

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, TRAUMA AND INDIAN WOMEN

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, TRAUMA AND INDIAN WOMEN:  
FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN  
IN  
MANJU KAPUR'S *A MARRIED WOMAN*  
AND  
ANITA RAU BADAMI'S *CAN YOU HEAR THE NIGHBIRD CALL?*

By SANCHARI SUR, B.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree Master of Arts.

McMaster University

© Copyright by Sanchari Sur, September 2011

Master of Arts (2011)

McMaster University

(English)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Communal Violence, Trauma and Indian Women: Fictional  
Representations of Women in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* and  
Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*

AUTHOR: Sanchari Sur, B.A. (York University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor C. Chakraborty

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 104

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines fictional representations of Indian women's responses to trauma in the background of communal violence. It argues that fiction allows for the reimagination of women's conditions during communal riots, and their responses to trauma as a result of those riots. While ethnographic research seeks answers from traumatized victims, a fictional text can open up spaces for debates about conditions of women and their responses to trauma in the background of communal violence. Through Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* and Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, this project examines women's negotiations of their religious and national identities within the private and the public and their responses to trauma caused by communal violence.

The Introduction draws on texts on gender and diaspora theory as well as scholarly work on the evolution and history of communalism in India. It also looks at the historical backgrounds of two events of communal violence that underpin Kapur's and Badami's texts, namely, the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy and the resulting 1992 riots, and Indira Gandhi's assassination and the resulting 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Chapter 1 examines Indian women's negotiations of religious identities in *A Married Woman*. Through the characters of Astha, Pipee and Sita, I argue that Kapur draws parallels between women as Other and religious minorities as Other. Her text shows the ways in which trauma crosses religious borders of Hindu-Muslim, and opens up possibilities for envisioning ways of ethically coexisting with the Other. Chapter 2 investigates communal violence in India and Canada in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* Focusing on the characters of Bibi-ji, Leela and Nimmo, I argue that communal violence subsumes class, religion and location. Her text highlights how trauma crosses national boundaries and how the three women are torn apart by their losses.

In my Conclusion, I suggest for new avenues of research that might contribute to a further understanding of the dynamics of communal violence and trauma, and a future investigation into the negotiation of male religious identities in the background of communal violence.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Chandrima Chakraborty, for her constant guidance and immense patience. This project would not have been possible without Dr. Chakraborty's insight and support. I also want to thank my committee members, Dr. Nadine Attewell and Dr. Susie O'Brien, for their invaluable comments and feedback. Last, I want to thank my sister, Shinjini Sur, for being there when I needed her most.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 1. | Introduction  | 1   |
| 2. | Chapter One – Indian Women’s Negotiations Of Religious Identities in Manju Kapur’s <i>A Married Woman</i>                 | 34  |
| 3. | Chapter Two – Communal Violence at Home and in the Diaspora in Anita Rau Badami’s <i>Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?</i> | 63  |
| 4. | Conclusion: Communal Violence and the Effect of Trauma  | 94  |
| 5. | Bibliography  | 101 |

## INTRODUCTION

This project looks at fictional representations of Indian women's responses to trauma in the background of communal violence. It seeks to demonstrate how fiction allows for the reimagination of women's conditions during communal riots, and their responses to trauma as a result of those riots. While ethnographic research seeks answers from traumatized victims, a fictional text can open up spaces for debates about conditions of women and their responses to trauma in the background of communal violence. By recreating or imagining events that may or may not have actually occurred as well as offering myriad (at times contested) responses to these events, fiction enables the envisioning of other futures by suggesting possibilities for further debates and dialogues to occur in the present and in the future.

My thesis examines two novels: Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* and Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*. To avoid gender biases in representing women's conditions, I have specifically chosen two women writers. Both novels are set in the background of religious communal violence in India, and its diaspora (here, Canada). Also, they focus the reader's critical attention on women through their use of women protagonists to explore gendered responses to trauma. Both novels reveal that the female characters' differential responses to trauma have to be understood in the context of their gendered upbringing and their socio-historical circumstances that are temporal and contingent. Yet, at the same time, the novels suggest that communal violence subsumes class, gender, national identity and religious identity.

In ethnographic research, women are often portrayed as victims of violence as evidenced in the works of feminist theorists like Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin whose research is on the female subjects of 1947 Partition. Writing on the Partition of India in *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh write on the Partition of India*, they argue that “[t]he most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the Other [by] dishonouring [their women]” (23). As a result of this dishonour, women either maintain a rigid silence surrounding their trauma, or fictionalize their accounts. Veena Das and Gyanendra Pandey also support this claim when on the basis of their research on Partition violence, they conclude that women respond to trauma either through silence or engage in creating fictional narratives around their experiences. On the other hand, recent scholarly work on the 1992 Hindu-Muslim riots has shown that women have often provoked, applauded and participated in violence against religious minorities (See for instance, Basu; Sarkar and Butalia). However, the texts that I am analyzing in my thesis do not reflect women who have responded to trauma through violence, or have experienced trauma as a result of being assaulted directly. The novels reveal that women's trauma is not always dependent on their own trauma, such as rape, violence, and so on, but can also be a result of the violence against the men in their lives. In Kapur's text for example, communal violence affects women indirectly through other men in their lives. Astha and Pipee experience trauma through the death of Aijaz. Similarly, in Badami's text, communal violence travels across distance and space and affect Indian



women irrespective of the location, community or social status. Bibi-ji suffers the loss of her husband as a result of communal riots, while Nimmo loses her husband, son and daughter. The novels show that women can become traumatized by communal violence, irrespective of their actual involvements and their backgrounds.

My chapters aim to show that women's responses to trauma are determined by their gendered upbringing, and how that upbringing affects their negotiations of identities in the private and in the public, in the context of communal violence. In both novels, patriarchal agents in the form of family members affect the upbringing of the central women characters, and shape their attitudes towards their religious and national identities. However, the texts also demonstrate that in the face of communal violence, women's negotiations of their identities in the private and public do not necessarily depend on their gendered socializations; some women may be able to overcome their former gendering effects and respond to socio-historical situations in innovative ways of their own. At the same time, women's relationships with religious minorities make them more receptive to the pain of the Other. While Badami's text illustrates Nimmo's and Bibi-ji's experience of trauma due to the death of men of the same faith (Pappu, Satpal and Pa-ji), the death of Muslim Aijaz in Kapur's text traumatizes as well as empowers Pipee and Astha (both of whom are Hindus) to live differently, and opens up ethical means of coexisting with the Other. While trauma in Badami's text crosses national borders, in Kapur's text, trauma crosses religious borders of Hindu-Muslim.

However, to understand the complexity of trauma (and its effects) as a result of communal violence in India and its diaspora, I will begin with an investigation of the history and the rise of Indian communalism and its rise in contemporary India.

### **Indian Communalism and its Rise**

The emergence of “a dark side [of] political violence” (Ludden 18) in Indian communalism is a recent phenomenon. While David Ludden agrees that communalism is “collective antagonism organized around religious, linguistic, and/or ethnic identities” (12), the role of politics in communalism is a new development. Communalism was originally the formation of communities in respect to the formation of the Other (Freitag 220). As Ludden and Sandria Freitag argue, community identity based on religion, linguistic or ethnicity evokes a feeling of belonging that comes into being in (antagonistic) opposition to other groups. Belonging is achieved when one positions the self against the other, where the self can only come into being by the formation of the Other. Ludden explains this formation of communal identity as based on “public opinion around oppositional ethnic or religious categories” (13). Freitag clarifies Ludden’s position by pointing out that the Other can be both other communities *and* the state (220). However, there lies a conflict between the origins of Indian communalism. Many scholars, such as Pandey and Edward Said, argue that communalism was “a product of orientalism and the colonial state” (Ludden 11). These scholars oppose the view that communalism rose as a result of conflict between different religions. Instead, they push for an investigation into how the state has been implicated in communalism since colonial times. Therefore, while communalism in India may seem to have started as a way to foster belonging through

formations of communities, in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Pandey asserts that the colonial state played a major part in fostering an assumption of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, which evolved into communal politics and communal violence, in contemporary India (Ludden 11).

To understand the evolution of Indian politics and the position of communal violence within this politics, there is a need to go back to the beginning of community formation in India. In her research, Freitag finds that in British India, political processes and state institutions were based on two neat categories of “public” and “private”. This distinction was problematic because it functioned on the assumption that all political issues could be housed within state institutions (212). At the same time, community identity was termed “apolitical” and hence falling into the private and domestic, and “not requiring the attention of the state” (212). Yet, community identities have always been political in India since the absence of state interference within domestic and private matters, according to Freitag, created an “alternative realm” that promoted cultural cohesion in public spaces through symbolic integration of people based on religious practices (213). The symbolic integration came about in the eighteenth century when “members of the dispersed Mughal courtier class and people who exercised leadership among Hindu merchant groups” took up responsibility to foster “urban integrative ceremonies” (213). In the absence of state interference, colonized Indians found themselves experimenting and contesting freely “the status and ideological constraints that they expressed in public” (212). Thus, community identities that were considered domestic and private by the colonial state became both political and public. At the same

time, the community identities that were formed in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of state interference became religious in nature due to the institutionalization of religion in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which shows that contestation and activism within and among groups of ulema and monastic sampradays carried over into public arenas (see Sanyal 1990; van der Veer 1993). These religious community identity formations promoted cultural cohesion through shared community practices performed in the public space through activities such as processions, performances and local festivals and legitimized those who claimed and exercised new leadership based on religious authority (213), similar to the religious figures such as monks, saints and ascetics who have always held sway in India, both pre and post British rule. In these new leadership roles, India saw the gradual emergence of political leadership with a religious nationalistic undertone. However, Freitag points out that Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders tried to play down the different forms of community identities. They saw these community identities as threats to a unified national identity that could prevent India's freedom from British colonialism (214). Therefore, according to Freitag, despite the formations of different emerging community identities based on religion pre-1947 Partition of India, national leaders saw these identities as fractures in the Indian nationalistic imagination. Indian leaders actively promoted a unified national fabric, despite the myriad religions, as a way to gain independence from British rule. But their assertion of unity in diversity notwithstanding, communal violence on both sides of the border at the time of Partition seems to point to the salience of existing religious identities that went against the imagined secular democratic future of an independent India. These

unresolved issues at the time of Partition, according to Freitag, led to an ambiguous relationship between the state's political institutions and the alternate realm of religious communities (215). Freitag believes that secularism won in the post-1947 independence era due to the inherent fear of further partitions, and she claims that it is only since 1980, that “a number of competing identities” have emerged in India (215). The 1980s was a critical period for the rise of communalism in India. This period saw the decline of the Indira Gandhi-led Congress which opened up a political space for the Hindu Right to make inroads among the middle classes (primarily in North India). It was also an era of secessionist movements in Kashmir, Assam, and Punjab that created fears about the territorial integrity of India. The Mandal Commission recommendations (1980) for affirmative action benefits in education and jobs to the “other backward classes” (OBCs) and the infamous Shah Bano case (1986) became a major event in the escalation of Indian communalism (Chakraborty 171). The competing identities that emerged around this period comprised of “different bases of community identity” that competed with the nation state for the “primary loyalties of participants” (Freitag 215).

While Freitag conceptualizes the formation of Indian communalism, it is important to point out that Indian communalism is understood and described differently from Western communalism. Richard Fox explains the difference between Indian and Western communalism through his theory of hyperenchantment. He sees Indian communalism as a “hyperenchantment of religion” (239). In his view, communalism in India is a local (not global) instance of how modernity built new forms of identity once it was disenchanted with the pre-modern world (239). Because modernity gave rise to new

means of transportation and communication, enchanted identities were more “powerful and massive” and therefore, more “violent” in nature (239). Indian communalism, according to Fox, created hatred and violence within India, rather than different communal identities that could struggle for power in India (249). Fox believes that due to the hyperenchantment of religion in India, Indian communalism comes with a negative connotation in the West (239). Western communalism, according to Fox, refers to religion as a matter of faith, as opposed to Indian communalism which is religion as an ideology (238). However, Fox adds to this definition by clarifying that both Western and Indian communalism rise out of modernity. He argues that while communalism in India and the West rises as a response to a failed bureaucratic state, the West adopt a “nostalgic and celebratory view of communalism in its midst” and at the same time, condemns India for communalism (238). Fox reasons that this horror on the part of the West at Indian communalism may be as a result of violence and hatred of Indian communal politics (249). Indian scholars and intellectuals also fear Indian communalism due to the extent of violence that can erupt as a result of communal hatred. However, Western theorists use communal violence to demarcate Indian communalism from Western communalism. The difference between Indian communalism and Western communalism then, lies not in an actual difference, but in the way the West decides to “other” India, even though both forms of communalism rise as a response to modernity.

