



## 'A Community Under Siege': Analysing Kohut's Thoughts of 'Narcissistic Rage' in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*

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**Abstract**

This paper looks at the operational mechanics of narcissistic rage as a subversive force within the poignant depiction of communal violence in Githa Hariharan's novel *Fugitive Histories*, utilizing a psychoanalytical lens inspired by the insights of Kohut. This exploration aims to unravel the intricate nexus between the phenomenon of riot and narcissistic tendencies, scrutinizing the concept of collective narcissism as it pertains to social communities. Employing Kohut's in-depth study of group psychology, the research delves into the transformative dynamics of narcissistic rage and its consequential impact on instances of communal upheaval. The paper culminates in a discussion highlighting the potential role of empathy as a mitigating agent against the perils of narcissistic rage.

### 1. COMMUNITIES IN COMBAT: AN INTRODUCTION

This article delves into the psychoanalytical concept of narcissistic rage within the context of literary studies focused on communities. Specifically, it examines the manifestations and underlying causes of narcissistic rage during times of communal upheaval, as depicted in Githa Hariharan's (2009) novel *Fugitive Histories*. The article aims to elucidate the actions prompted by narcissistic rage during such critical moments. Throughout the last century, psychoanalytical discourse has revolved around the notion of narcissism, leading to the emergence of novel philosophies addressing various societal issues. Sigmund Freud initiated this discourse in the 1930s, which was subsequently developed by psychoanalysts like Kohut, Bacal, and Newman in the late 20th century. Kohut's (1978) essay "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage" explores the intricate relationship between narcissism and aggression within the framework of group psychology. Kohut asserts that suppressed grandiose aspirations of a narcissistic self can temporarily recede but eventually resurface as aggressive tendencies, not only in individuals but also within entire groups (p. 619-20). There is a long history of narcissistic psychoanalytical discourse. The narcissistic sector of personality, a development that leads to the acquisition of mature, adaptive and culturally valuable attributes in the narcissistic realm, is an affirmative attitude toward narcissism. However, Kohut (1978) also

acknowledges that narcissism can take on negative or malevolent aspects. He notes that the relationship between narcissism and aggression is influenced by parental attitudes during the formation of an individual's "self", "...that the side-by-side existence of separate developmental lines in the narcissistic and in the object-instinctual realms in the child is intertwined with the parents' attitude toward the child" (p. 617). Similarly, a group's psychological growth is intricately linked to societal attitudes. The collective psychological evolution of a group, in conjunction with its social environment, plays a pivotal role. The interplay between one group's development against other and its societal treatment within the context of narcissistic discourse remains an area that necessitates further exploration. To explore the connection between narcissistic wounds and racial prejudices, Julia Borossa (2007) comments, "Undone by the gaze of a white child who speaks, necessarily, in the register of the symbolic, the black man realizes that his place is not subject but other. In the very moment where he is seen not as a man, but as a black man, he is created *as other* by the cultural ideas of white society" (p. 121). Borossa emphasizes that Fanon maintains a commitment to the concept of the human, and it is through psychoanalytic concepts like trauma and the narcissistic wound that a nuanced understanding of subjectivity, influenced by history, becomes more ambivalent and open to difference.

Hariharan's (2009) novel *Fugitive Histories* is set against the backdrop of the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat violence. The religious massacre in Gujarat started on the morning of 27th February 2002, when a train was burnt by the Muslims in [Godhra](#) which caused the death of 58 Hindu pilgrims who were returning from [Ayodhya](#). There are multiple narratives of what happened at Godhra on that day. Certain details can, however, be traced from these accounts. On that fateful day, Hindu pilgrims who had participated in support of constructing a Ram Temple in the disputed land of Ayodhya were aboard the Sabarmati Express. The Hindu activists had reportedly been chanting religious slogans from the train. Eventually, a scuffle started between these Hindu activists and the Muslim tea vendors at the Godhara station. Following the train's departure from the station, it was forcibly halted by the pulling of an emergency chain in a predominantly Muslim area. Two carriages were ignited immediately, and the firefighting efforts were also thwarted. The fire killed 58 passengers, including many women and children. The aftermath saw a wave of retaliatory violence unfold across the state. Hindu mobs targeted Muslim residences, shops, and communities, leading to the gruesome slaughter of Muslim men, women, and children. This period marked a three-day inter-communal eruption of violence, with Ahmedabad witnessing further clashes for three months and the violence extending statewide for an entire year. Rather than pursuing justice against those responsible for the initial attack on the train, the response took the form of revenge killings. Over a hundred thousand Muslims reportedly sought refuge in the state's rudimentary refugee camps. Hariharan's novel *Fugitive Histories* intricately examines this significant episode of communal violence and envy, that unfolded in Gujarat in 2002. Joseph H. Berke (2012) in his work "Envy and Narcissism" studies that envy and narcissism are the two sides of one dangerous coin. Both the narcissist and the envier are in a perpetual state of comparing their possessions and qualities to those around them. He highlights, "In most situations the envier aims to eliminate the torment in himself by forceful, attacking, annihilative behaviour. The same process occurs with the narcissist. He gets into a murderous rage at anyone or anything which may puncture a fragile sense of superiority. Such anger, directed against the

