



AMBIANCE OF RELIGIOUS ABHORRENCE IN THE *FIGURATIVE HISTORIES* BY HARIHARAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper uncovers with the help of novel, Figurative Histories, the presence of differences, hatred, disliking's, prejudices and negativity among Hindu and Muslims in the name of religion after the Bharat-Pakistan partition. It presents how the administration was failed in controlling before the riot came into flow and let loose the fanatics on the people belonging to another community though India is a secular country. After reading the novel we can easily judge that the fundamental list the community at hatred, must suffer individually for their social as well as professional life and that politicizing ethnicity and ethicizing of politics is largely responsible for increasing cultural conflict. People in the universe strongly believe that they are the creation of the omniscient God and as per their assumption and blind beliefs try to find this existence of God in their own way and this may have given birth to the different religions of the world. The tragic outcome of this is that they have started to fight against each religion to prove the authenticity of their so called religion and at the end we can see that the humanity has to suffer so pathetically. Figurative Histories is among the literary work which depicts like Amrita Pritam's Pinjar the sad history of communal riots.

Key Words: Religious Abhorrence, communal riots, Ahmedabad

INTRODUCTION

Figurative Histories depicts the mishap with the Muslims in the western region of Gujarat in 2002. All the matter related reports, interviews, witness accounts and the writer's own views and opinions are recorded over here to judge the situation and accordingly try to change oneself for the betterment of the society as well as humanity sake. Throughout the reading of the novel, we could feel that in the name of religion, how the real religion of humanity suffers in the hand of fanatic. The core theme of the novel is just to show or convince the reader is

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that the real religion is service to mankind. Here the whole story is found woven around two major characters Sara and Mala but whatever the sensitive heart of the writer wants to convey is conveyed through Sara as she is so closed to the difference of opinion, views or religions Karma being a child of a Muslim father and a Hindu mother. She works in an NGO in Mumbai. To serve the NGO, she took steps to be in contact directly to the communal riot affected people of the Gujarat. Her intension was just to write a script for a documentary based on this.

She starts to reach to the affected sensitive hearts. First she meets Yasmin who has lost her dear brother Akbar in the mishap and now the seventeen years girl is struggling to earn livelihood for all including her parents. She starts to live in Muslim area which is known as mini-Pakistan. She longs to join college and dream to have unmeasurable return from it of her lost brother Akbar. It also presents Mala's life, a Hindu Brahmin girl who chooses a Muslim young man, Asad as her life partner. No doubt Asad loves humanism. As usual, Mala's parents don't support her for the inter-caste marriage but despite of this ban she sticks to her inter-cast marriage. Asad casts secularism, Liberalism and humanism.

When the novel begins, we find Mala in a dream city Delhi. But when Asad leaves the materialistic world forever, Mala's life becomes topsy-turvy. As Asad was a very good artist, he did his best to sketch down whatever has been going on in his mind. His art represents his mentality, feeling and human touch when he dies, he leaves behind him a lot many paintings with sad commentaries on them. He tried to reveal through the sketches and paintings that the communal riot in Gujarat was unbearable as was totally in human. After Asad's death, Mala goes through the paintings and sketches and realises that her husband was passing through the inner turmoil that had scattered all that he bloomed, cherished, advised, propagated and was feeling proud of too. She could understand the responsible factors behind his sad demise, pessimism and deteriorated health. As Sara is a social worker and associated with an NGO. She is asked by her friend to pen down the picture of the adverse effect of the once visiting Ahmedabad. When she tries to explore Ahmedabad for this purpose, her sorrows finds no bound. She feels that the earth is sliding away. India-Pakistan partition in 1948, in the name of man-made religion: through this depiction we can find this 'cut and burnt, cut and burnt. It's a shorthand chant, a chant that echoes in Sara's ears because it's trapped there. But as often as she hears it, Sara knows that chant is leaving something out. There is an empty space before and after, between the cutting and the burning. May be no one wants to fill up that awful space. May be that minute of space is too long, longer than any other minute, because that's when a living person feels the breaking blow. Or the piercing stab. Or the burning licks of a tongue of fire."

Hariharan sincerely tries to go deeper into the past to find out the responsible factors those had widen the gap between these two communities. As our country promotes multi-



culturalism one should stop to blame other religion for anything Mala just tries to remember her golden past of the romantic days when she with Asad started to define social conventions to build an ideal life. She becomes shocked when she finds out that certain misconception between the two communities become the responsible factor for both the religion and that is proved the only ground to make the people detached and separated to their existing happy and ideal life.