Unlike Fox, Peter van der Veer links Indian communalism to the rise of Indian nationalism. According to him, nationalism has two sides. One, the love of a nation, and two, the fear and hatred of the Other (250). In his conceptualization of Indian nationalism,

van der Veer asserts that since the nineteenth century, “religion has been the site of difference on which the struggle for alternatives to Western modernity in many parts of the colonial world,” including India, took place (255). In other words, religious communities arose as a response to the infiltration of Western (and colonial) modernity in the colonies. He terms new discourses on these struggles against Western modernity as “religious nationalism,” as this term expresses a discourse on both religious communities and a discourse on the nation (255). Van der Veer thus points to a discourse on nationalism that is interconnected to a discourse of religious communities. He reads the formation of religious identities through familial lens, but adds that family does not exist alone. Instead, “the family is a part of a larger political economy” (256-257). In this recognition of the family being connected to a wider range of institutions that shape the social fabric of India, van der Veer refuses to localize the formation of religious identities to families alone, and points to other larger forces that shapes individual families.

Echoing Freitag, van der Veer notes “[c]ommunal violence in India has to be understood in the context of the politics of sacred space. Riots and rituals have come to be linked in the construction of communal identities in public arena” (259). What van der Veer is directing attention to here is how communal identities contest boundaries of public space, a contestation that leads to violence in the form of riots. Yet, he is also careful to point out that religion alone is not responsible for such forms of violence; politics also plays a role. He argues that politicians use religion as a “smokescreen” and call it communalism for their benefits (261). Politicians evoke nationalist sentiments

among their voters through the promotion of religious identities and ritualized practices and secure particular religious affiliations to congeal against an Other.

All of these critics point to the type of space that Indian communalism occupies in the face of Indian nationalism. Indian nationalism, according to these critics, has been irrevocably intertwined with Indian communalism. In a secular country like India, a national self-assertion which is Hindu in nature points to a complex history of Indian politics that has evolved in a multitude of different ways in the past century.<sup>1</sup> In Ludden's view, Indian communalism is an "unintended by-product of Hindu national self-assertion that results from adverse reactions from minority communities and from the Indian state" (16). Communalism in contemporary India has become a "new communalism," according to Ludden which he explains as the struggle of the Indian state, right-wing political groups and Hindu fundamentalist groups to reconstruct the country politically (18). Hence, the struggle is concerned with the legitimacy of the state, distribution of state resources, consolidating power in society and seeking justice (18). For Ludden, this "new communalism" differs from "old communalism" as it involves "ideological and organizational mobilization, reinterpretations of national heritage and shifting loyalties" by both the state and specific political actors (18). In this new construction of Indian politics, Ludden points to a "dark side" of "political violence" (18). However, it is important to note that in his definition of "new communalism," Ludden is specifically

---

<sup>1</sup> A historical example is the Cow Protection Movement in the 1890s that demanded the end of cow slaughter in British India. The movement led to widespread attack upon the Muslims by Hindu groups in North India.



referring to a struggle between Hinduism and Islam, and not Hinduism and other religious minorities.

In their differing views on the origins and consolidation of Indian communalism and in tracing a shift from “old” to “new” communalism in contemporary times, none of the critics shed light on the role of women. My project seeks to fill this lacuna in scholarship by investigating the position of women in India, and in the Indian diaspora, within this context of new communalism, especially in the background of “dark side [of] political violence” that Ludden refers to. I have chosen to examine women, as their position within communal violence is usually theorized as that of victims (Pandey 2044), who are either silent or who fictionalize their experiences (Das 68-69). My project will examine two novels, Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* (2002) and Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), which have narratives set in the background of communal violence, both in India and its diaspora. Kapur’s novel is situated in the background of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy<sup>2</sup> and the ensuing Hindu-Muslim riots in 1992, while Badami’s novel looks at women both in India and the diaspora, in the background of Indira Gandhi’s assassination and the following anti-Sikh riots in 1984, and Air India Flight 182 Bombing in 1985. The two texts are crucial in looking at the position of women in the background of riots as they throw light on the various ways through which women negotiate their national and religious identities in the midst of a communal crisis. Moreover, the texts also highlight the ways in which national

---

<sup>2</sup> The area occupied by Babri Masjid (or, Babar’s Mosque) became a site of tussle between Hindu right and Muslim minorities in India. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992, the mosque was destroyed, and led to widespread Hindu-Muslim riots in India.

and religious identities can evolve as a result of communal violence, both in India and its diaspora.

I focus on fiction as a medium through which to study the formations of religious and national identities because fiction allows for study of conditions of women in ways that ethnographic research cannot. Ethnographic research is limited by the qualitative nature of its data, unlike fiction which can envision possibilities for present and future debates. In the examples cited by Gyanendra Pandey, women who experience the trauma of communal violence are sometimes unable to articulate their experience (2041). Or sometimes, they speak of violence in the form of fictional narratives. This echoes Das's postulation that women either negotiate their loss through silence or by fictionalising their accounts (68-69). Yet, the fictional narratives by both Kapur and Badami offer possibilities to reimagine the situation of women which are generally shrouded in silence. Since Kapur and Badami focus on female protagonists in their narratives, the choice of the two texts facilitates a critical exploration of female national and religious identities in the background of communal violence. They will allow me to investigate the ways in which the fictional female characters negotiate their loss, and their religious and national identities in the face of that loss. I will situate my readings of the two novels in the light of the scholarly work on religious and national identities of women within India and Indian diaspora and in the socio-historical context of two violent events in Indian history in order to understand the formation and negotiation of trauma by fictional female subjects in Kapur's and Badami's novels.

## **Theoretical Context: National and Religious Identities of Women in India and the Indian Diaspora**

### **India**

In order to understand the formation of both religious and national identities of women, it is necessary to take into account the theorizations of feminists on the subject matter. Freitag mentions that community identity for women are shaped by “gendering processes” where women fall into two strict categories, either the “mother/goddesses” end of the spectrum, or they are “resisted” as “harlots” (221). Freitag does not specify what these “gendering processes” entail. However, Gayatri Gopinath’s position on the role of women in Indian society seems to offer an answer to Freitag’s “gendering processes”. Gopinath states that patriarchal attitudes towards women in India situate the female gender as “the symbolic center... [for]... ‘home’ and ‘family’” (262). The female gender becomes a symbol for home and family, and hence, a symbol for domesticity. In this construction of female identity, there is an attempt to confine women within the domestic and private sphere (that is, “home” and “family”). Moreover, any kind of deviation from traditional gender roles is either condemned or ignored (263). Gopinath’s theorization that women are confined only to the domestic sphere points to a gap in her reasoning when faced with the question of their religious identities. If women in India are confined to the “private” sphere, and van der Veer points out that communalism is a contestation of sacred space in “public,” then where do women fit into the context of communalism? If religious communities and national politics are delegated to the public arena, then where

and how do women as familial beings negotiate their religious community identities and national identities? If riots, as van der Veer points out, are violent events occurring out of religious differences in the public space, where do women stand in the event of riots and similar violent events? Gopinath's theorization fails to take these questions into account.

Gyanendra Pandey, however, attempts to answer these questions when he points out that women, along with children, are usually victims when they come in contact with communal violence (2044). Taking the instance of violence enacted on both sides of the new border during the 1947 Partition of British India, he highlights the general view of the populace as violence always being “out there” (2037). From his interviews, Pandey concludes that violence is always presented as either happening on the boundary that separates one's community from the Other, or violence always occurs beyond the boundaries of one's community, religious and geographical (2037). In this distinction of inside (the community) versus the outside of (the community), there is an echo of the separation of the private and the public, where one's community comprises the private, the familiar, while the outside or the Other (communities), automatically falls in the public. Just like patriarchal views on female gender that portray females as “a site of pure and sacred spirituality,” (Gopinath 263), female victims of communal violence view their own community as “pure” while the Other communities are set outside this “pure” realm (Pandey 2037). Violence that is committed by one's community members is exalted to martyrdom or revenge for a just cause, while violence committed by other religious communities is seen as communal violence. In this distinction, there is an attempt by female victims of violence to purify one's own community, where the Other is the

aggressor and “not to be trusted” (2041). I would argue that the perpetrator conceptualized as the religious other is unequivocally seen as masculine, as opposed to the victimized religious community, which is in contrast, feminized. Similar to the predominantly female victims of communal violence, communities that are violated or suffer are also feminized. Thus, we can see a parallel emerging between suffering/victimized females and suffering/victimized communities. However, Veena Das offers a differing perspective to Pandey’s formulation of female and community victimhood.

Through her investigation of women’s negotiation of loss as a consequence of Partition violence, Das explains the specific victimization of women (and children) during moments of communal violence. Through her analysis of accounts of abducted women during the 1947 Partition, she argues that Indian nationalism “includes the appropriation of bodies of women as objects on which the desire for nationalism” was inscribed through violence, like rape, mutilation and so on (68). The construction of female bodies as symbols of their respective religious communities and national honour allowed men to demonstrate their desire to gain superiority over the Other. Violence against women thus becomes violence against men. In other words, nation states are built on the bodies of women (68), where men of different religious communities contest for power and authority over the nation by seeking to establish their control over bodies of women from the opposing religious community. Therefore, nationalism is constructed on the bodies of women, which is ironic, since the state occupies a public space, while women occupy a private space in the Indian patriarchal imagination, according to Gopinath.

Das inverts Gopinath's view by situating female victims of communal violence in the public. According to Das, to understand the world that women inhabit post-violence and loss, it is necessary to approach this world through mourning (67). Das asserts that the experience of loss makes the voices of women "public" in the process of mourning (68). This view is in contradiction to Pandey, and to some extent, to Gopinath. Both Gopinath and Pandey point out that female identity (whether personal, religious or communal) are confined to the private. However, according to Das, it is the process of mourning in the event of loss, especially in the context of communal violence that Pandey refers to, that situates female voices in the "public" domain. Women express their loss through their body and language (Das 68). Therefore, even in their silence, victimized women of communal violence objectify grief through their bodies (for example, mourning rituals such as wailing), or through language, where there is a need to fictionalize their accounts of violence (68-69). This shows that Indian female subjects in their negotiation of trauma as a result of communal violence occupy contradictory spaces, which is at once in the public, and at the same time, in the private.

### **The Indian Diaspora**

Diaspora theorist Vijay Mishra points to two kinds of historical migrations taking place in terms of Indian diaspora. While the first group of Indian emigrants – what Mishra characterizes as the "old diaspora" – migrated in search of labour, in part because of "British imperial movement of labour in the colonies," there was also a movement of peoples in the mid to late twentieth century, which Mishra terms as the "new diaspora"

(421). My thesis is concerned with this “new diaspora”. According to Mishra, new diasporas keep their connection with the homeland “intact” through “family networks” (422). Instead of forming an exclusive community in isolation in the diaspora, new diasporas maintain these connections with family back in the homeland, through visits, communication and so on. Mishra also refers to “marriage” with individuals from the homeland as a way of maintaining these connections with the homeland while living in the diaspora (422). He notes that peoples of the new diaspora are also “visible presences” in the “Western democracies” (422). In other words, the new diaspora is visible to the new nation state to which Indians have immigrated because of their interaction with the new country of residence. Even though diasporic spaces are seen as a place of displacement by many diaspora theorists, including Mishra (423), I use the term “new homeland” in my work to signify that the diaspora acts as a second homeland, or a “new homeland”. Here, I also make a distinction between the “new homeland” and the “old homeland,” where the “old homeland” refers to the assumed place of origin. Mishra uses the term “diasporic imaginary” (423) to refer back to the “old homeland”. He uses Zizek’s definition of the imaginary, where the imaginary is a state of “identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves” (423).<sup>3</sup> Mishra argues that the diasporic subject creates an imaginary homeland (here, the “old homeland”), where the imaginary homeland becomes a “fantasy structure... through which society perceives itself as a homogenous entity” (423). Therefore, the migrant in the diaspora views the old homeland through a lens of fantasy, where the old homeland functions as an ideal

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 105.

homeland, a homeland where the migrant can “feel” comfortable. Therefore, the need to feel good in an imaginary homeland points to the idea that the migrant does not feel good in the diaspora. Mishra refers to a dichotomy between the diasporic space (“new homeland”) and the assumed place of origin (“old homeland”) as the people in the diaspora view themselves through the lens of the imaginary (old) (423). Mishra theorizes about a “feeling of loss” and maintains that “imaginary homelands are constructed from a space of distance” (423-424) that “preserve that [feeling of] loss” (423). In the diaspora then, women may experience a “double loss,” which in the context of communal violence would entail the loss of an imagined old homeland and loss (physical, psychological, familial, material, and so on) due to communal violence. But Sara Ahmed refers to a feeling of alienation due to racism in the diaspora, which is different from alienation due to communal violence within one’s homeland. Ahmed echoes Mishra’s “feeling” of affect component that exists within the diasporic migrant.

