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**ANALYZING THE ‘ABJECT’: A NEGOTIATION THROUGH EXTREMISM  
AND SUBALTERNITY IN AMITAVA KUMAR’S  
HUSBAND OF A FANATIC**

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**Abstract:** The inter-communal violence that happened in the Western state of Gujarat in 2002 has been one of the deadliest communal violence happened in post-millennia India. Amitava Kumar’s political novel *Husband of a Fanatic* (2004), delineates the lives of survivors living in the government relief camps in the aftermath of communal violence. The paper argues that through the employment of grotesque images and figures in the narratives, the author manages to draw horror and revulsion to the readers wherein these figures construe as ‘abject’ (Ilott 2014, 664). Drawing upon the theory of ‘abjection’ by Julia Kristeva (1980), the paper analyzes the figures of abjection employed in the narratives of the novel that crudely depicts the survivor’s physical viscera and camp life in the aftermath of the violence. Furthermore, the paper analyzes how the sufferings and trauma caused by the communal violence opens up the debate on extremism and subalternity in the novel. Through the close reading methodology, the article provides a fresh analysis into the postcolonial literary trajectories of abjection, extremism and subalternity.

**Key words:** Abject, Communal Violence, Gujarat riots, Extremism, Subalternity.

## 1. The Gujarat communal violence

In the domain of postcolonial literature, communal violence in South Asia have been a subject matter for solemn discussions and analysis for it not only delineates the individual's pain and suffering but also the collective consciousness of the masses that suffer at large from the consequences of it. In the Indian literary canon, partition authors have thoroughly negotiated the post violence trauma of the victims and have vehemently negotiated and provided narratives pertaining to the causes and aftereffects of such tragic incidents. Politically, the Indian subcontinent of South Asia, continue to witness such account of communal violence even today on daily basis because different religious communities that live and coexist together as a society. Critics have argued that the communal clashes in India has become a regular phenomenon so much so that it is often not covered or "noted in the press" (Brass 2006, 6). In India, the Hindus and Muslims have always remained at loggerheads on religious political orientations since India's partition with Pakistan happened on religious lines and so, the communal divide between the Hindus and the Muslims continue to have a major mark on its socio-political image to this day. Therefore, the communal violence in the Indian subcontinent and particularly India has a perpetual existence (Brass 2006, 6; Wilkinson 2004, 12).

The narratives of communal violence in India made their way into the postcolonial literary space for a very long time since the major communal violence came about during the partition (Kaushar 354). Their tales of horrors and survival have made their way to public domain through varied artistic representation on celluloids, documentaries and multiple literatures. What is common in these narratives is the post violence trauma of the victims that formed its core. In the light of the post millennia communal violence of South Asia and India in particular, the intercommunal violence of Gujarat in the year 2002 is one of the deadliest and controversial event that not only dented the 'secular' image of India but also provided an insight into deepening communal resentment between Hindus and Muslims who forms the major part of the Indian populace. Being the largest democracy in the world, India's socio-political imagery along with multitudes of diversity is a manifestation of the country's vast pluralistic ideals that also remains a testament to its secular credentials on world stage. However, the religious diversity also brought up the challenges like the varied religious conflict and violence especially among the Hindu-Muslim community that continue to dent its 'secular' image at global fora. All the same, the history of communal violence is relatively not old in India. During the colonial times, the country witnessed few incidences of communal violence as these communities were mostly united in their fight against the British rule (Wilkinson 2004,

10), however, political critics notes down the fact that after the partition of India and Pakistan, there has been surge of communal-violence in "post-colonial times" (Wilkinson 2004, 12).

The communal violence between Hindu and Muslims in the western state of Gujarat had been one of the most volatile and sweepingly controversial Hindu-Muslim communal conflict in post-millennia India that occurred in the year 2002. To briefly sum up and to provide an encyclopedic information of the event, official record claims that some 1044 people were killed in the violence, majority of whom were from the minority community in a majority Hindu dominated state. Reports of state negligence were widely published in the media which majorly focused on the state's inefficiency to curb on the perpetrators of the violence which led to wide scale of loot, murder and rapes. Most of the survivors left their homes in the aftermath and several colonies were deserted by them as their houses were vandalized or burnt down. Political observers note down that "at the height of the violence, there were as many as 125,000 refugees in these camps" (Gerstein et al 2007, 366; Jaffrelot 2003, 6). The violence of Gujarat remains a blot on India's social democratic fabric and remains the most debated and controversial communal violence to ever taken place in India after the horrors of partition. Even to this day, the survivors are still looking for to get 'justice' from the apex court and their tales of sufferings are negotiated and analyzed through multiple forums concerning art, literature and popular culture. In the contemporary Indian literature, writers who witnessed or experienced the horrors first hand have broadly discussed about the political motif and consequences broadly approaching the 'realist' method to draw their own experiences in their literary works. Meanwhile, Gujarat communal violence features prominently in the works of Raj Kumar Jha's *Fireproof* (2008), Harsh Mander's *Fear and Forgiveness* (2009), Manoj Mitta's *The Fiction of Factfinding* (2014), Robin David's *City of Fear* (2008) etc. Most of these literary works are non-fiction while some chose to fictionalize the characters while keeping the events in its actuality.

