



Secularism in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*

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Secularism is one of the most effective elements for constructing a modern state. It is one of our country's essential ideals, as reinforced by the national movement and the Republic's founding fathers. A secular spirit or inclination is defined as a system of political or social philosophy that opposes religions faith and worship. It also maintains that public education and other aspects of civil policy should be carried out without regard to religious beliefs. The term is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "the belief that laws, education etc. should be based on facts, science etc. rather than religion" (1062). Secularism is the keystone of a modern secular state since it introduces science, technology and rationalism into society. It must resist and struggle against the clergy and powerful interests in society during this process. As a result, communal onslaughts by fundamentalists are the other of secularism and reformation. The oppressed segments join the secular movement in order to grab the associated liberal space, which can serve as springboard for their rights struggles.

In the Indian context secularism should imply respect for non-coercive and pluralism and a voluntary resource to change. In the name of unity, no democratic society can repudiate diversity and plurality. It will be easier to mount public pressure against religious Killers and those who propagate hatred of secularism insist on people's inherent rights and due process of law. The fight for secularism and democracy must also be fought at the roots, where a set of ideals generating strong idealism is essential is organise and prepare the masses for struggle. Secularism begins in the heart of each individual. There should be no feeling of 'otherness' because we all have a common heritage. India is a traditional society with many customs that owe their origins in part of several religions. It survives here and its polity has managed to maintain its secular character that so far. Ours is a civilization in which Sufis and Bhakti saints have brought cultural appearance for one another.

Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*, her most popular novel, is set in a world of recent religious turmoil in India. The story explores how prejudice has impacted the lives of people across the nation. The author relates the characters with disharmonious events taking place through their visions, fantasies and memories. Mala, a conservative Tamil Brahmin, names a Muslim boy Asad and settles in New Delhi. The two incidents of the Babri Masjid demolition in 1990 and Gujarat Carriage in 2002. These two events are viewed as the most serious warning to the secular identity of India. The author opines through the novel that asserting majority alone is not a way to consolidate Indian identity. In this context Kakar observes; "The story of the Hindu-Muslim relations takes a different hue depending on the colours of the ideologies lenses through which it is viewed ... to the conservative Hindu nationalist ... the rift between two communities is a fundamental fact of Indian history ..." (20) Sara is presented by Githa Hariharan as the ideal secular citizen of India. In order to gather information for her documentary film, she travels to Ahmadabad to speak with victims of the Gujarat massacres. The victims loss their life, their asserts, and their peace of mind. They migrate to the so-called safe-for-Muslims zone after witnessing horrific atrocities in their community. For the time being, the mayhem has subsided on the surface. However it has a long-lasting impact on the sufferer's mind, spanning days, months and even years. The people from the minority community are fermented repeatedly not recognizing them the citizen of the nation. Sara and Nina interview families and individuals who lived through the brutal destruction. Noorjehan wails on this condition, "They brunt my

husband, they burnt my father, they brunt my son ... Now give us our men back, give us our children back. All those they took away with made-up charges. Give us our missing ones, out lost ones” (Hariharan 162). The inquiry depicts how Muslim women were the worst affected in the Gujarat pogrom either as rape victims or because of mutilation and murder. It seems that religious fundamentalism which is the superficial cause of creating divides is only the top of iceberg and it latent beneath it a host of deeper animosities and differences at the socio-political level. The lesson learned is that prejudices must not condition our responses the trouble caused by hidden agendas and forces. As Hariharan states in an interview given to S. Bageshree; “... Fugitive Histories looks at these familiar ideas in a more personal, private way. It presents the mosaic of lives that collide in unhappy ways, but also in ways that produce love, passion and tenderness. A lot of people with liberal ideas would not hesitate to formally condemn prejudice against a community” (Web www.thenindee.com).

The treat to secularism is focused through character of Asad who had a clear vision of it and the equality of all religions before the Gujarat riots. But the Gujarat pogrom shatter the illusion of secularism and Asad visualizes that a Muslim will remain a Muslim because people are prejudiced, divided and biased on the basis of their religious sentiments. He is deeply miffed and ruptured because the carriage shattered his faith in the equality of religions. He delineates his feelings through his sketches. The pogrom has deep impact on his mind. He opines to Mala: “we have marched all over lives and nothing has changed or it’s changed for the worse” (Hariharan 215). He cannot tolerate the cruelties which are inflicted on the Muslims. Homi J. Bhabha stipulates: “Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time, and only fully realise their horizons in the mind’s eye” (1). The detailed narrative of Yasmin raises another significant question. How safe are minorities in a so-called secular, democratic country? One of the characters in the novel, Yasmin, is a youngster who was a victim of the Gujarat atrocities. Her brother had died, and her father had lost his business and their comfortable home. The victims of the insurrection are taken to a rehabilitation centre. The family is ridiculed at their attempt to register the loss of boy in the police station. Secularism in India is a muddled and contradictory notion, as both fundamentalists and liberals promote their own narratives. Rajeshwari Sundar and Anuradha Needham describe this phenomenon: “The Indian state has chosen to interpret secularism differently; it has undertaken the charge to ensure the protection of all religious. It is therefore makes a huge investment in matters of religion, unlike any nation in the west- for example, by administering religious trusts, declaring national holidays for religious festivals, preserving the system of different personal laws for different communities, undertaking the reform of religious law and so on. This raises the problem of where the boundaries of state secularism are to be drawn” (20).

Asad has always been an ardent secularist. He married a Hindu woman and had two children Sara and Samar. He did not believe in the strictness of his religion. He was a socialist who had been influenced by Marx. Asad had a dream, the dream that made him say: “You didn’t have to worry about whether you were Indian Muslim or Muslim Indian, or part Hindu, or atheist by default, it was enough just to be you?” (Hariharan 79). Asad was constantly conflating the needs of the entire globe with the needs of people’s needs. He responded to Sara’s revelation that she will be taking up a job to combat social evils by declaring: “You had nothing to fight for now you do these is a battle going on. A war the every wants to tell people whether they are Muslim or Hindu or Christian or something else, as if people no longer know themselves. Let’s see how your do in this new war” (Hariharan 100). Samar is the son of Hindu-Muslim parents, and is taught that they are not confined to religious identities : “Asad may have told us we’re not Muslim or Hindu, but the rest of the world only has to hear our last name” (Hariharan 99). Though *Fugitive Histories* deals with conflict between Hindu-Muslim it also depicts somewhere harmony could be maintained. The perfect conciliation and harmony is seen on the way of Sara to Yasmin’s home. The temple and the mosque which are symbolic of two different religions co-exist harmoniously.

The novel is a progressive critique of fascist communal forces. It also envisage and product the present day’s violations of human rights based on various pretexts, which have effectively put the entire world under siege and turned it into the heart of darkness. We need to develop a more liberal and pluralistic image of the world, a world where people of different origins, nationalities and backgrounds do not battle, denounce or belittle one another, but live in perfect amity and perfect unison. This must be maintained in order to preserve the survival of the human race as whole. Each religion is a force that strives for the benefit of mankind. Each faith is required to appeal to the wide range of human temperaments. In this novel Githa Hariharan discussed amply prove that secularism ensures citizen’s freedom. But in the hands of fanatics, the hopes of secularists live entirely destroyed.

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