Ahmed theorizes about the formulation and consolidation of an affective community in the diaspora, where the affect lies in the sharing of “grief” and in mourning the loss of an old homeland (141). She argues that the diasporic subject or migrant is unable to name the loss, despite feeling that something has been lost (140). This goes back to Mishra’s postulation that the subject is unable to name the absence, where a feeling of loss lies around an unnamed trauma (423). Ahmed terms the mourning subject as melancholic, as the subject desires for the loss of the desired, where the nature of the desired is imagined (140). In this struggle to name the loss, an imagined homeland is created to substitute for the loss of an actual homeland. Ahmed believes that it is possible



to mourn for what is lost without knowing what has been lost, since the lost object is an “abstract idea” (140). Therefore, the loss is not an actual loss, but an imagined loss. According to Ahmed, due to this imagined loss, the melancholic subject is unable to form new attachments in the new homeland, which then prevents the subject from moving on (141). The melancholic migrant, in their attachment to an imagined loss, refuses to participate in the national ideal of the new homeland, as that will interfere with their attachment to their old homeland (142). Migrants use “racism” to explain their failure to live up to the national ideal of their adopted country (142). Racism, in this case, is not an invention by the migrant, but a rationale that explains one’s failure to integrate into the adopted country. Ahmed believes that racism preserves an attachment to suffering, where repetition of a “narrative of injury” causes further injury to the melancholic migrant (143). Ahmed adds that the need to create an imaginary homeland rises out of the migrant’s feeling of alienation that rises from their refusal to form new attachments in the new homeland (141). Ahmed postulates specifically about first generation migrant women in fictional narratives, whose refusal to form new attachments in the new homeland contrasts sharply with their second generation daughters, as their daughters want to integrate into the national ideal of their new homeland by going against the ideal of refusal set by their first generation parents (143). Therefore, the feeling of alienation for diasporic women rises not out of being in an alien land, but for refusing to integrate oneself into the national ideal of the alien land.

Brian Keith Axel agrees with this idea of diasporic imaginary created out of a feeling of alienation in the new homeland, where his postulation of diasporic imaginary is

similar to Mishra's. Axel opposes the assumption that "diaspora has a place of origin" (411). Like Ahmed and Mishra, he proposes that the diaspora creates an imaginary/idealized "lost" homeland, not vice versa (426). In other words, diaspora creates an imaginary homeland (here, the diasporic imaginary) in order to alleviate feelings of alienation within the diaspora, where homeland in the diasporic imaginary is an "originary moment" and not an "originary place" (424). However, while Ahmed and Mishra refer to the imaginary homeland as a recreation of the old homeland, Axel refers to the idea of yet another homeland, a *third* homeland. Using the example of Sikhs, he calls their desire for Khalistan as "the diasporic imaginary" (442). The Sikh diaspora dreams of an imaginary homeland that only exists in their imagination, and has no basis in reality, argues Axel, unlike Mishra's and Ahmed's imaginary homelands. While Mishra's and Ahmed's conceptualization of imaginary homelands have a reference point to the actual old homeland, Axel's imaginary homeland refers to a homeland that has no reference point in history, and exists as a future utopia for Sikhs. In the case of Sikhs, Axel refers to a history of violence and martyrdom where through symbols of martyrdom posted over the Internet, diasporic Sikh communities are able to recreate the imaginary Khalistan through the moment of viewing (425). The images of the tortured male bodies act as symbols of martyrdom (422) and through these images, the desire of and justification for carving out a new imaginary homeland or Khalistan is consolidated. Here, a male martyr's body stands in for both men *and* women as the moment of creation of an imaginary homeland. Evidently, the bodies of women are unable to act as the moments of creation of an imaginary national ideal; their bodies can only function as objects of

appropriation during communal violence (Das 68) that serve to feminize the Sikh community through the violation of their Sikh women. The feelings of alienation as a result of the violence committed against Sikhs by the Indian state (please see next section) is further exacerbated in the diaspora. Edward Said's theory of metaphorical exile can help to explain the feeling of alienation as observed by Mishra, Ahmed and Axel. According to Edward Said, exile is defined as "a median state [where one] is neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old" (49). Therefore, the exilic state points to a suspended position, a "no-man's land", where the individual is unable to belong either to the new or the old. A "metaphorical exile" then refers to a state of mind where the subject construes oneself as an outsider within his homeland, real or adopted (52). A person can be in a metaphorical exilic state of mind both in the homeland (whether, India), and in the diaspora. Ahmed, Axel and Mishra point to the migrant feeling alienation, or feeling like an "outsider" within the new adopted homeland, in addition to being in an actual physical exile. Being in two different exiles (metaphorical and physical) refers to the idea of double displacement.

Gopinath and other feminist critics explain how these diaspora theories relate to the experience of woman, both in the old homeland and the new homeland, through a feeling of double displacement. In Gopinath's opinion, this exilic state of mind is prevalent among women at home, due to their idealized images where the female gender is expected to emulate traditional gender roles established in the past. This is a cause for anxiety in women, as their inability to meet gender expectations can result in discrimination within the homeland due to patriarchal attitudes. The family, which is an

important social institution for understanding gender roles and patterns (D’Cruz and Bharat 167), also functions as a site of oppression for women in India. Indian society, which is patriarchal in nature, has two kinds of family systems: joint and nuclear. Unlike the West, the prevalent form of family in India has been the joint family, which has generally been viewed as more oppressive to women than the nuclear family (Schlesinger 171). Since the joint family comprises of living with one’s husband’s family as well, Schlesinger believes that women have to cater to the needs and desires of other family members, instead of just her husband and her children. In the diaspora, however, there is evidence of added burdens on the female immigrant, despite being in a nuclear family.

Research shows that “[w]ithin immigrant communities, traditional gender-role behaviours are often demanded from women immigrants” (Grewal 54) and patriarchal power remains even after migration (53). Anannya Bhattacharjee points to “the tendency of diasporic Indians to formulate a model of Indian womanhood as representative of ‘tradition’, ‘culture’ and ‘nation’” (41). The female gender role in a diasporic setting is even more restrictive than its Indian counterpart as new burdens are added when Indian women arrive in the diaspora. These new burdens can be explained through the “pervasive fear of [diasporic Indians] of total assimilation into an alien culture” (Ramanujam 147). This fear creates an added pressure to maintain the traditional Indian gender roles in a foreign country in an attempt to hold onto cultural values that can be passed onto the future generations. In other words, diasporic Indians alienate themselves from the host culture through their fear of assimilating into an “alien” culture, where “alien-ness” is attributed to the culture of the “new homeland”. Feminist critics have

found that “within [a] patriarchal diasporic logic,” women can only exist within the traditional household (Gopinath 265). In the theories of Gopinath, Mandeep Grewal and Bhattacharjee, there is an assumption that a sense of displacement replaces a sense of belonging within women, as there is a dichotomy between personal desires and the need to conform to gender roles that will allow women to be accepted within the society. These theorists assume that women are unhappy within patriarchal familial settings; an assumption that is at odds with the depiction of Leela and Nimmo in Badami’s text. While Leela lives in both a joint family in India and a nuclear family in the diaspora, Nimmo lives in a nuclear family in India. Both women profess joy at being able to carry out their patriarchal gender roles. Moreover, these theorists assume that all women are similarly oppressed regardless of caste, class, age, religion and so on. The assumptions of these feminist theorists fail to take into account possibilities of happiness for a woman within a patriarchal logic, whether in India or in the diaspora. These theorists also do not address the ways in which the diaspora can act as a site of “becoming” for the migrant (Hall 394).

Stuart Hall asserts that even in this construction of an imagined homeland due to the alienation experienced out of racism, diaspora is not just a site of “being” but also a site of “becoming” (394). He believes that while there is a need to reconstruct the past through “memory, fantasy, narrative and myth”, the “present” of the cultural identities in the diaspora is “unstable” and is constantly changing (395). Hall asserts that diasporic cultural identities cannot exist on a “shared” similarity of “history” and “ancestry” alone (393), but there is a need to recognize that being in the diaspora, or the “new homeland,”

also affects how the diasporic cultural identities change (394). In this change, Hall believes, lies the reason as to why the “old homeland” is recreated. Since the diasporic subject has changed while being in the diaspora, the “old homeland” in their imagination has also changed, and thus, it has to be “reconstruct[ed]” (395). Hence, while diasporic subjects have the need to create a(n old) homeland (395), they are also in constant transformation themselves (in the new homeland) (394). The female migrant, for instance, not only transforms in the new homeland, but through her transformation, she also transforms the new space that she occupies in the diaspora. Leela in Badami’s text, for example, opens herself to new opportunities in the diaspora, where she forms friendships with women of other racial and religious backgrounds as well as takes up employment. Contrary to the feminist critics discussed above, Hall’s positing of the diaspora as a place that allows for the transformation of the self as well as the transformation of the occupied space in the diaspora is particularly pertinent to my discussion of the novels in the next two chapters. It will help me to conceptualize how women’s national and religious identities in the diaspora are also subject to transformation.

My thesis examines fictional representations of the experience of women in India and the Indian diaspora in Canada in moments of communal violence. In the light of the above mentioned theories of diaspora, double displacement and exile, I will explore how the fictional protagonists in Kapur’s *A Married Woman* and Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* theorize their alienation in the old and new homeland. If according to Ahmed, Axel and Mishra, the feeling of alienation in the diaspora gives rise to an imagined homeland, then what does the alienation within the homeland give rise to?

Further, Axel defines viewing violent images in the diaspora after the violence has occurred as the moment when an imaginary homeland is created. If this is true, then is there a specific moment for women when imaginary homelands are formed? Do women function in the same way as men in moments of violence in national or diasporic locales? I will attempt to answer these questions through an examination of the two selected novels in the background of two violent communal events in Indian history after the 1947 Partition: Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy and the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992, and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the Air India 182 crash in 1985 in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. The two novels are productive sites for engaging with the outlined questions as they look at women differentiated by caste, class, religion, sexuality and language who directly or indirectly experience the effects of communal violence, both in India and its diaspora.

### **Socio-historical context of Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy and Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992**

Kapur's *A Married Woman* focuses on the relationship between two women, Astha and Pipee, in the background of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy. This controversy has a complex history that dates back to 1855 (Davis 38-39). However, the destruction of the Babri Masjid that took place on December 6, 1992, has its roots in the assertions made by right-wing Hindu nationalist groups as recent as 1984 (Davis 34). Originally occupying a site in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, Babri Masjid (or, Babar's mosque) became a bone of contention between Hindus and Muslims. The controversy surrounding

the Babri Masjid started with the assertion that the space occupied by the mosque was “originally” Ramjanmabhoomi, or “birthplace of Hindu god, Rama” (Davis 28). The prevailing belief was that a Hindu temple that originally stood consecrating the sacred space was allegedly destroyed by the Muslim invader and Mughal king Babar in 1528 in order to have the Babri Masjid built on the same spot (28). According to Richard H. Davis, right-wing nationalist political parties such as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) “planned to retake the so-called Ram janmabhoomi... destroy the mosque... and build a magnificent new temple to Rama to consecrate the sacred site” (28). However, Davis points out that although an inscription in the mosque claims that the mosque was built in 1528 by Babar, there is no evidence to show that a temple existed on that spot before the mosque. Moreover, in Ayodhya, there are several spots that are claimed as Rama’s birthplace (38).

Davis explains that the VHP required a “worthy adversary” in order to regain a foothold in the Indian political scene (49; also see Chakraborty, Chapter 4). Originally, the VHP had come into existence as a way to unite Hindu groups across India, and needed an “enemy” or the Other to unify Hindu groups divided by class, caste, language, region, sect and religious denomination (40). After being on the periphery of the Indian political scene for over twenty years (40), the VHP was able to use the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy as a way to unite Hindus through the Othering of Muslims. The VHP “created” the Muslims as the adversary of the Hindu community by “aggrandizing, reifying and mythologizing their Islamic antagonist” (49). It created an image of Rama as a god of *all* Hindus, and Babar as the aggressive Muslim



man to exemplify that a Hindu India was invaded by a Muslim foreign Other (34). It also reframed Indian Muslim identity around medieval conquest and iconoclasm, and linked genealogy to religion. Further, the VHP held the present-day Indian Muslims responsible for an imagined act that may or may not have been committed by their ancestors.<sup>4</sup> While the VHP blamed Muslims for taking over Hindu sacred spaces, BJP, the political front of the Hindu Right in India, blamed Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, for “diverting Indian nationalism in the post independence period” through the introduction of a Western concept, “secularism,” in the political nature of India (Davis 50). The BJP maintained that India had always been a Hindu nation, and through the introduction of a “foreign concept” like secularism, Nehru was responsible for redirecting Indian nationalism away from its natural path (50). The BJP asserted that Nehru’s Muslim loving pseudo-secularism that continually gave in to Muslim demands allowed the Muslim population to thrive and secure unfair rights within India. These arguments by the VHP and the BJP eventually mobilized much of the Indian Hindu populace to press for the liberation of an imagined Hindu sacred space from the clutches of Indian Muslims. In this way, VHP’s religious agenda and BJP’s political agenda came together to lead to the destruction of a historic site in India, inflaming the religious sentiments of the Muslim minorities all over India in the process. The aftermath of the destruction of the mosque on 6 December 1992 saw the eruption of communal riots all over India, where “[m]ore than 200 Indians were slaughtered,” including Hindus and Muslims. The cities that were most affected were in the northern states with a Muslim majority such as Delhi, Gujarat,

---

<sup>4</sup> Also, most Muslims are low-class Hindu converts and therefore, establishing their lineage to the Mughal dynasty suits a particular political need.