One of the grimmest portrayal of Gujarat communal violence is found in the work of Amitava Kumar's political novel *Husband of a Fanatic* (2004). The novel, upon its publication, garnered much media attention due to its raw depiction of the violent affected areas and also the interviews of the victims and survivors living in the government relief camp. However, its critical analysis remains absent in the academia where the crude representation of the dead and the victims draw horror and revulsion to the readers which is a feature of the gothic and horror text. The novel offers an insight into the life of the survivors who are mostly from the minority community and are living as refugees in the government relief camp in the aftermath of Gujarat communal violence. What stands out in these narratives is the author's portrayal of the physicality of the dead as well as the survivors that ultimately draw a sense of 'disgust' to the

readers. The current article proposes that these crude representations of the bodily marks and injuries of the victims can be construed as the figures of 'abjection' in the narratives of Amitava Kumar. Professor Sarah Ilott (2014), in her analysis on Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* contends that Jha in his novel has employed 'abjection' as a political tool where the characters are understood in bodily terms rather than symbols of religious affiliation (Ilott 2014, 664). Drawing on the similar idea of abjection by Ilott that is grounded on Kristeva's theoretical formulation, my paper argue that Kumar's employment of visceral body parts and crude imagery of the violence has been done deliberately by the author to evoke the repugnance from the readers that also outlines his political subjectivity."

Julia Kristeva (1980) in her seminal work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* argues that the 'abject' is something that is part of one's physicality but isn't required anymore and draw revulsion. Kristeva describes abjection as 'the repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery' (Kristeva 1980: 2). Her description of abjection is evocative, and vast in scope. Robbie Duschinsky is of the view that Kristeva's work promises profound insight on a range of important topics: the construction of identity; the operation of language; the meaning of negative emotions; the psychology of phobia; horror narratives as a literary genre, the repudiation and oppression of outsiders, violence against women, *inter alia*. As a result, Kristeva's concept of 'abjection' has been widely used in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Duschinsky 2013, 711). I propose that these portrayals of the physical viscera of the victims are the figures of abjection that the author has employed in the novel where the author's own' disgust is transferred to the reader where he succeeds in drawing the same reaction from the readers. The paper argues that it is not only the physical marks that forms the figure of 'abjection' in the narrative but the physical abjection is culminated into the social abjection for the people of minority community who become an object of contempt in the civil society post the communal violence. The paper would first examine the political backdrop of the event and the causes of perpetual disharmony between the two communities in India which is very important to analyze the hypothesis of the present article. The social exclusion of the minorities also opens up a debate on subalternity and subaltern space of which these victims are very much part of. The paper also discusses the role that extremism play in fomenting hatred and violence and how their strong presence is a bigger factor in projecting the 'minorities' as the symbol of national 'abjection' who become the figure of social contempt in the aftermath of the communal violence.

## 2. The Hindu-Muslim rift: the political slant and 'extremism'

India has a long history of communal violence since its independence from the British rule as the partition of India and Pakistan came about on religious lines i.e. Hindus and Muslims, where majority Hindu formed the union of India while Muslims preferred the union of Pakistan. Fundamentally, the bifurcation of the union of India and Pakistan wasn't just a single day idea propounded by the British. The country witnessed communal friction even in its pre-colonial times and critics suggest that the British used this friction between the two communities for their political advantage (Wilkinson 2004, 11). In the novel *Husband of a Fanatic*, Kumar delves into the history of communal violence in India and before coming to his own political conclusion on how communal violence affects the common men which is engineered by the extremism, the author takes the course of India's history where he brings into various and most controversial events pertaining to religious conflicts. The author discusses the communal violence that occurred immediately after the formation of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Sikh pogrom in Delhi after the death of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the year 1984 and the communal violence that occurred in response to the Babri mosque demolition in 1992. Political observers have contended that "religion played the key role in these particular historical disasters" (Deb 2011, 215). And the communal violence in India never seized from then.

