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BETWEEN ART AND ABSENCE: SUBJECTIVITY, DESIRE, AND PSYCHIC FRAGMENTATION IN ANJUM HASAN'S *THE COSMOPOLITANS* (2016)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Anjum Hasan's The Cosmopolitans (2016) as a narrative that configures modern subjectivity via fragmentation, absence, and deferred desire. Transcending descriptive accounts, the paper underscores that these conditions are produced through narrative form and key moments within the text. Concentrating on Qayenaat's engagement with the contemporary art world, encountering Baban Reddy's installation Nostalgia, and the spatial shift from Bangalore to Simhal, the paper asserts that belonging in the novel is constantly unstable and that recognition is also structurally deferred. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, affect theory, and critiques of cosmopolitanism, the observations infer that fragmentation is constructive of the modern self rather than merely episodic. Connecting interiority to cultural and affective economics, the study adds to ongoing debates on subjectivity in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, Subjectivity, Desire, Psychic Fragmentation, Indian English Fiction

INTRODUCTION

Anjum Hasan's The Cosmopolitans (2016) conducts a restrained yet astute mapping of subjectivity in the cultural world of contemporary India. Rooted in Bangalore's transforming art milieu, the novel abstains from the narratives that frame cosmopolitanism as mobility, cultural exchange, and self-fashioning. Alternatively, Hasan emphasizes experiences of detachment, affective uncertainty, and suspended desire, hence confounding the hunch that participation in cosmopolitan culture necessarily produces belonging or fulfillment. Focusing on interiority rather than spectacle, the novel channels attention away from external success and towards the unstable processes of modern subjectivity.

Qayenaat, whose reflective interiority structures the narrative, whose contemplative awareness shapes its flow. She emerges in Hasan's work not as a fully formed subject but appears marked by hesitation, ambivalence, and a lingering sense of incompleteness. Hasan depicts her as anything but whole. Qayenaat occupies a transitional position within the socio-cultural spaces she dwells in; she acts as both participant and observer, engaged yet distanced, present yet affectively aloof. This dual behaviour is not merely psychological but structural, which shapes her interactions with the world around her. The inability to translate experience into stable meaning, suggesting that subjectivity in the novel is defined less by coherence than by discontinuity, from the viewpoint.

By engaging with the contemporary art world, Qayenaat becomes a significant platform for exploring this condition. Her encounters with exhibitions, installations and artistic discourse do not wind up in aesthetic or intellectual satisfaction; rather, they

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accentuate a persistent disjunction between visibility and affect. Apropos, appears saturated with intention and symbolic value, yet curiously devoid of emotional pathos. Instead of being absorbed, meaning in these spaces generates a condition of affective suspension, in which the subject remains affectively suspended and unanchored. This gap between representation and experience portends a deeper instability within the processes through which identity is forged and preserved.

The novel moves past mere representation of art, scrutinizing the frameworks of recognition that preserve cosmopolitan culture. Inclusion is not guaranteed by mere participation in artistic networks; instead, it explores the erratic distribution of visibility, legitimacy, and symbolic capital. In this milieu, Qayenaat involves a constant balancing of aspiration and exclusion, as her pursuit remains elusive. This condition of adjournment augments beyond the social domain into the psychic realm, shaping the very structure of desire itself.

Against this backdrop, this paper posits that The Cosmopolitans (2016) constructs modern subjectivity through a sustained interplay of fragmentation, dislocation, and deferred desire. The concerns are not thematic in the narrative renderings; rather, they are structural conditions constituted by the novel's narrative blueprints and cultural and spatial dynamics. Rather than episodic rupture, fragmentation defines the self as operating on both material and affective levels. Desire, instead of reaching fulfillment, persists through deferral, sustained through lack.

This contention is developed through close attention to specific narrative moments that highlight these dynamics. In her encounter with Baban Reddy's Nostalgia, Qayenaat renders memory disruptive rather than continuous, thereby revealing the boundaries of aesthetic mediation. Her evolving relationship with Baban reveals the asymmetrical structures of recognition that govern both artistic and interpersonal domains in similar ways. An alternative mode of belonging, yet ultimately reproducing the same instability, suggests that fragmentation is not tied to a particular environment but embedded within the structure of subjectivity itself as observed in the spatial shift from Bangalore to the town of Simhal.

