Vol 8, Issue 11, 2025 **Impact Factor: 8.535** DOI: https://doi.org/10.31426/ijamsr.2025.8.11.8940

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

Fragmented Identities and Postmodern Narratives A Study of Dislocation in Fugitive Histories by Githa Hariharan

Saira Siddiqui [1]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

Dr. Soumya Tiwari [2]

[2] Supervisor, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the thematic and narrative disintegration of identity, this research examines Githa Hariharan's Fugitive Histories through the lens of the postmodern state of fragmentation. The novel's non-linear structure, in which the present and the past converge, reflects the meaninglessness and disintegration of a cohesive self. In the background of the Gujarat riots, the poem depicts the psychological and societal repercussions of sectarian violence via characters like Mala, Sara, and Yasmin. The disjointed storyline reflects the shattered lives of people trying to find their place in a diverse and troubled world. Additionally, the research emphasises how Hariharan questions conventional narrative via the use of postmodern strategies like metafiction, various viewpoints, and discontinuity. This study argues that the novel's use of fragmentation serves as a commentary on modern life and a narrative device in and of itself.

Keywords: *Postmodern, Fragmentation, Narrative, Traditional, Dreams.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Now at its zenith, Indian literature written in English has received unwavering acclaim from readers throughout the world. It has formed a new path, a new vision—a vision full of myths, traditions, rituals, unanswered hopes, and conventions and assumptions. A closer examination of the works of the Indian literary giants who had an impact in the English-speaking world reveals that, far from being a carbon copy of English literature, these writers' works are incredibly innovative and profoundly Indian in tone and subject matter. Rapid advancements in science and technology have been seen in post-independence India. Recently, India's economy has grown at a commendable rate. Thus, the book was a powerful vehicle for capturing the essence of its time, conveying both the happy and sad realities of that era. In the 1980s, there was a sudden surge of creative writing that mirrored a growing consciousness of the nation's diversity. It goes beyond the east-west divide to show how Postcolonial India has changed and how its new perspective is a synthesis of modernity and tradition. It shows how open-minded the younger generation is as they try to reconcile the

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International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

traditional beliefs passed down through the generations with the other cultures they've absorbed. When it comes to improving the quality and quantity of Indian English fiction, women authors have been essential and groundbreaking. They have enhanced the works by including feminist themes and the woman's point of view. Many of the works written by Indian women authors in English nowadays are considered to be among the most significant. In addition to bringing a new awareness to the literary world, modern women are making waves in almost every other field.

Indian English literature has recently had a renaissance, and Githa Hariharan is rightfully considered one of its leading lights. She considers the human situation to be the most fundamental component of literature and, by extension, of writing in general. One aspect of her storytelling style and her love of storytelling is the incorporation of myth and fantasy into her works. Narrating becomes a useful tool for Hariharan in re-creating the past so that it becomes more relevant to the present, according to him. As a writer, this becomes very important to her. Her use of myth and folklore is obviously not an intentional decision, as she informs us. Prior to delving into the mythology, which serves as a means to transform "a small space spacious," the novel's core is unveiled.Art has been liberated from the stifling assumptions and aristocratic hierarchies by postmodernism. It has provided support for several under-represented viewpoints. It has sparked other subfields, including diaspora studies, multiculturalism, and subaltern studies. The spread of postmodernism has been greatly assisted by several individuals, including Leslie Fiedler, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Ihab Hassan, Susan Sontag, Linda Hutcheon, and many more.

The protagonists and antagonists created by Githa Hariharan exhibit a postmodern outlook and way of thinking. An example of a character with a postmodern sensibility is Devi from Night of a Thousand Faces. In doing so, it deconstructs and reimagines metanarratives while also rejecting the conventional beliefs of Mayamma, Baba, and traditional women like Gandhari, Savitri, and Amba. She decides to spend her time with musician Gopal after divorcing her husband Mahesh, who she finds uncaring and focused only on his business. She runs away from Gopal and goes back to live with her mum once she finds out he's just about music. For her, traditional ideologies and ideas are irrelevant. Because of this, she struggles mightily to break free of her oppression and find her place in society. By incorporating several novelistic techniques and postmodern perspectives into her writing, Githa Hariharan establishes herself as a postmodern Indian writer. In her work The Thousand Faces of Night, she used postmodern techniques to challenge traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures. There have been references to epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas via intertextual allusions. Gandhari, Dhratarashtra, NalaDamayanti, Amba, Bhishma's story, Jaydeva and Padmavati legends, Purandaradasa, and Geet Govinda lines are among the famous characters she has used. Additionally, she has included magical realism, a postmodern technique, into her writing. She has used a wide variety of literary devices, including but not limited to: mythology, folklore, fantasy, fables, pastiche, metafiction, irony, time distortion, fragmented non-linear and multiple narratives, and so on. In using the aforementioned postmodern fiction techniques, the author amplifies the experiences of women who have been historically silenced. Although each of her works stands on its own, there is a thread that runs through them all, like the postmodern aspect.