alleged source of the envy, constitutes a means of self-protection as well as other-destruction” (p. 155). The paper undertakes a textual analysis of Hariharan’s novel to explore the connection between narcissism and the 2002 Gujarat riot. It scrutinizes how narcissistic rage can serve as an amplifier of violence, shedding light on the intricate interplay between psychological dynamics and communal conflict.

## **2. Voices of *Fugitive Histories*: The Narratives of Trauma**

The 2002 Gujarat episode touched new depths of violence, horror, and barbarism in India. It had turned the pluralizing identity of Indian nationhood into a polarized sight of religious disparity. Hariharan’s take on this account digs into trauma in the lives of the people after the attacks. This is conspicuously evident in *Fugitive Histories*, where she astutely captures the latent undercurrents of human biases and prejudices. In the novel, Sara, one of Hariharan’s three women protagonists, is a documentary filmmaker and social worker in Mumbai. When she gets an offer to write a script for a documentary film on the Muslim families affected in the Gujarat riot, she arrives in Ahmadabad to study the issue of communal violence. She looks for the facts from the survivors of the riot. Sara along with her friend Nina, visit the Muslim re-established colony in Ahmadabad. To reach this colony they had to cross the border between the Hindu and Muslim areas and enter a locality that is known as mini-Pakistan among the local people, the safe zone for Muslims. Within this enclave, Sara encounters Yasmin and numerous other Muslim women who share their heart-wrenching experiences from the riot. Yasmin, a young girl who narrowly survived the Gujarat riot, bears the heavy weight of tragedy upon her shoulders. Having lost her brother Akbar and her home during the upheaval, Yasmin resides with her Ammi and Abba in the re-established colony, a response to the continued threat of communal violence. Yasmin’s family grapples with the haunting memories of the riot, intensified by the mysterious disappearance of her brother from college. Yasmin, amid her family’s plight, stands as their sole beacon of hope. Driven by the aspiration to attend college and secure a job, Yasmin’s family dreams of selling their current residence to establish themselves in a safer environment. However, their aspirations are constantly met with scepticism from neighbours who dissuade them from sending Yasmin to school, fearing for her safety as a Muslim girl. The spectre of discrimination shadows their daily lives, serving as a stark reminder of their marginalized status. The other women in the re-established colony too share similar tales of loss and trauma resulting from the riot’s aftermath.

Upon Sara’s arrival in Ahmedabad, the city first presents an illusion of normalcy and tranquillity, “But there was no enemy to be seen, no danger; the city itself was modestly veiled by darkness... Sara can hear the ordinary sounds of a city waking up to another regular day... All is as it should be in a normal city on a normal morning” (Hariharan, 2009, p. 106). Five years have passed since the riots, yet Ahmedabad, to an outsider like Sara, bears no overt indications of its sinister history. However, the city functions like a dynamic character, capable of altering its demeanour in response to the individuals it encompasses. Its external appearance belies its deeper complexities. For someone like Yasmin, the city embodies a menacing entity, evoking fear whether she walks its streets alone or amid a crowd, “Any girl knows that a busy road is a safe road. But Yasmin knows now that she should also be afraid of a crowd” (p. 148). The shadows of history, particularly the city’s dark past, linger palpably, infusing even ordinary activities with a sense of trepidation. In this unsettling environment, Yasmin is acutely aware of the need to be vigilant and cautious in order to secure her safety and her very existence.

Yasmin's mother is deeply apprehensive about allowing her to go to school, "You'll be careful?" she asks, as if Yasmin has to guard something precious, say ten thousand rupees in her schoolbag. 'You'll come home directly? Don't talk to anyone once you've left Sultana at her class'" (p. 119). Being careful, for Yasmin, means:

avoiding an empty road but also a crowd. It means not going where it's dark or where there may be policemen. It means running, hiding, keeping her racing heart quiet and still because there's someone after her and he may hear it. Someone, or many someones. They may have tilaks on their foreheads, trishuls in their hands. Trishuls, or swords, pipes, rods, hockey sticks. Anything that can hit or cut. (Hariharan, 2009, p. 123)

Sara's initial encounter with the city does not impart any whimsical impression of the place that made it such a willing hostage of a whole big hating mob. During her visit to meet the riot survivors in the area locally referred to as "mini Pakistan" (p. 110), Sara gained a profound understanding that the divisions between communities and delineations of boundaries are intricately intertwined with the specific local narratives of this place.