The analysis is inspired by the following research question:

- How does the novel construct fragmented subjectivity at the level of narrative form rather than merely representing it as a theme?
- In what ways does the contemporary art world function as a structure of deferred recognition and affective absence?
- How do key narrative moments- particularly the Nostalgia installation and the movement it Simhal- reconfigure the problem of belonging?
- Why does the narrative resist resolution, and what does this resistance reveal about the nature of modern subjectivity?

These questions institute the analytical trajectory of the paper and ensure that the argument develops incrementally and logically. Instead of presenting isolated readings, the paper traces how fragmentation, dislocation, and deferred desire operate across different levels of the text, from individual to broader narrative structures.

The study proceeds through structural progression. It starts with a review of existing scholarship to situate the study within current critical debates. This is caught up by a theoretical framework that draws on psychoanalytical theory, affect theory, and critiques of cosmopolitanism to provide conceptual tools for analysis. The subsequent sections delve into a close reading of key narrative moments, probing how the novel constructs subjectivity through the interplay of art, desire and spatial displacement. The final section covers the role of narrative form in enacting fragmentation, depicting that the novel does not merely describe instability but reproduces it formally.

By synthesizing Lacanian psychoanalysis with Sianne Ngai's affective taxonomy, this study makes a distinct, threefold contribution to contemporary Indian English literary scholarship. First, it departs from conventional thematic analyses that treat cosmopolitanism merely as socio-economic privilege or geographic mobility, demonstrating instead that Hasan structures the cosmopolitan condition as an unresolvable psychic absence. Second, it uncovers how low-intensity affect—specifically the non-cathartic stasis of "ugly feelings"—replaces traditional climactic conflict in contemporary Indian urban narratives. Third, it provides a sustained formalist investigation into how Hasan's narrative architecture (free indirect discourse, temporal ellipses, and anti-climactic plot resistance) formally enacts psychic fragmentation rather than merely describing it. In doing so, this paper expands the critical parameters of Indian English fiction by positing that modern subjectivity is fundamentally organized around structural lack and perpetual deferral.

NARRATIVE FORM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FRAGMENTED SUBJECTIVITY

Critical scholarship on Anjum Hasan's The Cosmopolitans (2016) has predominantly approached the novel through sociological, intersectional, and existential frameworks. Scholars such as M. Sugha Devi and D. Dhanalakshmi foreground the stratified nature of Bangalore's art market, demonstrating how institutional legitimacy remains contingent on class privilege and gendered capital. Similarly, Rama Islam critiques the archetype of the "cosmopolitan woman," interpreting Qayenaat's displacement as an indictment of globalized self-fashioning, while recent existential readings (Binoy and Sharma) frame her trajectory as a struggle between Sartrean bad faith and authentic choice.

However, while these studies effectively map the external architectures of inequality and thematic alienation, they leave a critical analytical void: they treat cosmopolitan dislocation almost exclusively as thematic representation. By restricting their scope to content-level critiques of institutional elitism or personal angst, existing readings overlook how fragmented subjectivity is actively produced through narrative form and affective mechanics. The novel does not merely describe socio-cultural exclusion; it formally enacts psychic destabilization through close third-person focalization, paratactic hesitations, and the avoidance of narrative climax.

This paper addresses this critical gap by shifting the analytical lens from thematic sociology to formal and affective narratology. Drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalysis and affect theory—specifically Sianne Ngai's formulation of non-cathartic "ugly feelings"—this study demonstrates how Hasan configures modern subjectivity not as a coherent state challenged by external inequality, but as a condition structurally organized around lack, psychic absence, and perpetually deferred recognition.

Qayenaat's engagement with the art world consistently exposes this condition of emotional instability. Her visits to galleries and exhibitions are marked by a peculiar sense of distance; she observes the artworks, listens to conversations and participates in the rituals of the art circuit, even then she remains unable to acquire a coherent and sustaining sense of meaning from these experiences. Hasan portrays these moments through a language of hesitation and incompletion, where perception fails to translate into emotional engagement. Despite their conceptual depth and symbolic intensity, the artworks fail to justify their emotional impact, leaving it elusive and creating a gap between representation and internalization.

