch all the chances of survival from anyone all of a sudden. She feels helpless. Her family paid a big price for being Muslim. “They had to quit their neighbourhood, their India. They found a safe house in a muslim neighbourhood but in return the safe house made them give up their home, their old life. It made them give up on Akbar” (138).

The psychological trauma and pain Yasmin is going through makes her silent and introvert. She discusses with Sara her old home and her life. Her pain can be felt by the readers when she tells Sara how she used to wait for Akbar daily, how she used to feel comfortable with her family and enjoy every moment of life. After telling Sara about her old house she curses herself. She does not find any point in dreaming about the old days. Time has gone and so has Akbar. She keeps on reminding herself she is alone, no matter if she is surrounded by a huge crowd. The facial expressions of Yasmin and her psychological condition make Sara realize the depth of suffering she is going through daily. Unable to help Yasmin, Sara feels as if she is responsible for Akbar’s not coming back home.

Through Yasmin, Hariharan portrays the dilemma of several Muslim people who were forced to leave their homes, the homes which belong to them since ages. One can easily calculate the pressure to disown one’s native place. It is announced in the loud speakers, “Go to Pakistan! Go back to Pakistan! (157). This only shows that they have become prisoners in their own city.

Hariharan, through Yasmin shows the effects of religious identities. The people who are bound by these identities find it difficult to live without them, but ironically
during riots such religious identities cause destruction and injustice. When people lose their bearing, perceive others as alien and only work to increase the existing conflicts, crisis of identity occurs. This happened in 2002 riots. All the Muslims find it difficult to survive; they lose their mental balance and suffer. If they want to survive, hope and positive attitude is required. Yasmin feels and learns to control her emotions and she feels satisfied with what is available:

Yasmin is thinking too hard. She’s thinking: we’re lucky we have two rooms even if they’re dark and small. We’re lucky we have two rooms in a safe area. We’re lucky we’ve a tap in the bathroom; we’ve to use the water tank outside only once a day. We’re lucky we have electricity. You’re lucky you go to school. You’re lucky your father got some money at least for the old house. You’re lucky you didn’t have to see your brother’s dead body or see him killed. You’re lucky you can remember him as he was. You’re lucky, we’re lucky. They have to say it often, in as many ways as possible. They have to say it as often as possible because in their hearts they don’t believe it. Now Yasmin has to believe it. She’s lucky. (122)

Hariharan unveils the inner turmoil of Yasmin who after losing her brother describes the grave situation of her parents. Yasmin recalls and tells Sara her parents’ visit to the police station to find out their missing son Akbar. Police ill treats them often. Once, a policeman ridicules Akbar as “A college student called Akbar Ali. What do you think happened? Has he eloped with a Hindu girl? Or left home to join the terrorists” (134). When Yasmin’s mother retorts, he says “…this is probably what Osama Bin Laden’s mother says of him” (134). It demonstrates the psychological crisis of Yasmin as well as of her parents. Yasmin thinks “missing is not so bad, it’s better than dead” (136).
Like Yasmin so many other Muslims lost their loved ones. Yasmin tells Sara about the disturbed minds of the victims. They are worried as the ghosts of the dead persons haunt them. Yasmin tells Sara her mother’s words, “There’s more than enough room for Abba, you and me.” But the simple truth is that this place will never be big enough for them. They are crowded out by too many ghosts; the dead, the wounded and the maimed take up more room than the living ever can” (150). This only shows the unfortunate and perplexed state of the victims who don’t even feel secure in the new so called safe place. Though the place is relatively safe, their emotions have lost their balance.

Once Yasmin sees Zahida-Khala (one of the victims) who lost all her family members in the riots behaving strangely, “She wouldn’t know how to kill an ant, but every time she sees someone on TV who looks Muslim and who looks like he’s angry or fighting, she gets up and kisses the screen” (158). Yasmin feels very bad for all these victims who desperately need someone to come and help them to recover from their present mental state. At such a tender age, instead of enjoying all the little pleasures of life, Yasmin is struggling hard to maintain the balance of her mind. Her elder brother Akbar whom she loves so deeply is now only in her memories. She has a photograph of Akbar and unlike Koran, a book, which gives her comfort, peace and memories to make sure Akbar was once a part of her life. She has a biology notebook of Akbar with her and the neatly drawn diagrams remind her of his existence. She views the book from page to page daily and feels as if Akbar is sitting near her and drawing them.

Such unforgettable memories of the dead or missing persons harm the victims more than the actual riots. Every now and then, the past disturbs them like an unfinished tale. Yasmin is also wounded during the riots. The ghastly memories of the riots trouble her:
Yasmin thigh throbs; it's only a scar, there is blood running under the skin, there's no piece of wood jamming up its flow. But how strange it is, being hated. It means old scars pain all over again. And how strange it is to hate. It opens up an old wound, it makes it throb so you think it's a fresh one, you have been wounded all over again. (161)

Yasmin tells Sara that she is living because she is not dead. She tells Sara that she can’t anymore recognize people as they're people no more. They are just part of a crowd. They are only voices speaking all together having no listener. No one cares to understand them and to acknowledge their individual identity. She witnesses, “...voice in the room belongs to which body, or whether the voices have bodies at all. They are just voices, nothing else because if they were really bodies, really people, wouldn’t someone have heard them by now; give them some justice in five long years? (162). No doubt, time can bring a change in Yasmin’s life but she is not able to regain what is lost.