A community can be understood as a collective of individuals who share common beliefs, values, and attributes. It provides a sense of security and belonging to its members. Often, religious faith serves as a pivotal factor in shaping communal identity, contributing to the delineation of territories and boundaries. Communities emerge when individuals find resonance in shared qualities, and boundaries are established to differentiate themselves from those who lack these essential traits. In this context, Hariharan's (2009) portrayal highlights the significance of communal bonds. Yasmin's experience exemplifies this phenomenon. In the re-established Muslim colony, she finds solace and security due to the presence of fellow Muslim families in close proximity, "... a little safer because there are Muslim families upstairs, downstairs, sandwiching them on either side" (p. 144). The proximity of Muslim neighbours creates a sense of safety, and Yasmin perceives any Muslim individual as someone familiar and akin to her. Her perception of Shabana Azmi, a prominent Bollywood actress, as a potential saviour, underlines this sense of connection. By observing Azmi's images, Yasmin feels closeness and hopes for understanding and relief from the shared trauma, "she thinks Shabana Azmi will come and save her from here" (p. 111-2). The residents of the re-established Muslim colony bear a plethora of stories detailing their experiences of loss and suffering. These individuals have endured the tragic loss of loved ones during the riots, with their homes being consumed by flames before their very eyes. Forced into this colony, they carry the scars of their past, marked by destruction and displacement.

In *Fugitive Histories*, the subtle and delicate power of telling this sensitive story has found its poignant expressions through Hariharan's (2009) commanding narrative prowess:

First there were a hundred people, and then there were more. There were so many more. There were so many they seemed countless. They had swords, pipes, hockey sticks, soda lemon bottles, saffron flags, and all kinds of sharp weapons. They had petrol bombs and gas cylinders. They broke the dargah down the street and put an

idol there. They came to our houses, they were shouting ‘Kill them, cut them, burn them alive!’ (p. 158)

This ominous turn of events witnessed the rupture of peaceful coexistence between Hindus and Muslims, who had long shared the same neighborhood. The communal clashes arose seemingly out of nowhere, engulfing individuals who had previously lived harmoniously side by side. The eruption of violent rage, stemming from individuals grappling with narcissistic issues, instigated this alarming and drastic escalation of violence. Hariharan (2009) effectively captures the harrowing magnitude of these events, recounting, “She fell. She was raped, she was cut some more. Then she was burnt” (p. 159). The narrative also chronicles the ordeal of a young boy during the riot, revealing, “They poured petrol in his mouth. They put a lit matchstick into his mouth as if it was a lollipop. He just burst” (p. 159). Such incidents are merely a few among a multitude of chilling demonstrations of the horrors that unfolded in the novel. These haunting memories, marked by such grim brutality, are indelibly etched into the survivors’ consciousness, persisting as traumas that refuse to be forgotten. The emotional scars borne by these survivors echo through the narrative, emphasizing the lasting impact of such horrific events.

### **3. Rage in Communities: A Cause for the Violence**

Rage and anger are distinct emotional responses. Anger is an emotion, but rage transforms a person’s entire physical presence into a violent expression. Narcissistic rage explodes when a narcissist’s ego is injured. Similarly, communities may also exhibit narcissistic traits, collectively driven by their high ideals of communal identity. When this identity is affronted, it can evoke violent responses. In *Fugitive Histories*, Yasmin, a seventeen-year-old girl scarred by the Gujarat riot, encapsulates this desolate sentiment, conveying, “Fire that men may light because they know how well fire burns people, homes and lives to ashes” (Hariharan, 2009, p. 123). Religion often functions as a defining aspect of individual and collective identity. Instances arise where an individual adherent of one faith becomes a recurring transgressor against another, exposing their narcissistic tendencies. Genuine religious teachings do not advocate hatred toward any entity. Instead, it’s an individual’s narcissistic tension that intertwines their ego with religious sentiments, cultivating a distinct self-identity. This identity becomes particularly vulnerable once injured, resulting in an earnest attempt to mend it. At its zenith, this narcissistic tension can ignite a malevolent rage within people, as witnessed in Gujarat, exacerbating the violence that unfolded.