The split becomes clear in Qayenaat's behaviour vividly. She observes quietly, absorbing the coded aesthetic dialogue without immersing herself. "Present but not absorbed" captures these echoes perfectly. Entering cosmopolitan spaces does not guarantee a place inside; it only underscores marginality, keeping her poised between inclusion and exclusion.

Qayenaat's detachment within the Bangalore art circuit operates through what Sianne Ngai designates as "ugly feelings"—low-intensity, non-cathartic states of irritation, envy, and social stasis. Her position in cosmopolitan gatherings is consistently marked by an acute sense of peripheral observation rather than true cultural belonging. Observing her affluent counterpart, Qayenaat reflects on the stark disparity in their social legitimacy: "…she deftly stepped out of Sara's line of vision, leaning in towards the bar for a refill, and studied Sara secretly—her vivacious, art-loving friend, her jingle-jangle jewellery, and swishy skirts". Hasan structures Qayenaat's subjectivity around an unresolved lack, framing her as "…the moneyless orphan who couldn't get her head around basic things like fitness, love, and employment". Her precariousness is further reinforced by material estrangement: "…was her chronic unemployment, her inability to fit into the stranglehold of a 9-to-5". This perpetual sense of incompleteness is embedded even in her nominal identity, having discarded her surname at twenty because "there was no way to reconcile the ordinariness of Gupta with the sublimity of Qayenaat". Her participation in the cosmopolitan sphere thus reproduces marginality rather than integration.

Lacan's idea of desire around lack illuminates why this abides. Qayenaat's persistence in unfulfilling art spaces endures through deferral rather than fulfillment. The art world promises acclaim but delivers none, steering her toward an elusive belonging. Baban Reddy spotlights this gap-his institutional ease clashes with her doubt. His privilege signals broader disparities in acknowledgment.

Qayenaat's retorts are barely marked by dramatic conflict in the art world; rather, they are delineated by a subdued dissatisfaction that remains without climax or release. For example, her contemplations after attending exhibitions do not land on specific interpretations but linger on a sense of unease, as if the experience has failed to cohere into meaning. This crux of muted affect underscores the novel's departure from more conventional representations of alienation, replacing overt crisis with a quieter, more pervasive form of dislocation.

The spatial dimension of this dislocation further jumbles the experience of cosmopolitanism. Bangalore is not a unified or coherent space but a fragmented urban landscape in which different social and cultural worlds coexist without meaningful integration, as the novel delineates. Qayenaat's movement through this environment- between galleries, cafes and private gatherings- spotlights the discontinuities that structure urban life. Each setting promise links, yet it slips away, underscoring belonging's feel perennially iffy.

Pivotally, this dislocation is not resolved through narrative progression. The novel does not deliver the breakthroughs or shifts that could steady Qayenaat's journey. Apart from that, it bolsters a mode of engagement characterized by repetition and deferral. The same dynamic is reproduced by encountering art, conversations with artists and movement through the city: the same promise of meaning followed by its withdrawal. This repetition emphasizes that affective dislocation is not an incidental feature of the narrative but a structural condition that shapes its form.

Bringing together intersectional criticism, psychoanalytical theory, and affect theory, this section reveals cosmopolitanism in The Cosmopolitans (2016) as a tension rather than a resolution. Here, external inequities collide with personal longing and lack, stranding the subject poised between ambition and rejection. Qayenaat's experiences expose the boundaries of cosmopolitan belonging, suggesting that global culture involvement does not ease fragmentation but amplifies it.

In this context, the novel highlights affective dislocation as central to modern subjectivity. It is not merely a response to external conditions but a route of being that is continually reproduced through the interplay of social structures, psychic dynamics and affective circulation. The novel emphasizes on hesitation, incompletion and unresolved experience, highlighting how subjectivity is shaped less by presence than by absence and less by fulfillment than by deferral. Such a depiction challenges idealized cosmopolitanism and calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between cultural participation and the self.