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>5</sup> Zoya Hasan notes that “[t]he majority of the volunteer members (kar sevaks) who assembled in Ayodhya for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 were urban, partly modernized, and educated men” (95). The contested Babri Masjid site acted as a pivot to imagine and construct a unitary Hindu identity serving the agenda of Hindu nationalist groups who sought to assert their power over a sacred space, and thereby the Indian nation. Babri Masjid consequently became a site for the tussle for power and dominance by men of Hindu and Muslim communities.

**Socio-historical context of Indira Gandhi’s assassination, anti-Sikh riots of 1984, and Air India Flight 182 crash in 1985**

Badami’s novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* explores the changing religious and national identities of Sikhs in the background of Indira Gandhi’s assassination and the ensuing anti-Sikh riots. Badami’s delineation of female trauma as a result of these events in the context of India and Canada shows how violence and trauma travels across national borders.

On October 31, 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot by two of her Sikh bodyguards. She died on the way to the hospital (Singh 562). Her assassination was triggered by a chain of events against Sikhs, for which Sikh militants held Mrs. Gandhi

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information, refer to online newspaper article in *The Guardian* (London), dated December 8 1992:  
<http://archive.guardian.co.uk/Repository/ml.asp?Ref=R1VBLzE5OTIvMTIvMDgjQXIwMDEwMA==&Mode=Gif&Locale=english-skin-custom>

responsible and for which she was assassinated. The event that acted as the catalyst for her murder was Operation Blue Star (Bryjak 25).

To understand the relationship with and position of Indian Sikhs in the Indian national imaginary, one has to go back to the 1947 Partition of India. Before the Partition of British India into India and Pakistan, the ruling party in Punjab, Akali Dal, formulated a plan for “Azad Punjab ([or,] free Punjab)” (27). By the time Partition was upon India, Akali Dal pressed for a “new sovereign state... called Khalistan ([or,] land of the chosen)”. The Partition yielded a free land for a Muslim majority, Pakistan, and a Hindu majority, India (27), but not a Sikh-majority Punjab as was demanded by certain groups. Tara Singh, the leader of Akali Dal at that time, sums up the fate of the Sikhs in his famous statement: ““The Hindus got Hindustan [or, India], the Muslims got Pakistan, what did the Sikhs get?”” (Schermerhorn 152). Khalistan faced opposition from the beginning from Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the Prime Minister of India post-1947 independence. Nehru, who was part of the ruling Congress party, was against further partitioning of the country (Bryjak 28). At this time, Akali Dal separated into two sects. One part decided to work with Congress, while the other group decided to work for Khalistan (28). After the Indian state decided to partition Punjab into Punjab and Haryana in 1966, “a group of religious extremists led by Sant Bhindranwale” came into being (28) who were energized further to continue their fight for Khalistan. This campaign for Khalistan finally led to the confrontation between the Indian government and Bhindranwale’s group of militant Sikhs on the night of June 1, 1984 (25), which culminated into the infamous Operation Blue Star.

Operation Blue Star was a code name for a military operation that was imposed upon Amritsar, a Sikh holy city in Punjab on June 1, 1984 (Bryjak 25). The Operation started in the form of a curfew, where “all lines of communication... and transportation... were severed... in and out of Punjab” (25). The directive was in response to Sikh militants, led by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, occupying the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of Sikhs (26). On the night of June 1, 1984, Indian soldiers surrounded the Golden Temple and engaged in confrontation with the Sikh militants within the structure, through the use of “machine-gun fire” (26). In this confrontation, 492 militants and 84 soldiers were killed, with casualties ranging around 1000. These numbers were available in an Indian government report (26). According to Sikh historian, Khushwant Singh, the actual number of people killed and hurt was at around 5000, most of whom were innocent pilgrims, including women and children (561). The anger that Indian Sikhs experienced as a result of the deaths of many innocent Sikhs led to Indira Gandhi’s assassination on October 31, 1984 (562).

In the aftermath following Indira Gandhi’s assassination on October 31, 1984, anti-Sikh riots broke out all over India. George T. Bryjak states that within a week of the assassination, “approximately fifteen hundred people (mostly Sikhs)” were killed (32). The numbers reflecting the death of the Sikh population post-Indira Gandhi’s death appear to be misrepresented as some reports state that “3000 Sikhs were murdered” (Crossette 70). Barbara Crossette believes the reported numbers may have been muted due to the role of the Indian government in the anti-Sikh riots. According to Crossette, mobs were encouraged by “Gandhi’s Congress Party” to roam Sikh neighbourhoods,

“butchering men and boys with savage brutality, setting fire to the still-living and the dead” (70). Therefore, the state and police were “a part of the setup” (76). However, Bryjak cites Pram Chopra who believes that not all of the killings were related to Indira Gandhi’s death. Chopra asserts that a large part of the violence took place as a result of “class antagonisms taking shelter under religious coverings” (76). The anti-Sikh massacre created anger and a desire for revenge within the Sikh community, especially the Sikh diaspora scattered around the world. In the aftermath of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the bombing of Air India Flight 182 took place on June 22, 1985.

The Air India Flight 182 scheduled to fly from Toronto to Bombay, was blown up by a bomb in Irish airspace on June 22, 1985. The Boeing jet crashed into the Atlantic Ocean killing all 329 people aboard (Singh 143). Sikh militants were suspected for the bombing. After years of Canadian inquiry and investigation, a Sikh man named Inderjit Singh Reyat was imprisoned for nine years in January 2011.<sup>6</sup> Years of investigation yielded that the bombing was masterminded by Sikh militants who were funded by Canadian Sikhs and other Sikhs in the diaspora.

Pritam Singh asserts that diasporic Sikhs funded Sikh militant groups in an effort to avenge the deaths of many innocent Sikhs in the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 (565). The diasporic Sikhs were further enraged by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s refusal to look into the Sikh massacre (563). Due to Rajiv Gandhi’s negligence in the matter, diasporic Sikhs decided to take steps against the Indian government through their funding of Sikh militant groups (565).

---

<sup>6</sup> For more information, refer to online article:  
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/airindia/bombing.html>

### **Sikh Migration History to Canada**

Pritam Singh calls Sikhs a “global community,” as majority of the Sikhs left India pre- and post-1947 independence, in search of better opportunities (555). Sikh migration to Canada began in 1903 due to the need for labourers for the construction of transcontinental railway lines in Vancouver (N. Singh 68). However, the fear of too many Indians in Vancouver was steadily gaining ground and on May 21, 1914, many Sikhs who had arrived on a ship from Hong Kong, were not allowed to step foot onto Canadian soil (N. Singh 47). The ship refused to leave and the passengers were even fired at by Canadian soldiers, in an attempt to dissuade them from getting off the ship (48). The reason the passengers were not allowed to disembark was a continuous journey act that was passed on May 4, 1908. The act prohibited immigration of persons who “in the opinion of the Minister of the Interior” did not “come from the country of their birth or citizenship by a continuous journey and or through tickets purchased before leaving their country of their birth or nationality.” In practice, this applied only to ships that began their voyage in India, as the great distance usually necessitated a stopover (N. Singh 48). However, immigration laws were amended in 1951 that allowed for the inflow of Sikhs from India and other countries to Canada (72).

Chapter 2 of this thesis examines how in Badami’s text, Bibi-ji’s father, Harjot Singh, is unable to disembark in Vancouver from *Komagata Maru* due to the continuous journey act, and how this experience catalyzes Bibi-ji to seek a life in Canada. The novel, I argue, by linking *Komagata Maru* to the Air India Bombing in interesting ways offers crucial insights on Indian women’s negotiations of diasporic space in Canada and their

experiences with loss as a result of migration and communal violence. Chapter 1, on the other hand, looks at Kapur's novel where trauma crosses religious borders of Hindu-Muslim, and through the characters of Astha and Pipee, I argue that Kapur suggests a parallel between men of religious minorities and women in India, where the proximity to these men make both Astha and Pipee receptive to the trauma of these minorities during communal violence. Their receptiveness allow for ethical means of coexisting with the Other. I also argue that through Sita, Kapur suggests alternate ways of practicing Hinduism, without being subjected to right-wing fundamentalist attitudes towards other religious minorities.

## CHAPTER 1

## INDIAN WOMEN'S NEGOTIATION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN MANJU

KAPUR'S *A MARRIED WOMAN*

Veena Das's and Gyanendra Pandey's ethnographic work on 1947 Partition and 1984 anti-Sikh riots attempt to theorize how women negotiate their trauma as a result of communal violence. Das and Pandey do not pay adequate attention to how women participate in communal riots (whether by engaging in violent acts or by questioning the logic of communal riots). There is no exploration into the formation of national and religious identities in moments of communal crisis. In regards to women's identity, however, Gayatri Gopinath points to the formulation of women's identity within the household and the society in general, and Sandra Freitag specifically refers to the formation of community identity. In both their formulations of women's identity, there is an assertion of idealistic purity and a confinement of women to the domestic or private spheres.

On the other hand, Peter van der Veer asks his readers to view the formation of religious identities through the lens of family (that is, family acting as an influencing force in the shaping of religious identity) (256-257). At the same time, he resists viewing the family as the only influence. Since the family belongs to "a larger political economy" (257), van der Veer is quick to point out that religious identities are not formed within the family in isolation from forces such as the changing political conditions outside the family. But since van der Veer terms communal violence in India as a "politics of [public] space" (259), and Gopinath points to women being confined to the private and domestic



sphere, then how are women's religious identities shaped by "a larger political force"? My analysis of *A Married Woman* in this chapter examines how women's community identity, while being influenced by "gendering processes" (Freitag 221), are not entirely shaped by them.

If following van der Veer, riots are violent events occurring out of religious differences and they function to secure one's communal identity from the "other" in public spaces, where do women stand in this context of communal violence? Are they mere victims (2044), as Pandey asserts? Or, do they bring their voices into the public through the process of mourning (68), like Das asserts? If the public space is the space where religious identities are formed and asserted, and women occupy a private space, then in what kind of space do women negotiate their religious identities? Is this space an appropriation of the domestic sphere she inhabits, where she is already an "other" and living in a metaphorical sense of exile? Or, does this open up new spaces that can accommodate her religious identity? These questions drive my enquiry into the formation of national and religious identities of the fictional women characters in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*.

Kapur's novel primarily focuses on Astha's relationship with men and women in her life in the background of the Ram janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, and the Hindu-Muslim riots that follow the destruction of the mosque in 1992. Brought up in a lower-middle class Hindu family, Astha moves into an upper middle-class Hindu family through her marriage to Hemant. Situated in Delhi, the nucleus of the narrative lies in Astha and Pipee's homosexual relationship in the background of escalating Hindu-

Muslim communal violence. As readers, we are exposed to Astha's agency (and sometimes, the lack thereof) in the face of the restrictions imposed on her by her family and her own desires. In this chapter, through the investigation of three female characters in the novel – Astha, Pipee and Astha's mother, Sita (ironically, named after the mythical Hindu God, Rama's wife) – I hope to address questions of how female religious identities are negotiated in the private and public spheres. I am especially interested in analyzing the different facets that shape and affect a woman's communal identity in India, particularly in the face of communal riots, riots which are a result of a contestation of a sacred space by specifically two opposing religious communities, Hindu and Muslim, and come to their fruition in the form of communal violence (Davis 31). My analysis of Astha, a married Hindu woman, who crosses the boundaries of heterosexuality (through her relationship with Pipee), domesticity (through political activism and creative expression) and an imposed Hindu identity (through her interactions with a Muslim activist, Aijaz) will raise questions about spatial politics. Does she occupy a domestic space, a public space, a liminal space between domestic and public spheres, or a space that is separate from either of these distinctions? I will also investigate the kinds of spaces occupied by Pipee (a social activist and Astha's lover) and Sita (a traditional Hindu woman). The narratives of both Pipee and Sita are crucial to this chapter, as both women are able to pursue interests that they were unable to when their husbands were alive. Widowhood seems to open up new ways of being for these two women and we find Pipee engaging in her desire for Astha and Sita working to acquire a strong Hindu religious identity.