Indeed, a distinction exists between narcissistic rage and mature aggression. Narcissistic rage represents an overwhelming and uncontrolled outburst of fury driven by a wounded ego, often resulting in irrational and extreme actions. In this state, the ego becomes subservient to the intensity of the rage, leading to impulsive behaviour. On the other hand, mature aggression demonstrates a more tempered and controlled form of expressing anger. It is characterized by a measured response, where the ego maintains a degree of restraint and rationality. Unlike narcissistic rage, mature aggression is guided by the ego’s ability to manage and channel the anger constructively, without succumbing to its overwhelming force. This differentiation highlights the critical role of ego management in determining the nature and outcome of emotional responses, particularly in situations involving anger and aggression. In his essay “Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage”, Heinz Kohut (1978) says, “The



transformation of narcissistic rage is not achieved directly-e.g., via appeals to the ego to increase its control over the angry impulses-but is brought about indirectly, secondary to the gradual transformation of the matrix of narcissism from which the rage arose" (p. 646). Thus, within this context, actions such as setting fire to others' houses, physically assaulting or even killing individuals in a fit of rage can be distinctly categorized as narcissistic acts. In *Fugitive Histories*, Hariharan (2009) effectively delves into the narrative of this profound undercurrent of communal animosity. This contempt is further elucidated through the offensive remarks made by the policemen during the interaction with Yasmin's Abba and Ammi at the police station. Hariharan (2009) writes that a policeman responds when Yasmin's Abba and Ammi went to report Akbar's missing:

Too many of you in college it seems... A college student called Akbar Ali. What do you think happened? Has he eloped with a Hindu girl? Or left home to join the terrorists? (p. 134)

The act of the policeman, as depicted in the narrative, isn't rooted in religious ideologies. No religion ever endorses enmity toward any living being. The emergence of animosity is often a manifestation of an individual's personal expression of hatred, originating from their narcissistic core. This underscores that religious teachings themselves are not the source of hatred; rather, it is the individual's interpretation and internal biases that lead to such attitudes. In a similar vein, one of the women in the story shares a personal account involving her son at school, "the principal was doing partition work. He'd ask Nasir in front of everybody else, 'Aren't you from Pakistan?' though Nasir did all his work. He kept calling my Nasir a terrorist till the child couldn't bear it anymore" (Hariharan, 2009, p. 156). The children often internalize the idea of religious boundaries, learning to prioritize and identify with their own religion while sometimes viewing other religions as different and unacceptable. These early experiences contribute to the development of community prejudices, which can become ingrained instincts as individuals grow. It's essential to recognize that the formation of self during childhood is a crucial period that shapes attitudes and perspectives in later stages of life. Injuries, whether physical, emotional, or psychological, sustained during the formative years can lead to a deep-seated sense of wounded ego. These injuries can become the foundation for significant narcissistic tendencies and rage as individuals mature. The roots of such behaviours often trace back to early experiences that shape one's understanding of identity, belonging, and differences among various communities. Understanding these dynamics underscores the importance of fostering tolerance, empathy, and open-mindedness from an early age to mitigate the perpetuation of prejudice and its potential consequences later in life. In his essay "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage", Kohut (1978) explains, "The other phenomenon that illuminates the significance of narcissistic rage is the emotional reaction of children to slight injuries" (p. 642). The hatred continues to be perused in the novel:

While Abba was away, some men with an important message came to the shop downstairs. They looted it first, then burnt it. The message was in the empty burnt-out shop and the smoke that made its way upstairs where they lived. It was a short message, loud and clear: Do you value your life? Do you value your family? Then it's time to leave the neighborhood because anything can happen. (Hariharan, 2009, p. 138)

This is how rage turns into violent expressions. Hariharan (2009) continues by writing, "The man who wants the house had attacked Yasmin. Yasmin escaped rape luckily. It left a mark of wound on her thigh" (p. 138). The memory of these experiences continues to haunt Yasmin, causing her sleepless nights.