Critics have argued that the communal violence after the partition in India has been 'political' in nature where the political parties have a major role to fan the violence. In his research on communal conflict in India, Paul Brass notes down that most of these communal violence are "anticipated" (Brass 2006, 324) and there are elements that plan and contribute to these creation of communal tension that results into violence. He further explains the process of its consolidation which begins with the spread of fake news and provocation that ultimately culminates into violence. This play a crucial role in fanning the deep rooted insecurities of the 'other' community. In the context of South Asia and India in particular, sporadic communal violence continues to affect its large populace till today. In the novel, Kumar highlights how the train burning at Godhra and subsequent rumors fueled the large scale violence against the 'supposed' community that believed to have burned down the train carrying the Hindu *karsewakas* who were returning from the Hindu holy city of Ayodhya on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2002 resulting into the deaths of 58 Hindu pilgrims. The author provides a brief backdrop of the incident hinting at the possible political hands behind this intercommunal violence. On the gravity of the violence noted Booker prize winning author and political activist Arundhati Roy asserts that pogroms and communal violence are not new to India's social spheres and every violence is directed at "particular castes, tribes, religious faiths" but was

despondent over the gravity of violence unearthed during the Gujarat riots. For she claimed that none of the communal violence in the postmodern India has been “as macabre as the one in Gujarat” (Roy 2009, 37).

In the Indian context, the communal disharmony is often ‘driven by politics’ which has the potential to “polarize the electorate” that reaps dividend to the political parties” (Froystad 452, Jaffrelot 2003, 8; Wilkinson 2004, 22) and communal friction between the Hindu and Muslims are politically driven that play a crucial role in mobilizing the electorate (Wilkinson 2004, 22). In the novel, the author further suggests in his narratives that the Muslims citizens are under constant threat which also reflects the fraught nationalistic politics in contemporary India. These clashes often electorally have benefitted politicians and critics argue that the Hindu nationalistic parties in India has been its main beneficiary (Jaffrelot 2003, 7; Dhattiwala and Biggs 2002, 485; Iyer and Shrivastava 2018, 6-7). Scholars and political activists have argued that the extremism in the Indian subcontinent is driven by radical politics where the citizens of the ‘minority’ community suffers the most. In the context of India, a majority Hindu state, the Muslims become the kernel of the communal victimhood. In the case of Gujarat violence, the minority were specifically targeted and became the center of majoritarian furor during the violence. Extremism in India continue to hamper its social fabric and especially when the communal tensions are high. Historically, the Partition of India led to the rise of extremism across the borders which, according to political analyst, also led to “a witch hunt and pogrom against its large Muslim community in 2002” (Appadurai 2006, 112). The eminent professor Arjun Appadurai suggests that the state of Gujarat which has a fairly dominating Hindu community has moved it into a state of “majoritarian rage” and the state is still a “crucible for political hatred against Muslims and for state-sponsored fear of Pakistan” (Appadurai 2006, 110). The communal violence between Hindu-Muslim have been “endemic” in India since its independence from the British occurring in many parts of the country, however, it has been rampant in the “northern and western” part of India. Critics have pointed out that the ‘minority’ class suffer more in these violence as their number of populace is less and they suffer more through the ‘hegemonic’ culpability of the majority community (Williamson 8). Even in the aftermath, the people from ‘minority’ community continue to suffer emotionally, economically, physically as well as socially.

### 3. Figures of ‘abjection’ in *Husband of a Fanatic*

As much to the controversy associated with the backdrop of the communal violence, Kumar’s narrative in the novel has been hard-hitting