THE ART WORLD AS A STRUCTURE OF DEFERRED RECOGNITION

In The Cosmopolitans (2016), Nostalgia holds a central place, extending beyond its status as an artwork to unveil the limits of representation and recognition. Unlike her past art experiences, tainted by detachment and interpretive hesitation, this moment provokes an immediate, unsettling response. The installation does not invite reflective contemplation, it confronts her directly with unresolved experience blurring the observer-object boundary.

Nostalgia is structured in a way that resists coherence. Despite of presenting memory as a unified and continuous narrative, it fragments memory into discontinuous elements that blocks synthesis. This work does not function as a path of retrieval or reinterpretation but exposes memory as unstable, partial and resistant to representation. This challenges the assumptions regarding art's capacity to stabilize experience.

The installation prompts a change in Qayenaat from detachment interpretation to affective intensity. Her reaction is expressed not through critical analysis or aesthetic evaluation, but through a visceral sense of disorientation. By collapsing the distinction between representation and experience, the work confronts her with unresolved elements of her own consciousness. This forms an affective response that exceeds expression, pointing to the failure of symbolic structures to contain the complexities of lived reality.

This failure can be understood through Jacques Lacan's conception of the symbolic order as a system that structures meaning while excluding what it can't assimilate. The Nostalgia installation confronts Qayenaat with precisely such an excess, something resistant to symbolization that unsettles the coherence of the symbolic framework. Her inability to assign a stable meaning to the installation exposes the limitations of representation.

Simultaneously, the encounter foregrounds the dynamics of deferred recognition shaping Qayenaat's relationship with art. In this context, recognition extends beyond external acknowledgement and involves aligning internal experience with representational forms. While this installation appears to promise this correspondence through memory and affect, the promise remains unfulfilled, deepening the gap between lived experience and representation.

The complication of this art work can also be observed in this art world. Rama Islam observes the cosmopolitan art scene as a space where recognition is mediated by structures of privilege and authority. Whereas, Baban Reddy is situated within the role of legitimacy, where artistic production is already imbibed within circuits of validation. This contradicts the claim of Qayenaat for installation being neutral, it is shaped by the asymmetry between artist's position of authority and her own marginality as a viewer, instead.

This asymmetry then is considered to be significant in understanding the intensity of her response. The installation, not only fails to produce meaning but also delves into the exclusion from the processes through which meaning is authorized and circulated. Her inability to engage with the work in a manner that synchronizes with its institutional framing reinforcing her position at the margins of the art world. In this sense, Recognition is stated not only at the level of personal experience but also within the broader structures that govern the artistic value.

The act of destruction that follows this encounter marks a critical moment in this narrative. Qayenaat's concept of installation can not be reduced to merely an impulsive reaction but it represents a breakdown in the mechanism that keeps symbolic mediation. The installation becomes the site of an action that disrupts its status as art which appears as an object of contemplation initially. This shift accounts for the collapse of the distance that typically defines aesthetic engagement.

This breakdown of aesthetic mediation culminates in the literal destruction of Baban Reddy's installation, Nostalgia. Qayenaat's violent impulse is triggered not merely by abstract aesthetic failure, but by interpersonal rejection and paranoia. Overhearing Sara and Baban in private conversation, her alienation crystallizes into the suspicion that they are uniting against her: "Baban and Sara, Sara and Baban, talking about her?". Setting fire to Nostalgia becomes an attempt to assert agency against the symbolic authority of the art world, rationalized through the defiant declaration: "I can be bad too". Yet, rather than producing catharsis or liberating the subject, the destruction results in the unintended, tragic death of Gyan Pai. The aftermath leaves Qayenaat bound to an even deeper crisis of guilt and displacement: "Yes, I ran away in misplaced fury and destroyed an artwork and killed a man for nothing but my despicable vanity". The failure of the artwork to contain affect leads directly to material destruction and self-imposed exile, proving that deferred recognition cannot be resolved through reactive violence.