Not all survivors have been able to vocalize their traumatic experiences. For some, the shock of the conflict has left them speechless, as if they have been figuratively stoned into silence by the intensity of their trauma. Hariharan (2009) writes, “But Zahida-khala still watches TV as much as she can, always on mute, but every time she sees someone on TV who looks Muslim and who looks like he’s angry or fighting, she gets up and kisses the screen” (p. 158). Zahida-khala, a survivor of the riot, carries her thoughts and emotions stifled within her, a condition that could potentially evolve into a narcissistic rage directed toward the Hindus whenever circumstances align. This mirrors the pattern observed in those Hindu mobs that have previously targeted them. This cycle of vengeance, if left unchecked, will perpetuate a never-ending cycle of retaliation. “We’ve learnt the hard way. Next time we’ll be better prepared” Zahida says (Hariharan, 2009, p. 165). “If we’d just had a couple of hours to get ready, we would’ve shown them”, another woman also joins (p. 165). Narcissistic rage, therefore, bears a significant responsibility for the devastation inflicted upon individuals. Riots of this nature reduce people to mere statistics, stripping away their individuality and humanity. Additionally, individuals are assessed solely based on their religious identity, relegating them to mere numbers in the grander narrative. The compassionate police officer conveys to Yasmin’s Ammi, “she’s just another mother, Akbar just another son. Akbar is just another missing person. Just another missing Muslim boy” (Hariharan, 2009, p. 137). There is a terrible description of the dead bodies at hospitals in this novel:

Abba spent all his time visiting the places where the corpses were piling up. He had never seen anything like it before, the parade of body after body that bore so little resemblance to a real body, To a human being, even a dead one. It’s the first time Abba saw that being dead meant being cut. It meant missing a body part—an arm, a leg, even ahead. (Hariharan, 2009, p. 137)

It’s important to acknowledge that not all characters in the novel affiliated with certain religious groups, such as Hindus or Muslims, are fanatics or mobs. Diversity exists within these groups, and coexistence is prevalent in most of the regions in India. As highlighted by one of the Muslim women in the novel, “They could have built another school instead of such a big mosque” (Hariharan, 2009, p. 156). It reflects the diverse perspectives and opinions that exist within communities. For instance, the Hindu sub-inspector, whom Yasmin’s Abba and Ammi eventually encounter, does not ridicule them. Instead, he carries the burden of harassment and the weight of silent suffering. His daily experiences are filled with the voices of people in distress, and he navigates through the challenges of maintaining order while empathizing with the emotional struggles of those he interacts with:

My mother, my son, my daughter...’ just because he’s conscientious and does his work. He wants to tell all these people making their way to police stations all over the city that they are no longer mothers or sons or daughters. They are just numbers, statistics, part of action and reaction. (Hariharan, 2009, p. 135)

Not everyone who experiences the tumultuous circumstances of a riot becomes a religious fanatic who just exhibits disdain for other communities. While the police officer might not display empathy, he does stand apart from the enraged crowd, indicating a difference between his behaviour and that of the mob. Exploring the escalation of narcissistic rage and its

manifestation within a crowd during such intense events is indeed a crucial area of study. The dynamics of how individual rage converges and amplifies within a group setting, leading to collective actions, can offer valuable insights into the psychology of mass behaviour and the propagation of communal violence. Understanding these processes is essential for addressing the root causes of such occurrences.

#### **4. Devising through Kohut's Analysis of Rage and Collective Narcissism**

Heinz Kohut (1978) observes that there are multiple reasons to challenge the idea of narcissism as an intrinsic and self-contained set of psychological functions. Instead, numerous arguments suggest that it might be better understood as a consequence of psychological regression, a mechanism where individuals revert to less mature psychological states when coping with emotional challenges. In his essay 'Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage', Kohut is sceptic about the appropriateness of the affirmative outlook of narcissism as he accepts that there exists "a number of arguments that can be marshaled in opposition to a consideration of narcissism as an integral, self-contained set of psychic functions rather than as a regression product" (Kohut, 1978, p. 618). He also admits that there exist several obstacles that stand in the way of its acceptance as potentially adaptive and valuable rather than as necessarily ill or evil. Indeed, when narcissism reaches extreme levels, it can pose significant harm not only to the individual displaying narcissistic tendencies but also to those who are connected to them. Furthermore, extreme narcissism might hinder personal growth, impede empathy, and contribute to social and psychological dysfunction. It has come to be seen with a negative tone, possibly due to its connection to defense mechanisms or regression. This negativity creates an emotional atmosphere that makes it difficult for people to consider narcissism as a psychologically healthy or acceptable trait combination. In the book, Kohut (1978) has expressed, "the term narcissism may have acquired a slightly pejorative connotation as a product of regression or defense, is a specific emotional climate that is unfavourable to the acceptance of narcissism as a healthy and approvable psychological constellation" (p. 619). Thus, he highlights that there are differing viewpoints on the nature of narcissism and its origin, and these viewpoints emphasize the role of psychological regression in its development.