and crude in its representational aspects. Unlike the conventional representational figures negotiated by the most authors who manage to soften the tone of their representation and explication, Kumar follows a different approach where the author depicts the scene as what he saw and felt. What he does is that while explicating the figures of the dead or the injured survivors, the narratives are presented in minute details of their physicality that plausibly generate a disgusting reaction to the readers reading it. The author employs visceral horror and bodily injuries to represent his own personal disgust. I propose that the author brings in these figures of abject into his narratives in order to impart more complexities in his literary expression that also opens a space for more critical enquiry into it. While approaching a reportage narrative form of what he himself witnessed, experienced and observed in and around on a visit to the riot-affected areas, the narratives vividly portray the horror, visuals of the dead, burnt bodies, the injury marks of the survivors representing it cruder in all its aspect. It can be construed in one of the description of a riot videos that he sees before meeting the survivors, this is how the author narrates, „At first glance, the dead did not look like the dead. The burnt bodies with puffy, light-colored lip, and holes where there had been eyes, resembled the rich customers at expensive, exotic spas, covered with ugly mud which has been fortified with minerals. It was only when the camera moved closer or travelled down that you were shocked by the brightness of the exposed intestines or testicles blown up on the computer screen. It was yellow in color. No one in the room said anything. These are the small ways in which genocide becomes mysterious: why does the flesh inside the chest of a men- or perhaps a woman, it was impossible to tell- take on a rich yellow hue when the rest of the body is burnt black?“ (Kumar 2004, 4).

The scene narrated by Kumar is grotesque and the references of dead bodies and their description make an allusion to the literary gothic tropes employed by the author. I argue that the narrative structure of the gory video in all its probability is done to draw revulsion to the readers so that the readers feel the disgust as the way the author had felt and wants the same kind of reaction from its readers. The author in no way had tried to tone down the narrative description of the visuals and elaborated them the way he saw without being manipulative. The narratives here offer an unexpurgated commentary about the dead, the burnt bodies and skin, severed limbs, holes, exposed body parts and other bodily viscera that instantly draw a sense of horror to the readers. In the literary domain, these grotesque representation of bodily viscera has been for long used in gothic and horror texts where pain and trauma are major themes. The grotesque image narrated by Kumar allude to what Julia Kristeva considers as 'abjection'. She argues that "abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be"

(Kristeva 1980, 10). It alludes to those substances that are 'cast off' and 'corpse' is one of the primary examples of such reaction which essentially draw a feeling of horror. She puts it, "The corpse, seen without God ... is the utmost of abjection" (Kristeva 1980, 4). The theory provides an important aspect for understanding the reaction towards physical viscera and other relatable aspects that remain on the threshold often employed in horror and gothic texts. Kumar's political novel *Husband of a Fanatic* follows the same canonical pattern in order to generate revulsive reaction from the readers. Being a first-hand observer to the violence inflicted sites, the author is disgusted to note the intensity of violence that had occurred. He had not toned down the description of what he witnessed, this has been done deliberately by the author as he wants to draw the same kind of disgust to be generated by the readers while reading the narratives so that the readers know the 'horrors' of the intercommunal violence.

There are other tropes of abjection employed by the author in the narratives. As Kristeva suggests that abject alludes to separating the ones that is not required anymore i.e. to excrete the self. Here the survivors living in the camps, mostly from the minority community, becomes the 'unwanted' citizen who are no more required in the civil society that is basically dominated by the majority class. Thus, they become the figure of abjection in the novel or can be well construed as the figures of 'social' abject. What we see now is that there is a transition of 'abject' figures where it is not only the physical viscera and injuries of the victims that construct the 'abject' but the citizens who become unwanted in the civil society, in this case, the Muslims. Here the 'abject' shift towards the 'own' people of the civil society who becomes the 'other' during the violence. There is this transition of physical abject to internal abject in the society where minority citizens are seen as 'cast off'. The author throw light on how they are often compelled to hide their identity while using public transportation and their school going children faces discrimination by majority Hindu teachers in school. Political activist and author Arundhati Roy contends that the Gujarat violence was a 'planned pogrom' that was "unleashed against the Muslim community" in which the "arsonists burned and looted shops, homes, hotels, textile mills, buses, and private cars belonging to Muslims" (Roy 2009, 31-32). Dr. B.V Muralidhar writes that "never in any of the communal riots of the past, there was such a furious outburst of violence as witnessed in this against one community" (Muralidhar 2004, 5). The motivated target of this specific community rendered them as socially 'abject'. What Roy pinpoints is the political agency connected to this intercommunal violence which eventually culminates the Muslim citizens as socially 'abject' in the novel. They are, as Professor Sarah Ilott puts it, rendered "politically abject by the murderous troupe" i.e. the majority Hindu radical crowd during the violence (Ilott 2014, 670). This critical explanation by these scholars and



activists is important to comprehend the hegemony of the majority class atrocities during the communal violence as is palpable in the case of Gujarat violence.