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II. POSTMODERN CONDITION OF FRAGMENTATION IN "FUGITIVE HISTORIES

Novels, especially when they depict evildoers, may comfort us because they make humanity seem more understandable and, by extension, more controllable; moreover, they provide the appearance of insight and power, as E. M. Forster notes in his "Aspects of the Novel." Contrarily, this is not how postmodern books work. There are no conventional storylines that explain the reasoning behind events. Since it is constructive rather than mimetic, as Aristotle had noted, it is no longer understandable. The condensing of time and space emphasises the interconnectedness of the present with the past and the dissolution of the past into the present. Postmodernist literature challenges the conventional narrative structure, as Linda Hutcheon has noted. The story unfolds in a disjointed fashion, with no apparent chronological progression, which makes deciphering its meaning somewhat challenging. In today's world, people have embraced diversity and learned to coexist peacefully. Because of this, he has an identity crisis and struggles with his individuality. Narratives in postmodern literature attempt to piece together the lives of disjointed individuals who have lost touch with who they are in order to provide meaning to the narrative. When it comes down to it, postmodern authors think there's no need in trying to bring order to this chaotic world, so they embrace fragmentation. If one wants to become a part of society, according to Julia Kristeva, they have to rebel against the established order and absorb its power in order to find their place in it. Traumas, rather than genuine experiences, can only arise in the absence of inclusion. Finding one's voice and making sense of the world are both accomplished by psychic rebellion.

Githa Hariharan's "Fugitive Histories" depicts individuals who struggle with a disjointed sense of identity and who resort to psychological rebellion as a means of finding order in an otherwise disordered reality. The story of Bala, Mala, Sara, and Yasmin is similarly fragmented since it is told via a series of unrelated occurrences. Postmodern fragmentation is present both technically and philosophically, and all of the characters suffer traumas as a result of society's plurality. Two compartments of the Sabarmati train were set ablaze during the 2002 Gujarat riots, which Hariharan discusses. The most impacted group is women since, in our patriarchal culture, they are still the most marginalised and powerless. The female protagonists Mala, Bala, Sara, and Yasmin are living proof of the discrimination women encounter in society due to their gender and caste. Marrying Asad, a Muslim, causes Mala to lose her religious identity. Her family is not prepared to accept her artist partner, Asad, since she is a Hindu-Brahmin. She also feels completely out of place in Asad's home. Since theirs is an interfaith union, the couple encounters difficulties right from the start of their marriage. Her father loses it when Mala says she wants to marry Asad:

Her father says, "How can you want to marry him?" with a real wonder in his voice. "Consider the contrast!" he exclaims. The gap between ourselves and other people will persist indefinitely. "Being married won't make it go away."

They worry about passing these difficulties on to their children and whether or not they will be able to weather this storm forever. Because his classmates make fun of his meat consumption, Samar, Mala's son, has no friends at school. He faces rejection wherever he goes just because he is unique. This is a common source of contention between Mala's father and son. Whatever his opinions may be, Samar goes on a tirade about how he is seen as a possible terrorist. At one point, he makes the

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decision to leave India and seek employment in the US. While visiting Mala, Asad's buddies Jamal and Bubbly said, "I get angry when people think I'm Muslim." This happened after the Gujarat violence. As soon as people think I'm too hip to be Muslim, I lose it (201). News of dismembered corpses and hate speech may be found everywhere. Life becomes painful for Mala due to its fractured state. As soon as she sees how distressed Asad is, her worst concerns about her relationship with Azad come true. Mala mulls over:

Have they all converted to Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism, even if they don't believe in any of it?"

They overlook their disagreements and get married, Asad and Mala. However, events in their environment serve as a constant reminder of their uniqueness. Mala learns that Asad can only find peace by sleeping alone after a traumatic night of seeing him sit up in bed, agitated and irritated, and then going to the studio to sketch and trash. When it comes to Asad, Mala feels really let down. "You didn't have to worry about whether you were Indian Muslim or Muslim Indian, part Hindu, or atheist by default, it was enough just to be you"—the fantasy that inspired him to say those things—has vanished.

Looking at Azad's sketchbook after his death, Mala realises what had been keeping Asad up at night: a defenceless guy caught in the midst of a community disturbance. Azad attempted to rebel against the system that is unwilling to change via his paintings after suffering inwardly. Asad, the guy who is talented with art but unable with acting, lets his guard down and lets her into his private existence, which had been a mystery to Mala. A contemporary man's social powerlessness is brought to light by this postmodern state of fragmentation. At the conclusion of the book, Mala prays by tossing Asad's paintbrush and unfinished paintings into water, completing the cycle of funeral ceremonies and allowing him to rest.