This moment, most importantly, does not lead to transformation or resolution within the narrative. The aftermath of the destruction also does not produce any clarity or closure, reinforcing the instability that has characterized Qayenaat's engagement with the art world throughout, instead. The absence of resolution defines the extent to which the dynamics of deferred recognition are structural rather than episodic. The encounter with Nostalgia escalates these dynamics but fails to fundamentally alter them.

The role of art within the novel must therefore be reconsidered in aspect of this failure. Art emerges as a structure that reproduces the very absence it appears to address rather than functioning as a medium of expression or communication. The promise of representation is subverted by the inability of artistic forms to stabilize the meaning. This does not account for the irrelevance of the art but the limits of representation are revealed.

This is the main point of the novel's exploration of recognition. Art is situated as a site where recognition might be achieved and the experiences of the subject could be validated and shared. Though this potential remains unrealized, as the structures that control artistic production and reception prevent the coalition of experience and representation. Qayenaat's experiences with Nostalgia justify this situation, probing how the promise of recognition is sustained even as it is shelved.

The importance of this moment extends beyond the immediate scene, sculpturing the broader trajectory of Qayenaat's engagement with art and as well as the social world. The failure of the installation to produce recognition does not lead to abolition, but it strengthens the cyclical nature of her engagement, where desire endures despite of repeated disappointment. This endurance reflects the structure in which absence is not overcome but reproduced continuously, maintaining the subject's orientation towards what remains unattainable.

So, Nostalgia functions as more than an isolated episode, solidifying the broader concerns of the novel dealing with representation, desire and recognition. The installation puts light on the tensions that underlie Qayenaat's experience, revealing how the structures of the art world intersect with the dynamics of subjectivity. The dereliction of the art work to mediate experience is not an exception but a manifestation of a more general condition in which meaning remains unstable and recognition suspended.

Highlighting the breakdown of symbolic mediation, the novel questions the conventional assumptions about the role of art in producing coherence. Instead of offering resolution, art becomes a site where fragmentation is intensified, where the voids between experience and representation are made visible. This exemplifies the Qayenaat's response to Nostalgia as a mode of engagement in which the subject is confronted with the limits of meaning, divulging the extent to which absence structures both artistic and subjective experience.

SPATIAL DISLOCATION AND THE LIMITS OF BELONGING IN SIMHAL

The interaction of desire in The Cosmopolitans (2016) is closely tied to the problem of recognition, particularly as they unfold within Qayenaat's relationship with Baban Redddy. This relationship accentuates the interpersonal dimension of deferred recognition unlike her earlier interactions with art, which exposes the limits of representation. Baban's presence within the narrative is not simply that of romantic figure but of a subject that is positioned within networks of visibility, legitimacy and symbolic authority. His ease, confidence and aesthetic judgement along with his institutional acceptance within the art world, constructs a form of presence that Qayenaat observes and desires.

The desire is not directed towards Baban as an individual, but towards what he represents within the symbolic order of the art world. His authority functions as a point of orientation, offering the possibility of coherence and validation that remains inaccessible to Qayenaat. In this manner, her attraction is stated less by intimacy than by misrecognition, in which the object of desire pervades with a significance that exceeds its immediate presence. The relationship, hence, operates within a dynamic where recognition is considered but never fully realized, maintaining a condition of perpetual deferral.

This design may be understood through Jacques Lacan's perspective of desire being mediated by the other. It states that desire does not arise spontaneously but is shaped by perceived desires and the authority of others, leading the subject to look for recognition through alignment with symbolic figures. Baban occupies the position of Other whose recognition appears to negotiate legitimacy. Yet this recognition remains partial and evasive, ensuring that the desire is not resolved but continuously reproduced. Qayenaat's relationship with Baban fluctuates between proximity and distance, where moments of apparent connection fall flat due to an underlying lack of reciprocity.

Also, this explanation does not present this misrecognition as a temporary misunderstanding that can be corrected. Rather, it reveals it as a structural condition that governs the formation of desire itself. Qayenaat's awareness does not diminish her attraction, but it intensifies the sense of distance that sustains it. The impossibility of full recognition becomes the condition through which desire persists, highlighting the fragmentation that characterizes her subjectivity. In this context, the relationship exemplifies a broader pattern within the novel, where fulfillment is continuously postponed and coherence remains unattainable.