#### 4. 'Voiceless' subaltern and the social abject

In the novel, Kumar highlights the plight of the survivors living in the government camps whose houses or shops were burnt down. Most had lost some of their family members while some themselves suffered the physical injuries. The narratives basically focalize on the traumatic side of the Muslim women survivors living in camps. Subsequently also throwing light on the life in the aftermath of violence where common citizens are coerced to lead a life of refugee in their own land. Even at the relief camps, there is no end to their misery. The survivors not only have to bear the brunt of losing their loved ones but also there is a lack of emotional support from their peers and the poor rehabilitation programs only adds to their misery. The representation of survivors calls forth the voices of 'subaltern' in this novel.

In the novel *Husband of a Fanatic*, Kumar convincingly portrays their 'silence' of the survivors where their voices are never expressed through media or nobody from the government officials basically cares for them. Rosalind Morris throw light on her critical definition and opines that even though the 'subaltern' take pains to the death to speak, they are not heard because of their "silencing, censoring and appropriations of the archive" and as such "subaltern is a predicament, not an identity; an obstruction from accessing power and voice" (Morris 2010, 8). There have been discrepancies in the articulation of subalternity for it is a subject matter that has been evolving since its inception. While the major conclusion is based on the definition as an "experiential space" which is populated by non-elite groups (Stoler 2009, 25) the other is its analytical definition of silence and unknowable locations. But the narratives complicate the fundamentals of subalternity as these survivors whose voices are 'not' heard or 'speak' against the government ultimately 'voices' their pain and sufferings to the author. For Spivak, it portends to the voiceless marginal that stands in contrasts with the survivors of the communal violence living in the camps of Ahmedabad. Thus, the survivors living in the government camps become the subaltern with a 'voice'. The author asserts that sectarian violence has a very deep rooted impact on the social structure of Indian society as it serves to communalize the very space where a community has lived for a long time. With their pain and trauma, Kumar indicates their subalternity.

Though often subaltern are associated with victimhood, Kumar through this portrayal of women victims negotiates their sexual subalternity. In the chapter 'Wedding in a Camp,' the author speaks to the

female survivors at the camp where they didn't shy away from narrating their tale to a stranger like him. One of the survivor named Razia Bano was "flung in fire after being raped" and she showed the "huge gashes on her back" and before he could say anything she "lifted" her sari and showed the wound on her left thigh where the doctors had taken "skin for grafting" (Kumar 2004, 5). Critics often have argued that the communal violence in the Indian subcontinent is 'gendered' where the most affected are the women. The assaulted female body becomes a synonym of the maimed physicality of the nation through which the subaltern lends her voices of pain and trauma. Arvinder Ansari writes that the "communal ideology" functions through their infliction upon women's bodies as it "legitimizes the regulation of their sexuality and their silencing" (Ansari 2012, 64). The author in the novel describes how the women survivors were curious to narrate their sordid tales when he visited them. Among the victims, there were minor girls who he felt were too naïve to comprehend the brutality of their assault. He narrates one anecdote where a little girl in the camp was asked by the fact finding team if she knew the meaning of the word "balatkaar", a nine-year-old girl replied, "*Mein Bataoon Didi? Balatkar ka Matlab jab aurat ko nanga karte hain aur phir use jala dete hain* (Shall I tell you, Didi? Rape is when a woman is stripped naked and then burnt" (Kumar 2004, 6). The author brings in other stories of women who faced such brutal sexual assault and witnessed their closed ones killed before their eyes. Similarly, in the chapter 'The Blind Men,' the author narrates how he had witnessed the familiar scenario of communal violence that happened in Bhagalpur where women were raped, killed or grievously injured. Kumar had visited Logain as a journalist to make a report on the communal violence. The violence was incited by fake news and rumors which cost thousand lives and it was mainly the women who suffered more in the aftermath. He met a 14-year-old girl whose right leg was amputated by a "Hindu mob with a machete". She was the only witness to a mass murder that took place in her village called Chanderi where sixty-one people were killed. She was "offered money" and later threatened by the perpetrators to whom she named in her "witness report" (Kumar 2004, 289). Bunni Begum, another victim that he met, had her fingers "crooked- with one or two of them missing-because she had tried to push away the award that the attacker had pressed against her throat" (Kumar 2004, 308). The injuries draw a deep sense of revulsion to the author where he feels disgusted and aghast. In order to generate the similar disgusted reaction from the author, the author vividly portray the incidences and the victim's injuries which portends to bodily 'abject' ultimately causing disgust to the readers. This facilitate the author's intention to garner empathy from the readers who gets to know the pain and sufferings of the survivors through this grotesque description.