Sara, the daughter of Mala, is living in Mumbai with her flatmate Nina, a documentary filmmaker covering the victims of the Gujarat riots. Nina approaches Sara with an offer to create the documentary's screenplay. Because of this, Nina takes Sara to Ahmedabad so they may interview survivors of the riots. She befriends a Muslim girl named Yasmin, who is perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old. Yasmin tells her harrowing experience of the riot, including how her family lost their home and store and, most tragically, how her brother Akbar, while attending college, went missing. Tragic events have unfolded before her own eyes, and she is not alone. The pain she has endured at such a little age is incomprehensible, and there was even an effort to molest her. Perhaps this is the reason Sara wants to spend so much time with Yasmin.

III. WRITING BACK' AND 're-writing

When Githa Hariharan starts her book When Dreams Travel, she does so with the framework of the traditional story. However, she questions and reinterprets the assumptions that are ingrained in the original mythology. In order to investigate what is outside the conventional narrative structure, the book reimagines the framework that is often associated with the Arabian Nights. Instead, it gives a more in-depth psychological and sociological investigation of its characters, which calls into question the feeling of completion and contentment that is often connected with the conclusion of the stories.

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The work is divided into two sections, which serve as a roadmap for the development of the story and the overarching issues that it explores. The narrative turns its attention to the lives of people such as Shahrzad, Dunyazad, and Dilshad, depicting their experiences in a manner that goes beyond the limitations of patriarchal storytelling. Women who were previously trapped to narratives that were controlled by males are the subject of this essay, which investigates their silence, pain, and perseverance. The book reconstructs history that have been hidden and provides a place for experiences that have been marginalised via the use of diverse voices and viewpoints.

As an additional point of interest, the narrative shifts from being driven by fear to being motivated by freedom and self-expression. When the characters tell their experiences, they do it not out of a sense of obligation but rather as an act of agency and creativity. Therefore, the book is a close reference to the original Arabian Nights, but at the same time, it transforms the Arabian Nights into an autonomous tale that questions the authority of traditional sources and honours other voices.

IV. OTHERS AND SUBVERSION

There are numerous different angles from which Hariharan challenges the patriarchal text. The presence of lusty women is said to be the cause of 1001 nights in the text that was originally written. On the other hand, the violent attitude of the Sultans was never called into doubt. Women did not have a sense of identity or a venue for their creative efforts. When it comes to the androcentric myth about harems, Hariharan reveals the sadism and cynicism that lie behind the statement, "All kings are collectors."

This collection of precious objects consists of ladies of all sizes, hues, and forms. In addition, the author questions the manner in which the Sultan mourns the loss of the deceased queen in his gorgeous tomb. The Sultan mourns her death not because of her extraordinary creative abilities but rather because she was honourable and chaste. The patriarchal standards of virginity, which are primarily enforced on women, are the only criteria that are used to evaluate her. No room of her own is available to Shahrzad.

During each and every night, she is robbed for the king's own personal amusement. In the role of a wife, she accomplishes nothing; she is only another addition to a series of spouses. The author is troubled by the fact that even a skilled artist like her is relegated to mundane family responsibilities. Shahrzad, on the other hand, is portrayed by the author as the personification of survival in a community. Other historical occurrences and individuals, particularly women who were suppressed, are brought into prominence by the author, who pays attention to the fact that the original book was silent on the subject.

The mother of Raziya, Shahrzad, and Dunyazad is brought to the forefront when the author writes. As a result of Dunyazad's vision, he is filled with pessimism and despair. In addition, Hariharan forces Dunyazad to declare her status as a woman in WDT, when in the original text, she was just required to attend upon her sister. The author forces Dunyazad to reflect on the past and bring it back to life, only to end up subverting it via the use of sarcastic retellings of the tales. When Dreams Travel provides Dunyazad and Dilshad, the silent figures of the Arabian nights, with the opportunity to create their own Ericture feminine. As a result, they are able to successfully proclaim their identity

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as women via the use of their magic-realistic stories. In accordance with Rama Kundu's assertions, the author rewrites "the macrocosmic metanarrative of the 1001 nights, from a postmodern context of feminism and metafiction."

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that Githa Hariharan's Fugitive Histories is an excellent representation of the postmodern state of fragmentation. This is achieved via the novel's thematic themes as well as its narrative strategies. A non-linear, fragmented structure that depicts the intricacies of current life is adopted by the novel, which breaks from the conventional methods of narrative that are linear in nature. In a society that is characterised by community conflicts and cultural diversity, this fragmented narrative is a reflection of the identities of individuals who are struggling to find purpose and stability in their interactions with one another. A profound feeling of alienation and loss of self is experienced by the characters in the story as a result of social, religious, and political disputes. This is especially true when the work is set against the background of events such as the Gujarat riots that occurred in 2002. A portrayal of lived realities, in which people are bound between many identities and competing ideologies, is brought to light by the research, which demonstrates that fragmentation is not only a stylistic decision but rather a representation of it. Furthermore, the book places a strong emphasis on voices that are marginalised, particularly those of women, who fight against oppression and make an effort to recreate their identities via the use of memory and speech. As a result, the findings of the study demonstrate that postmodern fiction, which is exemplified in this particular piece of work, incorporates fragmentation as a method of depicting the fragmented character of human life and undermines the notion of a united and cohesive reality.

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