The move to Simhal opens up another lens through which these interactions can be read. Simhal seems to stand as an alternative to the volatility of city-based cosmopolitan life. A more stable and meaningful mode of existence is offered by its quietness, slower tempo and separation from the competitive art world. Qayenaat's encounter soon shows that dislocation continues across the city as well.

This cycle of projection and deferral extends to Qayenaat's interpersonal desire for Baban and her subsequent flight to Simhal. Her romantic fixation on Baban is rooted in retrospective idealization rather than emotional reciprocity: "I could not have really loved you… You were no artist then, and it is the artist I love". When urban life collapses, Simhal is imagined as a sanctuary of authentic art, yet the physical reality immediately exposes the limits of spatial escape. Her encounter with the Modern Nritya Academy reveals that the town merely mirrors her internal desolation: "…this place was modern both in name and appearance… and yet evoked utter neglect and boredom". Similarly, her submission to the King—surrendering her autonomy to be renamed "Mandakini"—illustrates an attempt to erase past guilt through a projected identity: "The important thing now was to make the transition from Qayenaat to Mandakini, or rather to complete it, for she was already half there". Ultimately, Simhal confirms that dislocation is internal rather than geographical; true reckoning only begins when she flees the King's captivity ("…the harder thing

was acknowledging that her adventure in Simhal was over," and assumes responsibility by adopting Chota ("I need to be clear in my head for his sake,".

Simhal operates less as a concrete geographical alternative than as a projected space of resolution. It imbibes the desire for a form of belonging that has remained shifty within the urban environment, though this desire is itself structured by the same dynamics of deferral that shape the relationship between Qayenaat and Baban Reddy. The expectation of producing a transformation in subjectivity is gradually undermined, as the narrative reveals the persistence of affective and psychic instability.

A similar pattern of anticipation and disappointment is observed in Qayenaat's engagement with Simhal. The clarity proves difficult to sustain even if the space initially appears to offer this. The absence of the intense symbolic activity that characterizes the art world does not lead to a stable sense of self, instead, it delves into exposing the extent to which fragmentation is internal rather than externally imposed. The subject does not simply move through space but carries with her the structures of perception and desire that shape her experience.

This shifts the focus from spatial displacement to structural dislocation. The inability to inhibit Simhal as a space of belonging suggests that the problem lies in subjectivity but not in location. The probe for coherence is continuously redirected towards external spaces despite of the simplicity of Simhal, yet these spaces ultimately reveal their inability to fulfill this expectation. The result foregrounds the recognition that belonging can not be secured through movement alone, but it is embedded within the subject's relation to the world.

The fluctuation between desire and space thus becomes central to the novel's exploration of misrecognition. Simhal represents an unattainable space of coherence within the spatial domain contrary to Baban's interpretation that represents an unattainable object of desire within the interpersonal domain. Both function as projections that organize the subject's orientation towards the world while simultaneously deferring fulfillment. The inability of these projections to provide stability reinforce fragmentation suggesting that dislocation functions across multiple levels.

Keeping together the dynamics of desire, misrecognition and spatial displacement, this section demonstrates that fragmentation in the novel cannot be attributed to a single cause or context. It escalates from the interaction of symbolic structures, interpersonal relations and spatial imaginaries, all of which contribute to a condition in which the subject remains suspended between possibility and impossibility. In this suspended moment, desire endures not in spite of its unfulfilled state but because of it, belonging persists as a horizon that organizes experience without ever coming fully reached.

The novel does not merely depict fragmented subjectivity as a thematic dilemma; it structuralizes this fragmentation through narrative form and technique. Hasan relies predominantly on close third-person focalization and free indirect discourse, systematically collapsing the distance between external reality and Qayenaat's psychic ambivalence. Rather than establishing an objective social panorama of Bangalore or Simhal, the narrative voice filters events through her hesitant consciousness, where narrative progression frequently stalls in favor of extended interior ruminations. This technique formally locks the reader within Qayenaat's cognitive stasis.