This novel teaches the art of learning to live happy and smooth life. Mala had an inter – caste marriage with Asad, who was her friend, Nasreen's brother. Before she visited Nasreen's house, Mala never tested meat. Once she was given samosa with meat in it and unknowingly she tested it. When she realized something abnormal she ran to bathroom to spit it out. When Mala discloses her decision of marrying to a Muslims man, her mother tries to persuade her by saying, 'how can you want to marry him? Think of the difference! it'll always be a problem, the difference between us and them. It just won't go away just because you are married.'⁶⁹ She even reminds her first taste of meat at her friend's home. After the day for three days Mala and her parents all were went on silent mode, they started to avoid to look at other. The real problem for Mala's parents is not that she wants love marriage or that she is going to marry an artist, but that she longs to be with a Muslim man as his life partner. Asad and Mala's determination and bond of love were tested when they witness the terrible burden of what happens when a Hindu and Muslim decide to live as a married couple. Both the families do their level best to separate them but as Mala and Asad love each other so immensely that it was proved an worthless effort to make them detached to each other. They both love each other as an human being, not as a Hindu or Muslim.

When they both got married, the reactions were of two different extremes : some of her relatives start to deny that they don't know Mala while others starts to appreciate her for her bold decision and determination for showing the world how inconsequential their own short comings are. Mala's parents try to normalize the situation and summon Mala to Madras so they can prove to the rest of the family that all is not lost. They starts self-defence by saying that Asad's family is not so conservative religious, they are quite modern. While Mala's father adds that Asad is secular, her mother, as not happy with the marriage, is always founding a mood of accusation and giving topic for gossip to the relatives. Mala's mother tries to calm down the grand aunt by saying that they are decent people. But the grand aunt counter argues that they may be decent as they are, but what about their association with the Muslim religion. Thus even though they want to justify the intercasts marriage, their traditional and conservative religious belief stops them in doing so. Hariharan refers to the myths regarding Muslim man's sexual obsession which is revealed though the conversation between the grandaunt and Mala. The aunt asks Mala, "Don't they do it differently? And more often? How many times a night?"⁷³ The point is that the grandaunt wants to expose that the Muslim men are different in matter of sex, matter of food, custom and prayer.



After some years of their married life, Mala and Asad visit the village to meet death ridden Bala, Mala's grandmother. Mala's uncle surprisingly well behaved with Asad but can't totally. He couldn't allow himself to be with Asad which having their food in the same dish as usual they use to have food. The cook is instructed to serve Asad's food on white enamel plate. Mala recognises the plate instantly which is reserved for the women who are passing through the period of menstruation. When Mala gives birth to a baby – boy, Asad's mother insists the baby to be named as Ahmed but Mala's mother wanted him to be named Rama and Krishna. But Mala declares that the baby boy will be named as Samar as thy both had decided so earlier about it.

Sara and Nina are intimates. They lived in Mumbai in a rent basis house. Sara wrote a script for Nina's upcoming documentary called city Skyline. Through this documentary, she wants to reveal the reality of the people during the not in Gujarat in 2002, how the government supported to the affected people for the rehabilitation, what the government did to serve the people who were trying to rebuild their lives. The situation is described as. "27 February, 2002 the Sabarmati express was attacked in Godhara station in Gujarat and two of its carriages set on fire. The train was carrying. Hindu Activits were on their way back to Ayodhya. Godhara is a Muslim locality. In the days and weeks that followed, the Muslims of Gujarat became the soft target of brutal violence."⁴² One day Sara with Rajat go to watch movie where she met Rasheed, her friend Laila's first husband. He reminds Sara of Laila and her second husband's death in the Mumbai communal riots in 1992-93. Laila was burnt because of her religion.

The part two of the novel entitled as "Crossing Border", deals with the Sara's visit to the Muslim affected area of Ahmedabad to eyewitness the critical condition of the Muslim. Sara and Nina hire a an auto to cross the border to visit the place safe for Muslim. First, she find event though people mores from one place to another, they and the surroundings seem cheerless and pointless. Sara comes to know that during the riot a second year B.Sc. student Akbar is found missing. He does not return from the college. His parents go to the police station almost every day to register the missing complain of their son. Instead of co-operating them for the sake of humanity, itself, the policemen pretend everyday as if they haven't seen them before. Not only this. They force them indirectly to repeat the same story at every turn and at last fell them that their son might have eloped with a Hindu girl. The policemen don't leave a single space in insulting the sorrowful parents. They wish to dilute the case. When Akbar's mother so innocently says that her son was a mere student, the policemen with a mock respect says, "Begum, this is probably what Osama bin Laden's mother says of him" The policemen instead of knowing wary well that he is dead. try to convince them that Akbar might have joined terrorists. After all the father meets a sub-inspector who tries to co-operate him. He registers the father's complaint. Then the father tries to find out his dear son among



the corpses, dead bodies. With missing arms, legs or even heads. There were bodies with bellies torn open, some were totally burnt to coal or cut to pieces. For him it is proved totally difficult to identify Right from the beginning from the partition period, the indifferences or feelings of hatred between Muslims and Hindus has been increased.

