

privileged class who gain access and control over their bodies. Burhimai echoes the author's outlook when she says:

People come to the prostitutes to fulfill their carnal desires. They behave with them like animals and they appease their desires using brutal force...faith does not shelter you, law does not identify you. Grief or pain, esteem or honour, past or future nothing belongs to you...A prostitute begets no mercy, she finds no standing in society...While being with a prostitute a man is not normal. They come to prostitutes to be the personality which they cannot normally be (77).

In a well researched article titled "Pornography" Andrea Dworkin calls our attention to recognize representation of woman in male vision. She asserts that men have created 'the group, the type, the concept, the epithet, the insult, the industry, the trade, the commodity, the reality of woman as whore' (Dworkin:1997:326).

In the male system, women are sex; sex is the whore. The whore is porn, the lowest whore, the whore who belongs to all male citizens...Having her is having pornography...Using her is using pornography. Wanting her is means wanting pornography. Being her means being pornography (Dworkin: 1997:327)

Subala is not a pornographic study of a whore's life nor is it a thriller offering cheap titillation. Forcefully challenging Dworkin's assertion, the narrative is, as Hem Barua has said, a powerfully told story of sex that 'describes the grimness and misery, physical squalor and spiritual emptiness associated with the world of prostitution with enviable insight and intimacy' (Barua: 210).

End Notes:

1. A powerful Assamese novelist of the post war period Homen Bargohain started writing from his early childhood and continues influencing societal ideals with his critical writing in the present times also. A prolific writer in all fields of literature he has written poems, short stories, novels and a host of articles which reveal his journalistic panache. His short stories and novels are remarkable for their strong realism and naturalistic outlook and they depict a shift from the regular confines of subject and characterization in contemporary Assamese literature.
2. All translations from the novel are my own.
3. An old woman is reverentially called burhimai which means grandmother or old mother.
4. Commonly known as Munia bird, it belongs to the mannikin and waxbill groups(family Estrildidae, order Passeriformes).

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Some Tanka Poems

- Rajkamal Shiromani

(in the highest classical tradition of Japanese Prosody: 5-7-5-7-5 syllables)

Innocent childhood
arrogant youth, suffering
adulthood, helpless
old age, physically weak
and mentally shocked!

You kept on calling
and I switching my cell off
You wanted to talk
But I'd only broken sounds,
and syllables, and words.

What's happening now
in the autumn of my life?
The withering leaves
struggling to stick to the branches
braving gales and storms.

Were we two or one?
The whole morphology
changed, the plural we
became a singular one
a new derivation.

Dead Phonology,
Lost Morphology, syntax
and all Semantics.
The birth of a new dialect
with sighs, oops, and ouch!

From the ABC
straight away to XYZ
who cares D to W
That's the flight of love
in this world of stress.

A night of no moon
yet so bright, sparkling with stars
twinkling soft music
unheard, dancing body all in flames
'Tandava',* full of grace!

Gulmarg* was all white
that December afternoon,
all frozen inside, outside
except the warm blood
in our naked veins.

Were you right or I
I still know not, nor do you.
Why keep suffering
for a past that is long dead?
Let's now start afresh.

The bright moon dancing
with the high tide in the sea
and playing hide n seek
with clouds in a dense forest;
Nature, you are great!

Fugitive Histories: A Reading in New Historicism

- A. Marie Josephine Aruna

Abstract

Githa Hariharan's fiction *Fugitive Histories* lends itself to a new historicist reading in terms of its thematic and narrative technicality. Writing in this postmodern/postcolonial era, Hariharan centers her text on the issue of communal disharmony embedded in the post independent nation-state that India is with its claims of secularism as its democratic principle. *Fugitive Histories* deals with the aftermath of the communal violence of 2002 in Godhra which results in the dislocation of a whole community that is marginalized within its own country. Sara the protagonist records the testimonials of the women who are the worst sufferers of the historical event so as to recreate the actual situation in the perspective of the victims. Hariharan in the process attempts at reconstructing history that has been written by those in power, challenging its ideology that is defined so finitely as the single truth. She seems to say that there are several other perspectives to history, that it is fugitive and shifting.

Keywords: history, power, women, nation-state, India, secular and reconstruct.

All my novels and stories look at power politics in some way or the other. Fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations - Githa Hariharan

Githa Hariharan's latest oeuvre, *Fugitive Histories* (2009) subtly opens up the presence of all the differences, given within a postcolonial nation-state as India. Staring us starkly in the face is the 'reality' that the colonial world bequeathed to us a legacy- that of the Partition, the one historical/ political event the ghosts of which haunt us in our personal, social, and cultural conduct of every day life. That India is a secular country, in that it recognizes and acknowledges the different identities of its subjects might be true, but the underlying issue, however, is the internal power structure in a multi-cultural social set up, that is most often ignored.