## 5. Relief camp: a subaltern space

Another trope of subalternity is represented through the very relief camps which these survivors are part of. I propose that the relief camps represent the 'subaltern space' due to their locational marginality. These camps are constructed at the outskirts of the city and predominantly in the minority-dominated areas for their security. The author effectively effuses the grim reality of the city of Ahmedabad where the incidents of communal violence had taken place at a large scale. When the author goes out and visit their camp at Shah-e-Alam mosque, he observes that it was not well managed and the lives of the 'people' at the camp were still far from being rehabilitated. He notes, „there was a great need for women's undergarments. Children needed biscuits. The cost of giving ever child in the camps four cookies each on a single day was anywhere between fifty to seventy-five thousand rupees. With such basic needs still unmet, why would anyone in the camp want to do breathing exercise?" (Kumar 2004, 11-12).

These women even after losing their loved ones were made to suffer more due to poor plan of living at the government camp. This reconfiguration of space through displacement invokes a sense of alienation and belonging that are reflected in the disposition and attitudes from the people of minority communities. Anthony Vidler suggests that this feeling of alienation and homelessness give rise to a new space which he termed as 'architectural uncanny' (Vidler 1987, ix) where a familiar space is defamiliarized making its occupants estranged to one's own dwellings. In the case of Gujarat, the topography of Ahmedabad, the capital city of Gujarat, where the mass violence took place invokes these feeling of alienation to the survivors who are now living in the camps. As a visitor to the city, Kumar writes, "The devastation was remarkable. It is what the visitor first saw: the skeletons of burnt buildings" (Kumar 2004, 15). This reconfiguration of space has an impact on the disposition of the minorities where a profound sense of alienation is induced in them which also give a feeling of "estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness" (Vidler 1987, ix) which also construct modern space of living. This new space also becomes a "frame of reference" where the victims confronts their "desire for a home" (Vidler 1987, 12). The deserted colonies of the survivors where their loved ones were killed, and their houses ransacked becomes the spaces of architectural uncanny which was now palpable in a thickly populated city like Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of this paper discussed the new ways to comprehend the political aspects of Kumar's literary narrative. The author's own agony is

palpable in his portrayal of the dead and the survivors. To conclude, the novel *Husband of a Fanatic* highlights dual abjection, first the representation of visceral horror of the dead and the physical injuries of the survivors and secondly the survivors and the minorities who constantly live in fear become the figure of social abjection in the novel. Initially, through the grotesque representation of the physical viscera, the author manages to generate grim reaction from the readers and later, the author, by highlighting the discrimination faced by the Muslim citizens in the aftermath of the intercommunal violence situates them as the figures of 'social abject'. The government relief camps where the people are made to live like a refugee in their homeland depicts the spaces of subalternity due to its marginal location as they are situated at the periphery of the city marking its 'exclusion' from the mainstream society. The Muslim female survivors too represent the tropes of subalternity as their voices of pain and sufferings remain 'silent' to the authorities concerned. The socially abject Muslim citizens are majorly treated as the 'other' as the author narrates how it affected their psycho-corporeal being where they tried to hide their 'identity' while 'travelling in the bus or train' or their 'children going to the school' out of fear in the aftermath. The images of their comfortlessness remains palpable through the author's narratives.

Kumar in an email interview to Shampa Chatterjee offers as to what inspired him to write this novel, he says it was because he was on the hit list of Hindu right wing for his marriage to a Pakistani woman that basically influenced him to write this novel, "But the immediate context was provided by the riots in Gujarat. It is the events in Gujarat that provided the book its focus". Then he goes on to say, "I think caste and caste violence exists in very real and dangerous forms all over India. But, to respond to your question, I have little doubt that the politics of Hindutva and the BJP's proximity to power has been one of the main factors responsible for rise in religious ideologies in India" (Kumar). The novel received critical acclaim just after its publication for its political undertone. Gillian Wright for *India Today* writes that "Kumar passionately expresses his views while reporting on the people he meets. He especially abhors the anti-Muslim stance of the extreme rightists" (Wright). Christopher De Bellaigue for *New York Times* writes that, "Picking his way through lives distorted or destroyed by hatred, Kumar alleviates his own and the reader's gloom by drawing attention to the fanatics' mordant eccentricities" (Bellaigue). Guy Mannes Abbot for *Independent* writes that Kumar resists the distinction of delineating anything simple about India and his narratives on Gujarat riots exacerbate as if author never "quite leaves it" that once "epitomized India's cosmopolitan modernity" (Abbot).

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