One day when Akbar's father was away in search of him, some persons come to his shop, just look it and then set it afire. Not only this, they start to shout that if they love their lives, they must leave the space. One man goes upstairs, finds Yasmin, Akbar's sister and mother and embedding in the flesh of Yasmin's thigh, just tries to hint them what the Hindus can do. After some days a so called good man insist the father to sell his shop to him at a trivial amount. On the same day one message comes to the father "Muslims quit India or we will fuck your mother's."¹³⁸ The father has no option now except leaving the place. The person who tried to terrorize them was a man of middle age. He came there with something sharp in his hands but could not harm more to both the females: Only because he might be in a hurry to make other Muslims females tremored, threatened or feared or he might be in interest of having their horse instead of the women. Anyhow Yasmin escaped mishap with her. Yasmin's father sets up his business in a safe area but can't earn their livelihood as the surrounded people don't have enough money to buy or the other people have decided not to purchase from any Muslim's shop. Thus, besides personal, professional life is also almost nearer to end. Now the father has lost all his hope of seeing his dear son alive but he just wants to hug and kiss his even dead body and gives a decent burial.

Feroza khala was of the opinion that Yasmin's parents must not send her to school as the school going girls are not safe in the hands of other religion men. She tells Sara that in 2001, her all near and dear ones were killed. She was left unfortunately too just to take care of her old uncle. Other women tells Sara that as the situation was so unfavourable as they didn't find themselves capable enough in encountering any situation against them, they used to close the windows and doors. Every now and then, there only cutting, stabbing, raping and putting things and people on fire. Nasreen recollecting the horrible past described Sara that the crowd came with swords, broken soda-lemon bottles, saffron flags, bombs, hockey sticks etc., broke their religious place down first and put the idol of their God there. Then they rushed to each house shouting the words like cut them, kill them, rape them, burn them etc. They not only shouted they did what shouted and after satisfying their physical urge, they just killed those women. The description just remind us of the content of the novel "Pinjar" described by Amrita Pritam. One little boy was forced to have petrol in his mouth and then one men lit a match stick there to burn him. The policemen too were supporting indirectly to such persons was the blame by a Muslim women.

Sabiya tells that the police shot her sister in the courtyard before her eyes. Abeda tells that she cleaned many bodies before buried, but most of them were devoid of hands, legs etc.



Nasrin was attacked with an iron pipe but somehow she could manage to be escaped. Mumtaz pretended as if she were dead among dead bodies. Mahrukh eye witnessed a corps on which a crowd was sprinkling kerosene on it shouting “Jay Shri Ram.”¹⁶². What all they were doing according to them, they were just converting Muslims in to Hindu by burring such corpse. Farida feels threatened while describing Sara that they have heard the boys shouting on the road that they would rape or kill the Muslim women. The Muslim women also told that some of the Hindu families were too affected badly. But the numbers of Muslims were many in anger, they were telling Sara if next time such things will happen, they will prove themselves that what they can do. Yasmin does not like all these being hated or to hate. She believes that if anyone may start to take revenge against then definitely it becomes a never ending process. After finishing her work, when Sara was returning to Delhi by train, she has a disturbing experience. A middle aged couple offered her food and asked a casual question about her native. While introducing herself Sara told that she belongs to a Muslim father and a Hindu mother, they stopped talking with her. Then she tried to find out her true identity. No doubt she was secular, as her name was ended with Ali, she been treated as a Muslim. She knows that people keep an eye to monitor inter religious marriages. For Mala to listen to hate speeches everywhere on media was impossible. Asad gets completely defeated in his idealism and tells his wife Mala that she can continue her original Brabmin religion. He dislikes that each Muslim is being treated as an terrorist. The news of people sufferings disturbs him. One day Mala finds that Mr. Trivedi, her neighbour, is in trouble with his scooter. He is found unable in unlocking it with left hand as his right hand is busy in holding Prasad, Mala offers her help. Mr. Trivedi is so surprised that he drops that prasad.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the novel figurative Speech is proved as a thought provoking and brain. Churning novel for the people who in the name of religion leaves no space in torturing others. The novelist tactfully involves into the political and social problems that led to Gujarat Communal riot. Here he does his best in justifying how Muslims become unwanted to Hindus. Muslim of Gujarat were living in ghettos and were forced to do compromise with each and everything required for their smooth everything required for their smooth lives. Hariharan shows how in a secular society agitations and abhorrence in the name of religion leads to chaos and violence. In short this novel exposes the legacy of prejudices that sometimes insidiously, sometimes perceptibly continues to affect disparate lives in present day India.



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