Kohut (1978) points out, "the parents sometimes relate to the child in empathic narcissistic merger and look upon the child's psychic organization as part of their own, while at other times they respond to the child as to an independent center of his initiative, i.e., they invest him with object libido" (p. 617-618). He highlights two contrasting ways in which parents interact with their child: one where they perceive the child's psychological experiences as closely connected to their own, and another where they recognize the child's autonomy and treat them as independent individuals. This dynamic illustrates the complex nature of parent-child relationships and how parents' perceptions can shift between empathy and recognition of the child's independence. In this context of "empathic narcissistic merger", parents perceive the child's psychological makeup and emotional state as an extension of their own, as if the child's inner world is closely intertwined with theirs. At other times, parents interact with their child by recognizing the child's autonomy and individuality. Similarly, during an individual's development, there is often a narcissistic merging of one's identity with their religion. This fusion can lead them to perceive their religion as an integral part of themselves. While the primary purpose of most religions is to provide guidance and a moral framework, it's



paradoxical that during instances it becomes the cause of the violence, as individuals deeply entwined with their religious identity lose self-control and get transformed into a furious being. In such moments, the principles of self-restraint and compassion that religions often promote can be overshadowed by a narcissistic attachment to one's religion, resulting in a loss of self-control and a transformation into a vehement and aggressive entity. This phenomenon underscores the complexity of human behaviour and the interplay between individual psychology and larger social forces. Certainly, under certain circumstantial pressures, the desire to merge with an idealized and grandiose self can be suppressed and pushed down. This repression might occur due to external factors, societal norms, or personal constraints. As a result, the intense aspiration to achieve that elevated self-image might temporarily recede and fade away. However, it's important to note that this repression doesn't necessarily eliminate the underlying desires or tendencies; they might still linger beneath the surface, potentially resurfacing later or manifesting in subtler ways. Kohut (1978) says that the "suppressed but unmodified narcissistic structures, however, become intensified as their expression is blocked; they will break through the brittle controls and will suddenly bring about, not only in individuals but also in whole groups, the unrestrained pursuit of grandiose aims and the resistanceless merger with omnipotent selfobjects" (p. 619-620). At times of communal catastrophes, these repressed desires get intensified and unleash an outburst of rage which causes the tragedy. Kohut (1978) refers to the ruthlessly pursued ambitions of Nazi Germany and the German population's total surrender to the will of Hitler, to exemplify its meaning. Characters in *Fugitive Histories* have also fallen victim to the same effects of a communal narcissistic explosion.

Kohut (1978) emphasizes the impact of ego domination on various unrestrained emotions, including rage, disappointment, and triumph. According to his theories, when the ego, which represents a person's sense of self and reality, becomes overwhelmed or weakened, intense emotions can become magnified and less controllable. Kohut (1978) comments this can lead to behaviours that are out of proportion to the situation, potentially resulting in impulsive reactions and a loss of self-regulation, "In the narcissistic realm, in particular, ego dominance increases our ability to react with the full spectrum of our emotions: with disappointment and rage or with feelings of triumph, controlled, but not necessarily restrainedly" (p. 621). He discusses how having ego dominance in the narcissistic realm can enhance an individual's ability to feel and react with a full range of emotions. This includes both positive emotions like triumph and negative emotions like disappointment and rage. The survivors of the riot in *Fugitive Histories* exemplify how this dynamic plays out in real-life situations. The experiences and trauma they endure during the communal violence can lead to the domination of their egos by intense emotions like rage. This, in turn, can contribute to their actions, reactions, and interactions, shaping their responses to the events around them. Kohut (1978) says, "Extensive changes of the self must, for example, be achieved in the transition from early childhood to latency, from latency to puberty, and from adolescence to young adulthood. But these sociobiologically prescheduled developmental processes are not the only ones that impose on us a drastic change of our self; we must also consider external shifts, such as moves from one culture to another; from private life into the army; from the small town to the big city; and the modification in the self that is necessitated when a person's social role is taking a turn-whether for better or worse, e.g., sudden financial success or sudden loss of fortune" (p. 623) The

conflicts like that of Godhra and post-Godhra are the aforesaid external shifts that change a person extensively. The conflicts had bewildered many people who became fanatic and unreceptive of other religions, but earlier they may have lived a long life in religious harmony. Narcissistic rage caused these changes. Certain extrinsic situations demand a reshuffling of the self by rebuilding emotions. The mob attacks on Yasmin and others are also the sudden reshuffled actions rebuilt by such extrinsic situations.