New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. New Historicism developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic Stephen Greenblatt, gaining widespread influence in the 1990s and beyond. New Historicists aim simultaneously to understand the work through its historical context

and to understand cultural as well as to investigate the intellectual history and cultural history through literature. In other words, New Historicism aims at interpreting a literary text as an expression of or reaction to the power-structures of the surrounding society. *Fugitive Histories* can be read by applying the tenets of New Historicism, which discourse is informed by the Foucauldian concept of power and Louis Montrose's 'historicity of the text' and 'textual history'. The text deals with the particular historical event of 2002 (the Godhra incident in which a whole compartment of Hindus were burnt down). What the writer does is to look at this past incident not only to recreate it but also to rebuild/ reconstruct the entire event through various other viewpoints mainly those of the victims, thereby reinstating the New Historicist theory that history is not homogeneous, it is rather fleeting, shifting and constructed by those in power. The textual discourse therefore does not exist in a vacuum, but is influenced by the discourses of historical /social/ cultural/ political milieus that are drawn into its context. Received history is tampered with and rewritten from a women centered perspective. For history has it, that in any kind of war or unrest it is the women and children who are the worst sufferers. It is but inevitable that Hariharan weaves her tale through her women characters.

The text is divided into three parts with significant titles 'Missing Persons', 'Crossing Boundaries', and 'Funeral Rites'. At the surface level the author speaks of the death of Asad an artist, missed by his wife Mala, who ruminates over their hybrid marriage (Asad a muslim, and Mala a hindu). She tries to reconstruct their past life and Asad the person himself through some of his drawings which she has unearthed only after his death. Mala is yet to come to terms with the missing husband from her life, though this is only the result of natural death. Theirs is a marriage that signifies the post independent secular state that the nation is. On the other hand, we have the missing persons from the aftermath of the godhra incident, innocent people like Akbar who simply disappear from their homes probably arrested by the state police on the pretext of terrorism, or killed in orchestrated encounters. As Yasmin, Akbar's sister reflects about her missing brother: "Missing is not so bad, it is better than dead It's the first time Abba saw that being dead meant being cut. It meant missing a body part - an arm, a leg, even a head" (FH 136-137). The incident as such is brought to us by Sara's friend Nina who makes a documentary script which reconstructs the past of how on the fatal day the Sabarmati Express was attacked in Godhra station. The Hindu activists inside the train were burnt alive. This happens in a Muslim locality; therefore the Muslims of Gujarat become the target of brutal violence. As a result,

To this day the dispossessed of Gujarat live in 'safe areas'- Muslim Ghettoes- without civic amenities. In Ahmedabad, for instance, people who used to be part of the city's life-bakers, autodrivers, shopkeepers, engineers, schoolteachers- are now refugees in their own city.(42)

Nina's documentary in reconstructing history takes into account the stories of some of these people in their own voices, what the state has done or didn't do to change their situation, and how these people are now trying to rebuild their lives. This leads us into the second part of the text where Sara, Maya and Asad's daughter accompanies Nina in her field trip to Gujarat, where they record the multiple voices of women victims who witnessed the violence in the aftermath of Godhra. These are the women who have either been raped by perpetrators of violence, or have totally lost their brothers, sons, husbands, or find them missing. Their homes have been burnt and they have been uprooted from their living places to Ghettos for safety. Hariharan also refers inadvertently to another past incident that of the 1992-93 Mumbai riots when her friend Laila and her husband were burnt to death. Laila, Sara's childhood friend is described by her in this ironic manner:

It was as if her parents had unknowingly typecast her by naming her Laila, starting her on the road to romance. Laila took the name to heart, built fantasies around herself; it was impossible for her to be anything but a romantic heroine. In the end, of course, her name made her someone else; someone in whom the men who lit the fires saw nothing romantic or heroic; all she had, in their eyes, was a religion. (53)

The name that meant one thing to Laila and her parents meant something else for others. To those others 'Laila' symbolized the religion they hated, representing the postcolonial 'other', the marginalized within the nation-state. The process of making of the nation-state involves the shaping of the 'self' on the one hand as well as defining of the 'other'. In such a given situation then hostilities and prejudices are not only hardened but get deeply embedded.

In 'Crossing Borders', at the personal level again, we have Mala and Asad who form the resistance from within the powerful structures of neatly divided religious borders, and yet who have been successful. They are the subversion that power contains within itself. On the other hand we have Sara and Nina literally crossing borders within the nation/ state/ district, moving from the Hindu area to the Muslim area where lines/ borders are drawn to demarcate/ discriminate/ distinguish and separate the two peoples/ cultures/ based on religion. This very fact serves to undermine the idea of a secular state. According to Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism draws heavily on ethnography and also storytelling wherein people's experiences are recorded. In this case Sara's own interpretations and involvement with the issue is described with great sensitivity. Yasmin is the young girl, with whom Sara identifies, understands that stories are of different kinds as are the storytellers. But on this occasion the story she narrates to Sara is real, a story in which she has to live for the rest of her life. A host of women gather in Yasmin's small one room home- even after five years of the actual incident these women keep it live in their memories, the trauma, the pain and the