The institution of family is critical to consider in the context of Kapur's novel, since the family is held responsible for many gendering processes within India (D'Cruz and Bharat 167). The experience of Indian women within the familial sphere of home has been documented by India-based authors as a negotiation of desires between the private and the public spheres. In Kapur's novel, Astha's narrative emerges as a negotiation of desires between her home (private and domestic sphere) and her activities outside the home (public and political sphere). While Astha tries to juggle being a good wife, mother, daughter and daughter-in-law at home, she also tries to reshape her national and religious identities through her growing social awareness and involvement in the public arena. As Gopinath points out, there is a pull-push between desire and duty for Indian women (263). Astha desires to become independent outside the boundaries of her home. At the same time, she is bound by her duty as a "good" mother, daughter and the other domestic roles she embodies. Kapur depicts such tugs of war within a world of gender politics, where male figures and female agents of patriarchy set the limits within which women must struggle for their version of individuality.

In this struggle for individuality, Kapur portrays Astha as an individual who engages in constant negotiations of her religious identity and personal desires between the private and public spheres. Astha desires to actively participate in the public sphere in order to reconstruct her religious and national identity from that of a right-wing Hindu who sees Muslims as the "other" to a more secular identity, where she views all religions from a critical lens. When Astha desires to go to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh to protest against the proposed demolition of the Babri Masjid, her decision is opposed by her

mother-in-law, who insists on the tolerance of Hinduism. At the same time, the mother-in-law refuses to engage in the discussion of an implied Hindu tolerance. The mother-in-law's refusal proposes a right-wing fundamentalist (and populist) mentality. Since Astha's contact with a Muslim activist, Aijaz, she desires to reconstruct her religious identity. Kapur demonstrates that Astha's recognition of the drawbacks of letting her family and her immediate Hindu community shape her religious identity for her comes about after her encounter with Aijaz. For Astha, Aijaz acts as the turning point in her understanding of the double standards and the contradictions in the religious and political ideologies that her family subscribes to. Due to this realization, she insists on going to Ayodhya along with an activist group, and protesting against the demolition of the Babri Masjid as proposed by right-wing Hindu fundamentalist parties who claim to be the national voice-box for India. Kapur highlights that the formation of personal bonds with the Other can allow for a better understanding of the Other. Astha's personal interactions with Aijaz sets the tone for the novel as Kapur's answer to ways of mitigating communal tension lies in forming personal bonds with the Othered community, in order to overcome personal prejudices and to facilitate a better understanding of what the Other stands for.

Kapur also shows that differences in opinion about the Other lies in the lack of knowledge about the Other. The following exchange between Astha and her mother-in-law exposes the opposing views that the two women hold on nationalism and religion:

‘But why go to Ayodhya?... This is all politics, you should not get involved. Besides, have you thought about what you are going to protest? Lord Ram's Janamsthan [or, birthplace] is in Ayodhya, is there any country in the world where the birthplace of their god is not honoured? Hindu tolerance does not mean you accept everything and anything. Is this the pride we have in ourselves?’

‘But Mummy, if the temple is constructed, thousands of people will die agitating over it. Why? They could feed hundreds of poor children on the money they are collecting for the bricks.’

Her mother-in-law looked at [Astha]. ‘It is not a woman’s place to think of these things,’ she said firmly. (186-187)

Here, Astha is reminded of her “place” by her mother-in-law, when she insists on joining the protests against the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The “place” in question is within the domestic sphere, which is in opposition to the public sphere. In this exchange, the public sphere appears to contain the religious, social and political. By placing the religious in the public, the mother-in-law inadvertently evokes van der Veer, where religion becomes a contestation over a public space (259). As I mentioned in the introduction, the Babri Masjid represented a sacred space that could be contested publicly by two opposing religious groups, Hindu and Muslim. Similarly, the mother-in-law asks Astha to consider who the space belongs to. Instead of looking at the space as a sacred space that can be contested by two opposing identities, Astha sees the space as a national space, where nation is not a Hindu nation, but a secular nation. Moreover, the mother-in-law evokes nation and national pride, and in doing so, she places Astha in a space which is both domestic and Hindu, and where national pride equals Hindu pride. Then, in this instance, the idea of a married Hindu woman protesting against the destruction of an Islamic structure of worship (the mosque) is not only a transgression into the public sphere, but also a transgression of an Indian citizen against India. Astha’s status as a married woman is important to note here, since her mother-in-law reminds her of her duties as a married woman, with children. In other words, Astha’s “duties” are confined to the arena of the domestic household. Similarly, her national identity is also brought

into question, as the mother-in-law subscribes to the idea of Hindu nationalism. By equating Rama's alleged birthplace as the birthplace of an Indian god, rather than a Hindu god, the older woman exposes her own religious identity of a Hindu, who has been persuaded by right-wing propaganda, and who views India as strictly Hindu. In this familial atmosphere that is inhabited by women of narrow ideologies such as Astha's mother-in-law, Astha commits the crime of alienating herself purportedly as a Hindu, an Indian and a married woman. It becomes evident from their conversation that Astha's mother-in-law is incapable of separating her religious and her national identity. Equating the supposed birthplace of the Hindu mythological hero, Ram, with Indian pride, and consequently supporting the destruction of Indian history, Astha's mother-in-law fails to adequately counteract Astha's question, and instead hushes her through her reminder of Astha's "place" within the domestic sphere. The "place" becomes an area of contention, as it is unclear what this "place" actually symbolises. On one hand, Astha's place is set within the boundaries of home and domesticity, and on the other hand, she is denied the freedom of thought even within those boundaries since it is not a "woman's place". Therefore, if it is not a woman's place to voice her opinions even while within the domestic sphere, then where *is* a woman's space located?

Through this exchange between the two women, Kapur points to the underlying ambiguity of a "woman's place." Astha's attempt to "transgress" into the political and religious arena threatens to usurp the boundaries set for a married, heterosexual Hindu woman. The religious (and national) identity that Astha's mother-in-law imposes upon Astha is destabilized by Astha's own agency to form her religious identity. Astha's desire

to redefine her “place” is a challenge to these imposed identities, especially in an India that calls itself “secular.” Through her, Kapur exposes how Hindu majoritarianism unhesitatingly equates the Hindu community with Indian nationality, as well as, the conditions that question the meaning of a secular India. This intertwined nature of the national and the communal is brought into question by Astha’s questions.

Astha’s struggles to establish her own individual religious and national identity (as demonstrated in the above-mentioned discussion with her mother-in-law) emerges again in her conversations with her husband, Hemant. Astha’s Indian national and Hindu religious identities are both challenged and conflicted by the mixed messages that she receives from Hemant. Hemant’s entry into Astha’s life was that of an U.S.-educated Indian with modern ideas (Kapur 35). But to Astha, he reveals his own prejudices in his weak arguments over the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy:

‘... This whole thing is very complicated,’ said Astha.  
 ‘People make it so,’ replied the husband. ‘Otherwise what is there in an abandoned mosque? The government is too bloody soft on these Muslims, that is the problem.’  
 ‘Surely that is not the issue. Power seekers- on both sides- use religion quite blatantly. How can beliefs about god be compatible with violence?’  
 ‘You don’t know *their* religion.’ ...  
 Astha stared at her husband. Was he agreeing that people should be killed in the name of God? She didn’t want to know what he thought. (Kapur 108-109)

Hemant’s conflict over how he should present himself to his wife is reflected in his contradictions. On one hand, he admits that “people” make the controversy “complicated,” but in the same line, he reveals his true feelings through the use of the word “bloody” to describe Muslims. Through his revelation that Hindus are “us” and Muslims are “them,” he posits the two religions as being at odds with one another within

India. This separation comes about through an equation of violence with Islam. Thus, this “educated” Indian man reveals himself to be a right-wing Hindu Indian, who openly voices his disdain towards Muslims, and who he sees as “others,” and thus as “non-Indians”. Despite his seemingly secular education in the U.S., Hemant fails to view the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy with a critical eye. However, Astha questions these divides between the two religions. Even though she is educated in India, which is seen as more communal by Western scholars as compared to the “secular” West (a case in point being Richard Fox’s critique of Indian communalism, see Introduction), Astha’s interactions with Aijaz bring about a desire to challenge such divides. Here, Kapur again points to a need for interethnic socialization as a way to alleviate personal prejudices. In this interaction between Hemant and Astha, Kapur wants the reader to align with Astha. Kapur’s novel asks the reader to consider Astha’s position as a favourable position, where she is able to overcome such prejudices through her continued personal interaction with the Muslim Aijaz.

This exchange also points to Astha’s questioning attitude which challenges Hemant’s religious identity as a staunch Hindu and reveals Astha’s own secular identity as an Indian. At the same time, Astha’s secular identity fails in the face of Hemant’s personal assertions. She is unable to openly challenge her husband’s authority in the arena of politics. Even though this exchange takes place at home, in the domestic sphere, Astha considers politics as belonging to the public sphere. Hence, in her own conditioning to stick to the domestic sphere, she is unable to challenge Hemant’s views on the public sphere. At this point in the narrative, Astha’s religious identity is beginning to come into



focus, and she is afraid that by challenging her husband's opinions (or even by having his opinions completely revealed), her religious identity (which is secular in nature, and different from Hemant's) will be brought into question. By not questioning Hemant, Astha reveals an inner strength as she decides to equip herself with knowledge on the issue and figures out her own views on the issue before openly confronting her husband.

Astha reveals this inner strength, and subsequently Hemant's hypocrisy, in a later exchange with him where she voices her opinion on the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue:

‘You sound like a parrot.’ [said Hemant to Astha]  
 ‘To have an opinion is to sound like a parrot?’  
 ‘Please. Keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching. All this doesn't suit you.’ (Kapur 116)

By demeaning Astha's opinion, Hemant exposes his own lack of knowledge in the area, and his own inability to counteract Astha's arguments. Again, like his mother, he asks her to “keep to what [she] knows best.” By reminding Astha of her “place,” Hemant shows his own fear at being undermined in a space that he believes is his area of expertise. He pushes Astha into the domestic (private) sphere through the reminder of “home” and “children” limiting her from voicing her opinions on what is deemed political and therefore belonging to the public sphere.

Kapur shows that despite these obstacles that Astha faces from her husband and his family, Astha is able to exercise her agency in forming her own views on the national and the religious through a conscious decision that she makes. Astha's conscious decisions are helped by her interactions and close contacts with other characters whose national and religious identities do not follow the pro-right-wing sentiments of Hemant

and her in-laws. Astha's growing awareness of religious conflicts that exist outside the safety of her home comes about through her interactions with Aijaz Khan, a secular Muslim. By making Aijaz the turning point in Astha's burgeoning awareness of non-secular attitudes that exist within her home and outside of it, Kapur shows the different facets of Islam within India. At the same time, Kapur's choice of Aijaz as the prophetic revelation for Astha is perhaps a bit too convenient. I would argue that Kapur chooses a secular Muslim, over a secular Hindu, deliberately to reveal the complexities of national and religious identities that exist within Astha's family. As argued earlier, the discussions that Astha has with Hemant after her interactions with Aijaz, reveals Hemant's inner prejudices towards Muslims. Aijaz's presence in Astha's life also brings into focus Muslims that are very different from the views that her family holds. Astha's own journey towards a self-discovery of her own religious identity comes about through her recognition of the gap that exist between how her family perceives Muslims, and how Muslims, like Aijaz, actually are. Through her personal interactions with an educated secular Muslim man, who aims to create awareness through social work and street plays, Astha learns to form her own opinions about religion and nationalism.

Astha comes into close contact with Aijaz through her engagement with her school play about the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy. When asked by Aijaz to write the school play, Astha shows agency in researching about the topic instead of turning to Hemant or his family for input. Her agency to choose to research shows her desire to present a fair picture of the religious conflict over a public space:

Astha stared at the picture of the Babri Masjid. What was it about this monument that had create so much bloodshed and fighting over two centuries? It was not

even remarkable, squat and three-domed, surrounded by tress. How could she effectively present its history, long and tortured, in a manner that was simple without distorting? (Kapur 107)

Astha's personal concern over the possible misrepresentation of the issue within the school play reflects her conscientiousness. By choosing to ignore the personal opinions held by her husband and her in-laws on the issue, and by researching the different angles of the issue at a library, she reveals her desire to present a stance on the issue that would be "simple without distorting" the facts. She seeks to present an unbiased view of the controversy by disallowing her own prejudices (if any) to conflict with the representation of the historical, political and religious complexities of the controversy. Astha's choice of Aijaz, instead of Hemant, to sort out her inner conflict in this matter (Kapur 109) also reveals her intent to discover the "truth" behind the issue. Instead of the blame mentality that Hemant indulges in, Astha strives to find out if blame is an appropriate response at all.