Kohut focuses on human aggression and believes that it will produce tangible results on the phenomenon of narcissistic rage. Narcissistic rage can occur in human aggression for revenge, "Narcissistic rage occurs in many forms; they all share, however, a specific psychological flavour which gives them a distinct position within the wide realm of human aggressions. The need for revenge, for righting a wrong" (Kohut, 1978, p. 637). The history of Gujarat riot is moreover an episode of retaliation that has derived from the narcissistic core of a few people in the Hindu and Muslim communities. Kohut (1978) says, "The fanaticism of the need for revenge and the unending compulsion of having to square the account after an offense is therefore not the attributes of an aggressivity that is integrated with the mature purposes of the ego -on the contrary, such bedevilment indicates that the aggression was mobilized in the service of an archaic grandiose self and that it is deployed within the framework of an archaic perception of reality" (p. 643). This indicates that the devastating rage witnessed in the Gujarat riot is not an act of the mature purpose of the ego but an aggression to satisfy an archaic grandiose self. Kohut (1978) suggests in his theory, "The opponent who is the target of our mature aggressions is experienced as separate from ourselves, whether we attack him because he blocks us in reaching our object-libidinal goals or hates him because he interferes with the fulfilment of our reality-integrated narcissistic wishes" (p. 644). Similarly, in the context of the violent attacks by mobs in *Fugitive Histories*, the dominance of narcissistic rage can indeed blur the distinction between self and other, leading to a collective identity-driven response that targets perceived opponents. This can create a sense of unity within the mob, fuelled by shared emotions of anger and resentment. As a result, the mob's actions may be driven by a collective need to defend or assert their communal identity, which can lead to violent and divisive behavior.

Just as individuals can develop a sense of grandiosity or self-importance, groups of people can also exhibit similar tendencies. This phenomenon is often referred to as group narcissism or collective narcissism. Religion, among other factors, can indeed become a shared source of grandiosity for a group. It provides a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging that can lead to a feeling of superiority or specialness compared to others. When a group perceives its identity, values, or beliefs as under threat, collective narcissism can intensify, leading to defensive behaviours and a heightened sense of rivalry with other groups. This collective sense of grandiosity can have significant implications for intergroup dynamics. It can contribute to divisions, conflicts, and even acts of violence if the group's perceived identity is challenged or undermined. In the context of communal conflicts, such as the one depicted in *Fugitive Histories*, this shared sense of identity and grandiosity can drive groups to engage in aggressive behaviours in an effort to protect their collective self-esteem. In this context Kohut (1978) recalls Freud to gain insight for comprehending narcissism and its effects on human behavior, "First, regarding the contribution which the understanding of narcissism can make to the

understanding of the formation and cohesion of groups: particularly the fact that group cohesion is brought about and maintained not only by an ego ideal held in common by the members of the group (Freud, 1921) but also by their shared subject-bound grandiosity, i.e., by a shared grandiose self” (p. 658). Secondly, Kohut also says, that the psychic lives of groups, like that of individuals, show regressive transformations in the narcissistic realm. Mario Jacoby (2016) expresses in his book *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of Self in Jung and Kohut*, “But, if we are nervous, tired, in a bad mood, or a hurry, we may feel like eliminating from the face of the earth the chap who is blocking our way! After we have sworn at the driver, we may also think: ‘I should be able to have the road to myself! But these circumstances won’t allow it’” (p. 191). This indicates that when a group perceives a threat to its collective identity, whether real or imagined, it can lead to a regression of behavior and a heightened sense of vulnerability. This regression often involves a retreat to more primitive psychological states where rational thinking and empathy may be compromised. In this state, individuals within the group may be more prone to exhibiting behaviours driven by intense emotions, including anger, fear, and the desire to protect their collective identity. Kohut (1978) says that these problems turn into regression and such “regressions become manifest, particularly concerning group aggression, which then takes on, overtly and covertly, the flavour of narcissistic rage in either its acute or, even more ominously, in its chronic form” (p. 658). Kohut’s observation about the manifestation of regression and narcissistic rage in group aggression is particularly relevant in the context of intergroup conflicts based on shared identities, such as religious or communal conflicts. Hence, collective narcissism at times of conflict asserts to be depletive that entails into loss and trauma and an unending tale of repressed rage that always works as the subversive and divisive force underneath.