Beck rightly suggests that when any society undergoes reorganization, people are supposed to stand for their own beliefs and have to take their own decisions. They have to opt for their role in society and have to play it well, if they want a firm identity. Yasmin does so and achieves her identity. No doubt, Yasmin had to pay the price for her religious identity. She never feels protected and safe. The words which always come into her ears are “careful, alert, guarding against, taking care, anything can happen” (123). She knows that she has to take care of all this as she is a Muslim. She knows that there are some good people left in the world, but the faces with ‘tilaks” on their foreheads, and “trishuls” in their hands haunt her. She sees people with swords, pipes, iron rods, sticks and hockey with her open eyes as well as in her dreams. She can no more trust people. But one sees that eventually Yasmin comes to terms with life. She learns to manages and live her life in her own way by overcoming all the obstacles. The support given to her by
Sara, her mother, her father and memories of her dead brother Akbar helps her immensely in regaining her lost confidence and her true self.

Samar is the elder son of Asad and Mala. As the readers know that at the time of his birth, his grandmother wants to name him as Ramakrishna but his parents refused as they think it wrong to confer any identity on a newly born baby. Both his parents have high flown dreams about liberalism and want their son to grow up as a simple human being, not a religious fanatic. But unlike Sara, Samar wants to hold some religious identity. He wants a surname, a name which tells about his roots. Mala recalls an incident. When Samar was a young boy, he did not like to sit with Hindu boys to share his tiffin box as they complain that Samar’s tiffin smells of meat. When Mala tries to make him understand, he tells Mala that every day he cannot open and show his tiffin to the Hindu boys to prove that it does not smell of meat. Samar feels helpless. He wants to tell them that being Muslim he eats meat but again his mixed parentage stops him. He feels as if he belongs to nowhere. He feels as if he does not have any identity. Since beginning, he was somehow against his father’s secular vision of a modern Muslim. Unlike his father Asad, very soon in life he realizes that society does not accept such half-Hindu, half-Muslim people. He starts taking pride in where he belongs to. He makes up his mind to settle in Dubai after the death of Asad.

Samar attains “identity achievement” stage and he declares to his parents his newly searched identity. He feels happy to be a Muslim rather than half-Hindu, half-Muslim in a country where people gets recognized not by their beliefs but by their caste and religion. He struggled initially but in the end overcomes all the dilemmas of identity and irrespective of his parents’ dream, chose to be a Muslim. Even at the time of Asad’s death, he had a clash with her sister Sara. Sara wanted to cremate him but Samar wanted a grave for him. In the end Samar wins the argument and took him to a burial place. This
clearly shows that although initially Samar faced identity crisis but soon he also decides to be on one side. He no more believes in the ideals of his parents. Since beginning Samar was very much obsessed with getting good marks, doing his best in every field. He did all this as he wanted to be like everyone else. During his school days he used to feel different from others and later he wants to convert this difference into sameness. He wants to compensate for his mixed parentage. He studies well; works harder day by day, gets a good job in MNC but still feels incomplete. Wherever he goes, he feels a sense of alienation, of not belonging to a particular section, and when he could not tolerate it any more, he embraces his Muslim half. He learns the “Ramzan” rules and starts keeping “roza.”

Since beginning Samar was afraid of losing. Sara recalls an incident when they both were enjoying kite flying. She sees her brother holding the kite loosely. His eyes were carefully watching the movements of the kite. He knew that blowing of breeze may spoil the game and his kite will no more exist in the sky. He does not want it to happen. He wants his kite to fly freely in the unclouded sky. This indirectly shows the desire of Samar to excel in life. Like the kite, he wants to fly high and high. Like the kite which belongs to Samar, Samar also feels an ache for belongingness, and for this reason he declares himself as M (mohammad) Samar. Samar detects his own survival needs and determines the direction his life will take. He makes certain choices and commits to them. In spite of various impediments, he achieves his identity.

The novel not only deals with the problems of identity on individual plane, but also on the universal plane. It also focuses on shattered religious identities in general. When Sara visits Ahmadabad and listens to the stories of various victims, one can clearly see how religion affects one’s identity and social status. How and what the marginalized people feel in times of crisis. Political parties misuse religion for their political gains and
people suffer. Hariharan has boldly written and recorded the problems faced by Muslims during the Gujarat riots. These riots are considered a systematic political terror unleashed against the Muslims. All the victims suffered identity crisis. When Sara and Neena record their voices, one listens to the heartbreaking stories of these victims.