Astha's growing agency in the development of her religious identity also becomes clear through the paintings that she undertakes following a violent confrontation between Hindus and Muslims, where Aijaz loses his life. Again, instead of blaming the Hindu mob that lights fire to the vehicle with Aijaz and his group locked inside (Kapur 138), Astha strives to reveal the different facets of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy:

... [S]he decided to experiment with an issue she felt strongly about. She would deal with the Rath Yatra, with the journey a Leader was making across the Hindu heartland in the name of unifying the nation... On one end was a temple, on the other was the Babri Masjid, on its little hill. Between the two, the Leader travelled, in a rath flanked by holy men, wearing saffron, carrying trishuls... Besides the rath on motorbikes were younger men... whose clothes she painted saffron as well, to suggest militant religion. She sketched scenes of violence, arson and stabbing that occurred in towns on the way, people fighting, people dying. (157-158)

In the painting, Astha chooses to highlight the “militant” aspects of Hinduism, where Hindu symbols are appropriated by politicians for their own means. By revealing the potential for violence as a part of Hindu fundamentalism (where they also participate in killing along the way during the Rath Yatra<sup>7</sup>, Astha negates the popular belief that her family, and other staunch Hindus like her family, hold. In an earlier exchange, Hemant asserts that violence is a part of Islam (108), and yet in this painting, Astha shows that violence is not a part of religion, but a product of misusing religion (here, for political reasons). In this revelation, Astha shows her own third person stance, where she refuses to take sides, and instead believes in capturing the complexities of personal gain and power struggles on the side of the politicians that lead to the death of both innocent Muslims and Hindus. In her decision to depict this controversial scene in the aftermath of Aijaz and his theatre group’s violent death caused by a Hindu mob (138), Astha exercises her agency as a free-thinking woman, who refuses to have her own religious identity to be exclusively determined by “gendering processes” (Freitag 221). The gendering processes exist, but Astha uses her agency in ways that defy these processes throughout the narrative.

Astha’s reworking of her own identity is also revealed by the content of the speech she prepares for women at Ayodhya.<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath of Aijaz’s death, Astha becomes caught up in her work with Sampradayakta Mukti Manch: a group that comes

---

<sup>7</sup> The Rath Yatra, organized by Hindu right groups like VHP and BJP, took place on October 15, 1990. The Yatra was a call to Hindus to reclaim the Babri Masjid site. It was also a political gimmick to gather votes for BJP. For more information, see Richard H. Davis’s “The Iconography of Rama’s Chariot” in *Making India Hindu* (ed. David Ludden).

<sup>8</sup> Ayodhya is a city in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where the site of Babri Masjid is located.

into existence to curb the surge in communalism that seems imminent in the face of the pressure to destroy the Babri Masjid. As a part of this Manch, one of the members requests Astha to make a speech to women at the volatile site of Ayodhya so that women realise that they have “some kind of [a] voice” (185). In her speech, Astha appeals to women’s emotions, rather than the technicalities of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy:

‘In essence women all over the world are the same, we belong to families, we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brother and children... We judge not by what people tell us, but by what we experience in our homes. And that experience tells us that where there is violence, there is suffering... History cannot be righted easily, but... pain and trauma to women and children come easily.’  
(Kapur 197-198)

Despite her desire to articulate a position as an individual unaffected by the gendering processes she experiences in her family, Astha admits that this may not be the case for other women, especially the “basti women” (198) in that audience who are poor and belong to the lower classes. Yet, Astha also strives to align herself with the poor women. She attempts to blur the class distinctions between her and the women she addresses. Astha speaks from a privileged position; at the same time, she tries to appeal to women not from that privileged position but from a common platform of womanhood. She could have stayed within the confines of her upper middle-class home in Delhi, and avoided facing firsthand the realities of the escalating Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid situation. But she chooses to make the trip to Ayodhya to voice her opinion, and at the same time, connect with women from classes different than her own. She does not appeal to the women as an Indian or even as a Hindu, but as a member of the same gender. In doing so, Astha separates religion and national pride from the issues of humanity, where violence

affects women equally, regardless of whether they are Hindu or Muslim. Here, Astha prioritizes her female identity over her religious and national identity.

In *A Married Woman*, Kapur does not merely portray a female character who gradually gains agency in the creation of her religious identity. Through Astha's homosexual relationship with Pipee, Kapur chooses to complicate the issues of religion and nationalism that already exist in the narrative. Kapur's introduction of Pipee and Astha's homosexual relationship makes the cause and the effect in the narrative ambiguous. It becomes difficult to gauge whether Astha's relationship with Pipee is a product of communal violence (notably, Aijaz's death), or whether Astha's growing interest in political activism is a product of her relationship with Pipee. Pipee, a political activist in her own right (Kapur 120), and Aijaz's widow (207), has her own religious identity to contend with. Born a Hindu, she chooses to marry a Muslim out of love. In her conversation with her mother regarding her decision to marry Aijaz, Pipee encounters problems with Aijaz's religious identity as a Muslim:

'You can't do this,' she told her daughter [, Pipee].  
 'Why not? You're the one who is always going on about me getting married.'  
 'But not to a Muslim.'  
 'He's sweet. So what if he's a Muslim?'  
 Her mother clicked her tongue. 'They marry four times.'  
 'How do you know?'  
 'It's part of their religion.' (117)

Pipee's mother strongly opposes her daughter's marriage to a Muslim, Aijaz Khan. There is distinct differentiation on the part of Pipee's mother between "us" and "them". Pipee's casual brushing off of Aijaz's religion shows her lack of interest in how her union with Aijaz will be perceived by her mother and the society in general. Here, Pipee allows her

personal desire to supersede Aijaz's "Muslim" religious marker. For Pipee, Aijaz denotes the person she loves, rather than a person who represents Muslims. While Pipee's mother's uses her limited knowledge to change her daughter's mind, Pipee chooses her secular identity, along with her personal desire, to oppose her mother's limited knowledge. For Pipee, these distinctions between religious identities exist only as a result of societal creations, and as an emancipated political and social activist, Pipee does not acknowledge superficial creations of Hindu-Muslim distinctions. Pipee's religious identity is not a result of merely familial "gendering processes" that Freitag directs attention to (221), but as a result of being in a public domain (van der Veer 259) through her work as a social activist. Pipee is affected by events and experiences in the public domain of social activism. Her work brings Pipee in close contact with social and political issues that affect women and children from the slums (Kapur 120). For example, Pipee becomes aware of "the effects of communalism on Muslim children in the basti [slum]". Muslim children are "discriminated against, made to feel stupid and backward... [and] told their loyalties were to Pakistan" (120). In this close contact, Pipee is able to separate her religious identity from that of her mother's, and view communal issues through the eyes of a critical third person. Due to her constant efforts to alleviate such effects on women and children, Pipee has taken on a secular identity that allows for tolerance of both different religions and classes. Pipee becomes conditioned through her daily contact with oppressed women and children from the lower classes; women who are subject to "all manner of injustices" by the "men in the slums" (122).

However, despite her secularization, Kapur demonstrates how Pipee faces inner conflict when confronted by cultural markers different from her own:

In the days that followed, Pipee realised for the first time that she had married a Muslim. Everything was strange, the large haveli, the dishes they ate from, their paan making, the way they dressed, the way they greeted each other, As Salamalaikum – Wa Alaikum Assalam, their manner of speaking, the kh's that made her Hindi tongue seem crude and unsophisticated. (136)

Pipee's discomfort rises from the unfamiliarity of cultural markers in Aijaz's Muslim family, and not religious markers of Islam. Thus, Pipee's discomfort is a result of being temporarily unaccustomed to the social and cultural way of life (and not to the different ways of practicing one's religion). In this discomfort, the question of religion is almost an oddity on Pipee's part, as she equates Aijaz's family culture with their religion. It is ironic that a woman, who consciously separates social from the political, or from the religious, fails to do so in an unfamiliar territory. Pipee's realization, then, reveals Pipee's religious identity as a Hindu, which she sees as being different from that of Aijaz's Muslim identity. This duality reveals Pipee's own complex negotiation with her religious identity, a negotiation she becomes aware of only when taken out of her comfort zone.

The comfort of her own territory becomes even more evident when Pipee faces the horror and sorrow of Aijaz's violent death at the hands of Hindu fundamentalists. Despite the anger she feels at her own helplessness, Pipee does not blame religion, and instead continues to protest the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Kapur 198). Her presence in Ayodhya to take part in the protests attests to her commitment to the secularity of her own religious identity. Her role of an activist keeps her committed to a religious identity that does not border on fundamentalism. So Pipee does not go looking for revenge against



Hindu fundamentalists that were responsible for Aijaz's death. For Pipee, her ability to move between the public and private spheres affects the formation of her religious identity. However, for Astha, her religious identity allows her to stay within the public sphere, which in turn feeds into the growth and independence of her religious identity. For both women, their activities in the public domain affect the formation of their religious identities. On the other hand, their relationship in the private domain also plays a role in the ways in which the two women use the relationship for their own purposes. While Astha uses the relationship to carve out her independence within the public sphere, for Pipee, the relationship is a way of negotiating with Aijaz's death.

Kapur uses Astha and Pipee's relationship to add a shade of complexity to female religious identity in India. For Astha, a clandestine homosexual relationship with a widow of a Muslim man symbolises a space that does not fall within the boundaries of either the private or the public spheres, as dictated by patriarchy. At the same time, the relationship allows Astha to move between the boundaries of both spheres unquestioned, as a homosexual relationship is, as Gopinath remarks, "either condemned or ignored" in India (263). In Astha's case, the internalized patriarchy embodied through her in-laws, husband and mother, disallow for such a suspicion, raising only angry retorts at Astha's sudden freedom (Kapur 227, 236, 248). Astha's connection with Pipee is disapproved by Hemant on the grounds that Pipee is a Muslim by the virtue of her dead husband's last name, and "one of those [social activist] types" (227). By demeaning Pipee's work through his categorization of all social workers as "those types," Hemant struggles to establish his superiority and importance in Astha's life. Hemant tries to portray social workers as an

opportunistic group of people, who use social work as a smokescreen for raising money for themselves, rather than for a greater good. He starts losing his authority over Astha's life, as Astha refuses to give in to his demands that she is available whenever he needs her. Empowered by her relationship with Pipee, Astha resists Hemant's hold over her. Moreover, by referring to Pipee by the full name that takes into account her Muslim last name, Hemant is able to "other" Pipee. This is an easy way for Hemant to "other" Pipee, since because of her gender, he cannot disallow Astha from meeting with her, as he could have had Pipee been a man. In this example, it becomes evident that there is a need for Hemant to use religion and profession as a means of othering a woman. In his struggle for authority in Astha's life, Hemant resorts to othering Pipee in ways that he can. However, despite Hemant's resistance to Astha and Pipee's relationship, Astha finds an unusual strength in a same-sex relationship, and uses that strength to her advantage. Astha discovers her own creative independence through Pipee's encouragement: "[Pipee says to Astha:] 'Have an exhibition, do something of your own'" (269). Astha also realizes the ways in which Hemant manipulates her through power play: "Now sexually involved with another, [Astha] realized how many facets in her relationship between her husband and herself reflected power rather than love" (233). For example, Hemant demands Astha's presence at home on the weekend that she makes plans to go watch independent movies with Pipee (236). He makes Astha feel guilty for making plans on the same weekend that he would be at home. Hemant reasons with Astha that he was busy "establishing" himself "for ten years," and he is finally able to make time for his family (236). Hemant tries to control Astha by blackmailing her to stay at home despite her plans

with Pipee. However, Kapur shows that Astha's relationship with Pipee allows for a fresh perspective on power play between genders. Kapur demonstrates that same-sex interaction can be empowering for women, just as interethnic interaction can be empowering for both majority and minority communities. Kapur seems to be drawing a parallel between women as Other, and religious minorities as Other here as well because in both cases, social interaction outside the private realm ends up empowering the Othered.

Through Astha, Kapur also chronicles the internalization of patriarchal conventions. Astha breaks patriarchal love laws that dictate a heterosexual relationship within the conventions of marriage (Gopinath 262). She indulges in a same-sex relationship with Pipee as a way to escape the oppression within the familial space. For example, her husband and his family take issue with Astha investing time in her interests, such as painting. Astha's mother-in-law chooses to address her discomfort with Astha's painting through Hemant: "... Mummy said you are neglecting the children, you do not sleep in the afternoons, you are exhausted in the evenings, you are spreading mess in the house, everything smells of turpentine. And all for what?" (148). Evidently, both Hemant and his "mummy" are dissatisfied with Astha's desire to indulge in her own interests. Instead of opposing Astha's creative impulse directly, Hemant uses the rhetoric of Astha being a negligent and therefore a "bad mother," who also causes bodily harm to herself in the process (148). Hemant and his family also oppresses Astha through the conditional nature of her job as a teacher: "[Hemant says to Astha,] 'When the children come, we will see whether to continue this'" (48). Astha's financial freedom becomes conditional in

relation to childrearing. Hemant and his family then make it clear to Astha that her primary duty as a married woman was to her family and her children, while working outside in the public realm was a temporary situation. To escape such oppression, Astha cultivates her relationship with Pipee.

Kapur portrays Astha initially as a married woman; as a woman who internalizes the very heterosexual conventions she tries to run away from. The narrator notes: "... [Astha] longed to dissolve herself in him, longed to be sips of water he drank, longed to be the morsels of food he swallowed... she was focused on one thing, the moment of their union" (46). Astha views her body as a source of pleasure, and becomes a slave to her body and Hemant's lovemaking. She subscribes to her traditional gender role as a devoted wife and participates in objectifying her body. This process of objectification contributes to the corrosion of Astha's self-esteem.