### **5. Narcissism and Empathy: The Conclusion**

In “*Identity and violence: the illusion of destiny*, by Amartya Sen”, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) writes, “In 1944, when he was a boy of 11, Amartya Sen witnessed first-hand some of the Hindu–Muslim violence that tore British India apart on the eve of the partition of the country into India and Pakistan. Kader Mia, a young Muslim day labourer, was knifed by Hindus as he came into Sen’s neighbourhood in Dhaka looking for work. The murder has always haunted Sen as an example of a tragic feature that is unfortunately all too common in human societies: killing people for no other reason than the fact that they belong, often by birth, to particular communities” (p. 149). The lingering effect of any religious violence leaves a profound impact on individuals and communities. The paintings made by Asad, Sara’s father in *Fugitive Histories*, exhibit that he dies heartbroken as he finds his fellow citizens kill each other for their religious identity (Hariharan, 2009). The transformation of Asad, from being someone who didn’t emphasize religious identity to being constantly conscious of it due to the trauma of the riot, underscores the deep psychological scars left by such events. Understanding and addressing these underlying psychological factors can contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive society. By promoting empathy and understanding among individuals and communities, it may be possible to mitigate the recurrence of such communal violence fuelled by narcissistic motivations. While exploring the path to empathy Frank M. Lachmann (2008) comments in his book *Transforming Narcissism*, “McKee joins Kohut (1959) in arguing that through empathy, by entering the subject world of another person, we are able to transcend our egocentricity and to stretch our connections with humanity” (p. 73). This indicates that McKee,

along with Kohut, supports the idea that empathy serves as a transformative force. Through empathy, individuals can move beyond their egocentric perspectives, gain a deeper understanding of others, and strengthen their connections with humanity as a whole.

It is important to note that empathy is a complex phenomenon with multidimensional components. In the realm of narcissistic discourse, the role of empathy is multifaceted and complex. In the developmental trajectory, individuals often undergo a process of self-identification with their religious affiliations, resulting in a form of narcissistic merger wherein religion becomes an integral part of their self-concept. This initial merger with religious identity fosters a sense of belonging and identity. However, when latent narcissistic emotions manifest as rage, a contrasting phenomenon unfolds, characterized by a conspicuous absence of empathy in behavior. Consequently, during moments of intensified emotional turmoil, individuals tend to lose their capacity for empathetic engagement with individuals from differing communal backgrounds, impeding their recognition of the emotional experiences of the 'other'. This emotional dissociation can inadvertently amplify adversarial sentiments and precipitate hostile actions. According to Alice Miller (1981), "the person who has been narcissistically injured is normally unable to empathize with the motives of the 'enemy', cannot understand him, and will never forgive him" (p. 193). Mario Jacoby (2016) also expresses in *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of Self in Jung and Kohut*, "Narcissistic rage occurs in many forms which, according to Kohut, range from the deep, immovable hate of someone who suffers from paranoia to the relatively short-lasting anger provoked by the least offence in a person who is narcissistically touchy. The fact that it is rooted in a narcissistic view of the world, that it corresponds to an archaic mode of experience, explains why those who are in the grip of narcissistic rage show a total lack of empathy towards the motives of the person who has provoked the disproportionate outburst of anger" (p. 192). Acknowledging this intricate interplay between narcissistic tendencies, empathy, and conflict dynamics sheds light on the intricate psychological underpinnings of communal discord.

Thus, the dualistic nature of empathy within the context of narcissism becomes manifest. On one hand, the early stages of religious self-identification through narcissistic mergers suggest a formation of identity and unity. Conversely, when grappling with acute rage, the inherent lack of empathy can emerge as a key contributor to exacerbating conflicts. This phenomenon effectively obfuscates the ability to extend understanding or compassion across communal boundaries. While empathy is not a standalone treatment, its potential as a valuable instrument in addressing specific facets of narcissism cannot be understated. Texts like *Fugitive Histories* read stories that feature characters with difficult experiences and emotional challenges, which can foster empathy and a sense of connection among the readers. The theory of affective empathy emphasizes the emotional response individuals experience when they witness the emotions of others. It involves feeling a similar emotional state as another person and sharing in their emotional experience. Hariharan's novel conspicuously acknowledges the intricate and arduous experiences undergone by its characters, eliciting a sense of self-awareness and empathy within its readership. This intrinsic narrative quality prompts readers to engage with the emotional landscape of the characters, fostering an empathic connection that transcends mere literary exploration. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for addressing the roots of religious violence and fostering a more empathetic and harmonious coexistence among diverse religious communities. The present paper endeavors to delve into a detailed exploration

of the role of regression and narcissistic dynamics in the context of group aggression. It involves addressing not only the immediate triggers of conflict but also the underlying psychological factors that contribute to these dynamics. By examining the characters' experiences in light of Kohut's psychological framework of narcissistic rage, this study has been an attempt to unravel the latent mechanisms that underlie group aggression during moments of heightened tension and conflict. In doing so, the paper contends that a deeper comprehension of the text offers intricate psychological nuances, particularly concerning cognition and the imagination of empathy. It suggests that promoting empathy, dialogue, and shared understanding can help counteract regressive tendencies and foster more constructive ways of resolving conflicts.

### **Declaration of interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this work that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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