Furthermore, the narrative pacing undermines conventional plot trajectories. While sensational plot events occur—such as the arson of Nostalgia and the resultant death of Gyan Pai—Hasan structurally deflates their dramatic potential. The narrative resists giving these climactic ruptures a sense of dramatic catharsis, treating their aftermath through elliptical skips, lingering ennui, and delayed realization rather than traditional narrative escalation. Hasan's syntactical rhythm, marked by paratactic hesitations and descriptive lingering over low-stakes interactions, formally replicates what Sianne Ngai defines as non-cathartic stasis. By refusing linear resolution and thematic closure, the novel ensures that form mirrors content: the open-ended, non-climactic structure formally materializes the unresolvable, deferred nature of modern subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

The Cosmopolitans (2016) ultimately rethink subjectivity by rejecting the narrative and conceptual models that conventionally offer coherence, resolution or integration. The novel puts it as a persistent condition that shapes perception, experience and relationality rather than presenting fragmentation as a problem to be overcome. As the preceding analysis has demonstrated, this condition cannot be reduced to mere psychological instability or social marginality alone, instead, it emerges at the crossing point of cultural structures, symbolic processes and affective economics that persistently postpone the possibility of stable meaning.

The novel's engagement with fragmentation is its repudiation to translate dislocation into dramatic crisis or narrative closure, which makes it distinguishable from others. The deliberate formal and thematic strategy is not an omission but foregrounds the limits of representation. The narrative does not result into the moments of recognition that may strengthen the subject with the world, but it sustains a mode of incompletion in which experience remains open-ended and unresolved. This resistance to closure challenges interpretive expectations that demand coherence, compelling the reader to involve with subjectivity as a process instead of a fixed state.

This condition is inserted through a narrative that privileges hesitation, discontinuity and repetition. Episodes return to similar configurations of expectation and deferral without building a singular point of transformation. This cyclical movement suggests that

the instability experienced by the protagonist is not contingent but structural, imbibed within the very logic of the narrative. Meaning remains dispersed, resisting strengthening into a unified interpretive framework rather than accumulating progressively.

The novel also reshapes the relationship between the individual and the cultural spaces they inhabit. Participation in artistic and social environment does not produce a stable sense of belonging, instead, it deciphers the conditions under which recognition is mediated, distributed and withheld. The subject's engagement with these spaces becomes a site of negotiation rather than resolution, where the desire for coherence encounters the limits imposed by symbolic and institutional structures. In this context, the novel underlines a critique of cultural participation that goes beyond the specific context of the art world, insinuating a broader dynamics that molds contemporary experiences of selfhood.

The novel also gives significant equal attention to the persistence of low-intensity affect as a defining feature of modern experience. It dwells on subtle and often unarticulated feelings that resist clear expression rather than foregrounding moments of heightened emotion or dramatic rupture. This emphasis on muted affect underscores the extent to which subjectivity is shaped by conditions that do not lend themselves to resolution, further complicating attempts to locate meaning within conventional narrative frameworks.

Ultimately, this paper reframes the critical discourse surrounding The Cosmopolitans (2016) by establishing that Hasan's primary aesthetic achievement lies in the formal structuralization of psychic fragmentation. Rather than adding to standard postcolonial critiques of globalization or existential readings of individual choice, this analysis foregrounds how Hasan innovates contemporary Indian fiction through formal resistance to narrative closure and affective catharsis. By demonstrating that dislocation is an internal narratological structure rather than a consequence of geographic or institutional setting, the study redefines cosmopolitan belonging not as an attainable cultural destination, but as a structurally deferred horizon within contemporary subjectivity.

In this sense, The Cosmopolitans (2016) can be read as a significant intervention in contemporary Indian English fiction, one that shifts the aim from narratives of mobility and transformation to the complexities of inferior life. It questions the assumption that cultural participation or spatial movement can solve the tensions inherent in modern subjectivity, rather it presents these tensions as enduring and constitutive. The novel thus underscores a rethinking of belonging, not as a state to be achieved, but as a horizon that remains perpetually deferred, molding the subject's engagement with the world without ever being fully realized.

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