Astha's internalized heterosexual conventions allow her to engage in a subsequent rationalizing process to ease the guilt she experiences as a result of breaking love laws:

'Does he suspect you having an affair?' [asked Pipee.]  
 'It's not the same thing.'  
 'Why not?'  
 'You're a woman.'  
 'And that makes you a faithful wife?'  
 'No. But it is different, surely.' (Kapur 253)

Astha considers her relationship with Pipee as separate from infidelity, and is able to "ignore" it. Because same-sex relationships do not conform to her internalized patriarchal conventions, she is able to assuage her guilt from time to time by the consolation of her relationship with Pipee being "different". By resisting giving a name to her relationship with Pipee, Astha is able to step out of the domestic threshold without patriarchal guilt

holding her back. The homosexual relationship provides Astha with the liminality that allows her movement between the private and the public spheres with ease.

For Pipee, Aijaz's death acts as catalyst for her to pursue interests other than social activism. She engages in a relationship with Astha post-Aijaz's death, a relationship that rises out of both women's need to connect with each other in their inability to deal with a violent death. At the same time, Pipee's relationship with Astha allows her to pursue her own sexual impulses. Astha creates the outlet that Pipee needs to come to terms with her own independence. Pipee's independence exists only within the role of an activist, but through Astha's constraints as a married woman, Pipee realizes that she can exist in a different capacity that can allow her own identity to flourish. Her desire to exist in a relationship free of constraints allows her to fantasize about a homosexual utopia. Pipee urges Astha to leave her family and come away with her to this utopia (Kapur 269), unable to understand Astha's conflicts despite the oppression that Astha faces at home. While Pipee's decision to pursue graduate studies might appear to be a sign of freedom, I propose that Pipee chooses to migrate to the diaspora, as she fantasizes about the diaspora as an imaginary utopia. In her conversation with Astha, where she urges Astha to join her in the United States, Pipee represents the diaspora as realm that is not bound by the patriarchal conventions of India. The United States acts as the imaginary homeland for Pipee, and Pipee moves towards this new space in order to get over her loss (Aijaz's death). The distance from the politically volatile atmosphere of India arguably facilitates the mourning of her husband's death. Pipee chooses to leave for graduate studies in the States as a researcher of communal issues, highlighting her need to explore

the complexities of communal strife in detail, without the distraction of close contact with the same strife. At the same time, through Pipee, Kapur also shows that research into communal issues may be another way to open up possibilities for debate on how such issues can be dealt with in the future, without the unnecessary violence that claim the lives of many innocents. Kapur highlights the need for investigation into the complexity behind communalism in India and trauma, as Aijaz's death both traumatizes and empowers Pipee, and allows her to coexist with Astha in a homosexual relationship.

Astha, on the other hand, chooses between her love for her children and her love for Pipee. In her struggle between negotiation of desires between the private (family and children) and the public (her art, social work, and a possible life with Pipee in the United States) spheres, she makes a compromise between her art and her children. Her compromise relegates her to the private and domestic realm of household, with an occasional movement into the public realm through her creativity. In her choice, Astha reveals a woman who is both confident of who she is, as well as a woman held back by the desires that are unavailable to her due to familial and societal constraints. In this regard, despite her agency in developing a cogent personal identity, Astha is pulled back by some of her inner conflicts rising out of her internalized patriarchal conventions.

Astha's mother, Sita, is another character in the narrative, whose personal journey towards formulating her religious identity after her husband's death echoes Pipee's journey after Aijaz's death. Sita's character, in particular, sheds light on the ways religion is interpreted (and misinterpreted) for personal goals. Sita's name is ironical, since her namesake is Rama's wife, the same Hindu mythological Rama whose birthplace becomes

the site of contention and contestation between Hindus and Muslims in the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy; a ploy for political parties to gain electorates. Kapur uses Sita to show the ways in which religion can be interpreted in multiple ways. Hinduism, for example, may be interpreted in many different ways: “The Hindu religion... is wide, is deep, capable of endless interpretation. Anybody can get anything they want from it, ritual, stories, thoughts that sustain. But first you have to realise your need” (85). This line foreshadows the way Hinduism is interpreted differently in the text by the different characters, and in a broader context, by political parties. It is ironic that Kapur uses Sita as a symbol to reveal the misuse of religion, in the background of politicians misusing Rama as a symbol for their Hindu majoritarian politics. By using Sita symbolically, Kapur reveals the ways in which Hindu fundamentalist groups such as RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, BJP and so on (Davis 28), misuse Hinduism through their misrepresentations of religious symbols to the common people<sup>9</sup> to create communal tension.

Like Pipee, Sita finds a sense of freedom that arises after the death of her husband. Sita’s sense of freedom after her husband’s death takes her to Rishikesh in search of the Hinduism. Since her husband’s atheist attitude kept her away from practicing religion while he was alive, she chooses to pursue what she could not have earlier. While her husband’s death facilitates Pipee’s physical movement towards an imaginary diaspora, Sita’s husband’s death enables her to pursue those desires that were repressed while he

---

<sup>9</sup> An example of misuse of religious symbols is the transformation of Hindu god Rama from a forgiving, familial figure to an angry, masculine aggressor. This transformation of Rama was crucial in inciting communal hatred towards the Muslim minorities in 1992.

was alive. Both women choose to move towards an object that they believe can bring them happiness. This forward movement towards happiness echoes Sara Ahmed's concept of happiness (137). According to Ahmed, the freedom to be happy is not only based on a freedom from family or tradition, but also the freedom to identify with the "nation as the bearer of happiness" (137). Pipee and Sita, however, see an imaginary utopia as the bearer of happiness. Even though Ahmed talks of this movement occurring in the diaspora, in Sita's case, this movement occurs within the homeland. Here, Rishikesh is Sita's imaginary diaspora, and she actively moves towards this imaginary diaspora.

Sita's quest for "truth" from a Hindu religious teacher also reflects her agency which she can exercise after she inherits her husband's money:

'But when he lectures, he does so with a mike,' criticised Astha. 'That is not very unworldly.'  
 'If you live in this world, you make it serve your aims. It is hard for him to speak continuously and loudly to such large audiences... So we insisted he have the mike.'  
 'A present from one of the disciples?' inquired Astha...  
 'A present from me,' said the mother.  
 'He asked?'  
 'He never asks.' (Kapur 92)

In this search for "truth," Sita uses materiality as a way to find her religious identity as a true Hindu. Even though the guru "never asks," Sita fulfills imagined needs through her finances, as a way of getting closer to the guru. Through Sita, Kapur shows a naiveté that exists in a follower who is intent on discovering and developing her religious identity. Similar to Astha's endeavour to develop an independent self through her sexual relationship with Pipee, Sita uses her purchasing power to express her devotion as a true



disciple. Sita believes that she is on her way to discovering and redefining her religious identity. She also uses her agency to recreate her religious identity, an identity she claims she was unable to discover due to the restrictions put upon her by her late husband (55). Sita's independence comes with a false sense of agency that she believes to be her own due to her financial freedom; a freedom she uses to buy expensive gifts for her guru and invest in building more rooms at the ashram, at her own cost (96). Sita believes her gifts to the guru will lead her to her own salvation.

Sita's indoctrination also leads her to impose her new-found religious identity upon her grandchildren. When Astha visits Sita with her children, Sita insists that they go to the temple to pray, a ritual that the children are unfamiliar with: “‘We will all do it together,’ said [Sita] firmly, her eyes gleaming with the prospect of inducting her grandchildren into puja, ritual, Vedanta, and the sound beginnings of a Hindu life (Kapur 94). In this case, Sita imposes her view of what a Hindu religious identity comprises of, and is excited at the prospect of conditioning her grandchildren from an early age with her ideas. However, Sita's Hindu religious identity does not question the validity of other religions (like Hemant and Astha's mother-in-law). Instead, Sita's religious identity is concerned with the rituals and teachings of her own faith. Sita's personal ideas have a positive slant to them, as compared to those of Astha's in-laws’.

In her fictional accounts of these three women, Kapur explores the ways in which religious identity functions and comes into being. She reveals that financial stability is a key factor in their quest for identity freed of familial constraints. In the case of Astha, her education and her job as a teacher brings her monetary freedom, even if limited, and

allows her to meet with Aijaz, which eventually acts as a catalyst for her developing secular identity. This developing identity not only feeds into her own personal identity, but it also serves to provide Astha with the confidence she requires to find her creative expression, and use that creative expression for more control and perhaps, better monetary freedom.

Astha's upbringing in her natal home is also important to consider here. Astha's father believed in empowerment of females, while her mother believed in nourishing her mind with patriarchal conventions. Astha's father encouraged his daughter to escape from the clutches of tradition through education and ambition: "[My] daughter's future lay in her own hands, and these hands were to be strengthened by the number of books that passed through them" (2). He wanted to bring up his daughter as an independent woman; a woman who can take charge of her destiny, instead of being submissive to the men in her family. However, despite having an emancipated and liberal father on her side, Astha fails initially to become the independent woman that her father envisioned. This is a result of an opposing oppressive force within her family in the form of her mother. Astha's mother acted as an agent of patriarchy through her control of Astha's relationships with the opposite sex. She intercepted Bunty's letters to Astha and violated her privacy by reading her diary. The mother rationalizes her acts as a way to protect Astha from making a mistake: "You are too young to be indulging in such goings-on" (Kapur 12). The mother used ageism as a defence against her imposed restrictions on Astha. She nourished Astha's mind with marriage as the only goal: "Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman" (1). Her mother constantly reminded Astha of her duties (1).

Pipee's early childhood, on the other hand, includes only her mother and her brother, with no outside influences. The lack of outside influences helps to shape her independent self-identity from an early age, unlike Astha's. Pipee does not have to contend with contradictory parental figures in the everyday. Moreover, her work in the field of political and social activism also brings her in contact with Aijaz which helps to strengthen her beliefs in a secular identity. Through her interactions with Aijaz, Kapur shows that Pipee is receptive to the views and ideas of others around her. The violence of 1992 Babri Masjid riots further help Pipee to discover the ways in which to deal with communalism through research at a disconnected place (the States) that is removed physically from the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. Kapur shows that although Pipee is a practicing Hindu, she also has a secular outlook. Hence, Kapur demonstrates that practicing one's religion is not in opposition to being tolerant of other religions. However, Pipee's agency is possible due to the lack of family constraints, a possibility non-existent in Astha's case. For Astha, her struggle for a secular identity is a constant battle where she has to establish who she believes herself to be. Astha's negotiation, then, is not as effortless as Pipee's negotiation. Both Astha and Pipee opt for a secular form of religious identity, which differs significantly from that of Sita's religious identity as a Hindu.

Sita consciously chooses to follow a Hindu religious guru's teaching, as a means to understand how her religious identity as a Hindu functions within the society. However, Sita's journey into discovering her religious identity takes place in Rishikesh, at an ashram, which is disconnected from the realities of the pressures of everyday domestic life. By being divorced from these realities, and by being a widow without family

attachments and with monetary power, Sita has more freedom than either Astha or Pipee in her journey of self-discovery.

In their personal journeys of self-discovery, Astha, Pipee and Sita have to contend with men during their married lives. By juxtaposing all three women in the background of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy, Kapur brings to light the complex ways in which Indian women have to negotiate their national and religious identities at moments of communal violence. And often, these negotiations result in direct confrontation, as in the case of Astha and her in-laws. Kapur seems to be arguing through Pipee and Astha that a woman's religious identity does not pre-exist events of communal violence, but evolves in response to the events around her. Sita, for example, reveals how changing familial structures open up new freedoms and opportunities to re-invent oneself. Yet, in the context of Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, she does not emerge as a Hindu fundamentalist, but rather as a practicing Hindu. This shows that a woman's religious identity is not static but is dynamic and fluid determined by the changing private and public conditions of the society she inhabits. Kapur's fictional representations of three women negotiating their identities at moments of communal violence thus supplement ethnographic research by offering critical insights on the complex dynamics of different co-existing Hindu religious identities and by opening up possibilities for envisioning ways of ethically coexisting with the Other.

## CHAPTER TWO

## COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORA IN ANITA RAU

BADAMI'S *CAN YOU HEAR THE NIGHTBIRD CALL?*

Diaspora theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Brian Keith Axel, Vijay Mishra and Stuart Hall refer to the idea of the homeland left behind as an imaginary homeland created by the migrant in the diaspora. As mentioned in the Introduction, I make a distinction between “old homeland” and “new homeland,” where “old homeland” refers to the assumed place of origin (here, India), and “new homeland” refers to the diaspora (here, Canada). While Ahmed, Mishra and Hall posit that an imaginary old homeland is created by the diasporic subject in the new homeland in order to alleviate feelings of alienation due to racism, Axel offers his notion of a “diasporic imaginary” where the imaginary homeland is not a reference to the old homeland that pre-exists migration. Instead, Axel uses the example of Khalistan for Sikhs, where Khalistan (see Introduction 19-20) refers to a *third* new homeland, separate from the “old homeland” or the current “new homeland”. It is also important to note that while Mishra and Axel use the term “diasporic imaginary,” both theorists use the term differently in their theorizations. Mishra uses it to refer to an imaginary “old homeland,” while Axel uses it to characterize as an imaginary “new homeland” that exists only as a possibility or as a desire to create one. In the creation of an imaginary homeland, whether old or new, all four theorists refer to a “feeling” or “affect” component within diasporic subjects.