They all are “muslims” which represent their unique collective identity. They form a relevant group and share common values, emotions and goals. This collective identity affects their personal as well as social identity. They suffer as they belong to a particular marginalized culture. Victims like Razia, Mariam, Salma, and Zakia etc. talk about their miseries. Ladies were not only raped, but cut into pieces and then burnt. A little boy was forced to drink petrol and then he was burnt. One of the victims Razia wipes the sweat and tells how they were forced to leave their place. The loudspeakers keep calling them Pakistanis, terrorists. Farida asks Neena, “And what happened to us, that’s not terrorism?” (157). Zulekha tells about screaming mothers, sisters and daughters. “...they were begging us to remove the stumps of wood that had been pushed into them. Each one was crying, ‘me first, remove mine first.’ I’ll never forget their screams. Even now, when I tell you this, my blood boils” (160). Noorjahan tells about her burnt father, brother, husband and son. She only wants justice. She feels heartbroken and upset as she could not have given them respect they should have in death. She could not have buried them with dignity.

The riots affected children were not able to get education. Many Muslim parents refused their children to go to school. Parents were anxious for their children’s safety. “The feeling of hatred poisons not only the minds of the religious fanatics but also those who involve in the field of education” (Priya 278). Students are ill-treated even by the teachers. One of the victims explains:

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

Hariharan while presenting the plight of the victims takes digs at the government machinery and how they unethically suppressed the Muslims. Readers see how police ill-treated them. Reshma begged the police to help her as well as others’ families, but police replied, “Snakes that are not poisonous should keep the enemy away by hissing once in a while” (160). Even some good policemen did not come forward for help. They ask them to learn to protect themselves. They just stood by watching their homes burnt and people dying one by one. They didn’t have any orders to help the Muslims.

No doubt, there were some good people as well, who helped the Muslims but what difference does it make? Every time they will see each-other with suspicion and anger. Hariharan ironically states that riots took place in the state where Gandhi was born. She makes his ghost to witness the riots and feels that the present happenings are against his principles. The ghost of Gandhi says, “I can’t watch the destruction of all I’ve lived for. I would rather drown myself in the waters of the Sabarmati than harbor hate or animosity in my heart” (176). Ironically Hariharan states that even Gandhi has no power to end the current wave of religious fundamentalism.

But one question demands an answer here why Hariharan has not talked about the plight of the Hindus in Godhara riots. She only discussed in detail about the atrocities done to the Muslims. Everyone is aware about burning of the two compartments of the ill-fated train coming from Ayodhya by Muslims. Why Hariharan keeps silent over the murder of innocent Hindus? Religious riots take place when people of different religion deny accepting each other. Riots never take place just because of one religion. Or one
can speculate that just to earn the favour of so called marginalized people; she deliberately does not talk about the murder of Hindus in 2002 Godhara riots. Everyone knows well that because of this religious fundamentalism, not only Muslims but Hindus also suffered a lot if one goes through the pages of History. Riots between Hindu and Muslims always resulted in havoc. Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* is the most comprehensive account of this. This novel tells in detail the consequences faced by a Hindu family as they journey from Sialkot to Delhi after the partition riots. People were forced to leave their homes and *Azadi* brings only misery and misfortune. Nahal describes the experiences of the uprooted people in refugee camps and while travelling on foot to India. They submitted themselves to all type of violence- arson, murder, abduction and rape. Through the family of the protagonist Lala Kanshi Ram of Sialkot, he represents the suffering of millions of Hindu people, uprooted and forced to migrate to India. It portrays the dilemmas of innocent victims by some forces beyond their control.

In the words of Ramamurthy, Nahal’s concern in *Azadi* “…are not only the socioeconomic and humanistic implications of the tragic exodus of suffering millions from the hands of their birth but also the deep psychic disturbances and emotional transformation brought about by that traumatic experience in the inner lives of individual men and women” (Ramamurthy 131). Apart from *Azadi* there are several other works of fiction which highlight the problem of religious clashes like *Tamas* by Bhishma Sahni, *Twice Born Twice Dead* by Kartar Singh Duggal, *A Fine Family* by Gurcharan Das, *Midnight Children* by Salman Rashdi, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar and many more. Such types of religious clashes result in large scale massacre and loss of human life. On one hand, People lose their life and on the other hand, they also lose hope and faith in humanity and community living.

In the end, through the realistic portrayal of all the characters, the author makes it very clear that all humans are connected with one another. All affect and get affected. On
one hand, one sees that how all the above discussed characters are individually closely related to each-other and how they affect each other, and on the other hand, it seems that on universal level as well, one individual and his or her life affects the whole society. Hariharan describes this human connection beautifully with help of the story of an ant that haunts Mala even in her old age. An ant asks a frog, snake and other creatures to save its drowning baby. Every one refuses, so the ant bites a little boy. “He picks up the stick, which hits the dog, which runs after the cat, which chases the rat, which gnaws a hole in the snake charmer’s basket, so the snake inside escapes and is about to eat up the frog, but the frog jumps into the water and rescues the baby ant” (13). It shows that everyone’s life is connected in this world and every action leads to a chain or reaction that influences the lives of others either directly or indirectly. “What happens to one also that happens in some way, to the other. That’s how all those fragments that pass for different lives forge a cunning chain. The interlocking links may not always be visible, but still they’re made of iron. And the ending in a chain story can’t really be the end. To make sense of it all, you have to go back to the beginning” (13).