In reference to the “affect” component, Ahmed writes of communities in the diaspora that come together based on the sharing of “grief” for the loss of an imagined

(old) homeland (141). She argues that “affective communit[ies],” are produced by the “feeling” of “loss” that brings diasporic subjects together in the new homeland (141). According to Ahmed, the feeling of loss is an imagined loss, where despite the “feeling” that is experienced by the diasporic subject, the subject is unable to name that loss (140). Mishra also refers to this feeling of “loss” (423), where diasporic subjects create an imaginary (old) homeland in order to “preserve that loss” (423). The “loss” refers to the loss of an imagined old homeland, which the diasporic subject is unable to come to terms with in the new homeland. Citing racism as a reason, the diasporic subject stays in this alienation and refuses to become a part of the national ideal (Ahmed 142). The subject, thus, forms an attachment with the feeling of loss. However, according to Mishra, the loss is connected to the trauma of a single moment when the migrant was “wrenched from” his old homeland (423). Mishra believes that this “moment” is transformed into a “trauma” of absence, where the trauma is “a sign of loss” (423). Since this absence is not fully symbolized by the subject, the subject represses the absence into a loss. While Ahmed views the “loss” of an imaginary (old) homeland as an imagined loss of a beloved (140), Mishra maintains that the loss is a repression of a feeling of absence (423). Axel and Hall, on the other hand, theorize about a feeling of alienation that rises out of violence against the migrant’s community.<sup>10</sup> Alienation produces in the diasporic subject a need to create an imaginary homeland, whether an imagined old homeland (in the case of Hall), or an imagined new homeland (in the case of Axel).

---

<sup>10</sup> Sikh migrants often carry a desire for Khalistan from the old homeland of India to the new homeland of United States, Canada or Britain.

Edward Said's theory of metaphorical exile in the diaspora can be used to explain this feeling of alienation. As mentioned in the Introduction, "metaphorical exile" refers to a state of mind where the subject construes oneself as an outsider within his homeland, real or adopted (52). A person can be in a metaphorical exilic state of mind both in the homeland and in the diaspora. While Said's theory is based on Palestinians displaced by force, feminist theorists like Gayatri Gopinath, Annanya Bhattacharjee, Mandeep Grewal and Sara Ahmed aim to specifically theorize the experience of women in the homeland (India and South Asia) and the Indian diaspora. According to these theorists, women experience a sense of displacement in the homeland because of patriarchal attitudes towards females (see Introduction 21). This sense of displacement can be explained through Said's sense of metaphorical exile. However, even though Gopinath points to metaphorical exile among women in India due to patriarchal ideologies, it can be argued that both men and women can experience a metaphorical exilic state of mind due their position in society, irrespective of their gender status.

Anita Rau Badami explicitly reveals this in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* through her portrayal of ethnic and religious minorities in India, such as the Sikhs, who experienced a sense of displacement and alienation due to the communal violence that targeted them following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. According to Axel, "a set of official and unofficial [Indian] policies ha[ve] been implemented [against the Sikhs] since the early 1980s... that has effectively positioned [them]... at a point of marginality beyond the reach of national and international human rights jurisdiction" (416). Axel specifically refers to Operation Blue Star (see Introduction ), where in the

siege of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, the Indian army fired upon innocent pilgrims, many of whom were women and children. These violent events in the history of India indicate that similar to Axel's and Hall's postulation of experiencing alienation in the diaspora through racist violence, religious and ethnic minorities in India can also experience alienation through violence committed against them.

Grewal, Gopinath and Bhattacharjee explain the alienation of Indian women in the diaspora through the idea of double displacement. Since a woman is metaphorically displaced in the Indian homeland due to patriarchal attitudes towards females (see Introduction 21), scholars argue that a physical displacement in addition to her metaphorical displacement adds to her sense of exile, where she is both in physical *and* metaphorical exile. Grewal, Gopinath and Bhattacharjee talk of “added burdens” in the new homeland, which adds to the diasporic subject's alienation (see Introduction 22). Due to a fear of the “alien culture” of the new homeland (Ramanujam 147), the diasporic subjects often end up alienating themselves further. In order to escape from this feeling of alienation leads to the diasporic subject reconstructs an imaginary homeland.

In the last chapter, through the characters of Astha, Pipee and Sita in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*, I argued that a woman's religious identity in India evolves according to the way she decides to or can accommodate it. Steven Vertovec in “Religion and Diaspora” points to religions that can represent diasporas by themselves. Using Robin Cohen's examples of Judaism and Sikhism (189), Vertovec argues that since members of these religions are “considered to comprise discrete ethnic groups... marked by their religions” (10), these groups can be considered to represent separate diasporas.



Vertovec's view aligns with Axel's postulation that diasporic Sikhs all over the world imagine Khalistan as their imaginary homeland, regardless of being in a new or old homeland (426). In Vertovec's findings, he also discovers that "following migration [,] women play... [a] key role... in reproducing religious practice" in the diaspora (15). Vertovec holds women responsible for carrying religion over to the diaspora. Here, Vertovec echoes Hall's postulation that the diaspora can be a site of "becoming" (see Introduction 23). Women, then, are responsible for how they reproduce and transform religion in the diaspora. According to Vertovec, a Sikh diasporic subject will not transform his Sikh identity in the diaspora, unlike other religious minorities. As my analysis in this chapter reveals, Badami's novel, however, contradicts Vertovec's findings; we find tolerant Sikhs turning towards militancy in situations of communal strife. Thus, Badami's fiction opens up alternate ways of addressing the transformation of Sikh identity in the diaspora.

*Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* looks at the lives of three women- Bibi-ji, Leela and Nimmo- in the background and aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, and other violent events as precursors and results of the assassination. While the narratives of Bibi-ji and Leela contrast life both in India and abroad (here, Vancouver, Canada), Nimmo's narrative focuses on life in Delhi, India. Badami portrays the changing religious identities both in India and abroad for Bibi-ji and Leela, while focusing on Nimmo's changing religious identity within India. In my choice of the three characters, Nimmo's narrative stands out due to the difference in the kind of displacement she faces. While Bibi-ji and Leela are physically displaced from their homelands due to their

husbands' career and life choices, Nimmo's physical displacement is a result of the violence and cross border mass migration following the 1947 partition of British India into India and Pakistan. Bibi-ji and Leela experience a displacement that is slightly voluntary in nature, while Nimmo's displacement is forced which leaves her with emotional scars deeper than either Bibi-ji or Leela. At the same time, Leela also stands out for the trauma she carries of being a "half and half" (74). As the daughter of a high-caste Hindu Brahmin father and a "casteless German" mother (77), who is growing up in a traditional Brahmin family in India, she experiences alienation within her family. Ceaselessly taunted by her Hindu relatives at home results in her sense of metaphorical exile as a child. In this metaphorical exile, Leela's mother's unexpected accidental death comes as a welcome respite, and allows Leela to make a choice of taking ownership of her father's religious identity, while still a child (87). Bibi-ji's trauma, on the other hand, is almost second-hand. The loss of her mother and sister (in the same cross border migration where Nimmo loses her family) takes place while Bibi-ji is in Vancouver with her husband (54-55). Bibi-ji's trauma rises out of her guilt and helplessness from being unable to save her family from the instabilities of the Partition. Focusing on three female characters whose early life traumas inform their differing narratives in the novel, this chapter will analyze the ways in which they negotiate their national and religious identities in the background of violence against minorities both in India and its diaspora in Canada.

As with *A Married Woman*, the institution of family features prominently in Badami's novel in the formation of a woman's religious identity. Premilla D'Cruz and

Shalini Bharat point to the family as one of the primary sites for gendering processes that help shape a woman's personal, political and communal identities (167). D'Cruz and Bharat assert that family, being the first institution that a child comes into contact with, is key in shaping the desires and identities (self, political, personal, religious and so on) of the child through processes that emanate from both the male and female members of the family (168). Peter van der Veer points out that the family cannot be the only acting force on the formation of religious and national identities of children. Instead, there is a need to look at the larger "political economy" that the family is a part of (257). Political forces also play a major role in the early development of identities (religious and national) of both men and women, according to van der Veer. The importance of both the familial and the political is illustrated well in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*. We see that while in India, Bibi-ji, Leela and Nimmo fall prey to both familial conditioning, as well as, outside circumstances that affect the way their religious and national identities are formed. While the religious identities of Bibi-ji and Nimmo are affected due to trauma (rising out of communal violence), Leela's migration to Vancouver changes the ways in which she perceives people from other religions and races. The religious and national identities of all three women form as a result of the larger political forces around them.

In Bibi-ji's case, her childhood desires are shaped by the dreams of her father (as a result of his unsuccessful journey to Vancouver on *Komagata Maru*) and the teachings of her mother. Bibi-ji spends her childhood and her teenage years in Panjaur, a tiny village described by Badami as "a dot in that landscape of villages scattered across the fertile plains of West Punjab" (3). With her visions restricted to the small village life, Bibi-ji

listens to her father “open-mouthed even though she had heard the story [of *Komagata Maru*] a hundred times already...” (12). She dreams of going to Vancouver after countless retellings of the story of her father’s failed journey on *Komagata Maru* in 1914 (for details, see Introduction 32). Due to the dreams shaped by her father, she plans and prevents her sister from being chosen by her prospective husband from Canada. On the day of her sister, Kanwar’s, bride-viewing,

[Bibi-ji] looked down at her sister’s face... and was filled with sudden envy. It would be Kanwar, after all, who would go to the country that [Bibi-ji] had dreamt about ever since she could remember. But Canada... was *her* fate. *She* was the one who longed for Abroad. She wished that this man who was causing such a flutter in the house was coming for her. *Why*, she thought, *a single look at me and he would demand to marry me like all the other men have*. An idea crept into her mind. *Why not give him the choice, why not let him see both of us sisters and decide?* (Badami 27)

Here, we can see Bibi-ji demonstrating agency through her deliberate attempt to win Kanwar’s prospective groom for herself. Although only sixteen, Bibi-ji desires Canada as “*her* fate”. She wants “Abroad” for herself. In her choice of Canada, Bibi-ji does not recognize that although she makes this decision consciously, the desire for the preference has been inculcated in her as a child through her father’s desire. Her father’s retellings transferred his desire to reach Canada into his daughter, where he reminded Bibi-ji, almost without fail, of how he was “*almost there*” (11). She fails to recognize that her desire is not her own, but a desire that has been relocated from her father to herself. However, even in her failure to recognize her second-hand desire, Bibi-ji rejoices in her deliberate plan to steal her sister’s prospective groom, and escape to “Abroad,” a land spoken of nostalgically by her father. The complexity of this desire for the unknown highlights the complexity of women’s desire for change. In this relocation of desire from

father to daughter, Badami shows that desire can be fluid, and has the ability to move from one person to another. Bibi-ji's desire is a product of her father's dreams, and not her own dream. In this instance, Bibi-ji's agency is a reflection of *somebody else's* choice. Therefore, keeping in line with D'Cruz and Bharat, Bibi-ji's desire is shaped by her father's desire.

While Bibi-ji's desire for the unknown, here, "Abroad" (Badami 27), turns her into a diasporic subject, Bibi-ji's mother helps to shape her religious identity. While her mother professes the equality of all religions, Bibi-ji is constantly aware of her own religious identity as a Sikh. In the village for Panjaur, for instance, Bibi-ji often prays to a Hindu holy "stone":

[A] holy stone, believed by the Hindus of the village to harbour a powerful goddess, reared out of the earth. It was smeared with turmeric and vermilion and someone had scattered flowers around it... [Bibi-ji] touched the stone, earnestly whispering a prayer, as she and Jeeti often did together. As a Sikh she already knew that she was not supposed to worship idols and stones and pictures, but her mother had said that gods from all religions were holy and it would not hurt to pray to them now and again. (7-8)

Bibi-ji's awareness of her religious identity as a Sikh is strong as a six year old, even as she prays to the holy Hindu stone. In her belief that all religions were equal, a belief stressed upon by her mother, indicates that despite holding onto a strong Sikh religious identity, her mother also taught Bibi-ji to be tolerant of other religions in the village. Similarly, Badami makes a reference to another young Sikh girl, Jeeti, whose religious rituals mirror those of Bibi-ji's. This implies that both girls who come from Sikh households have been conditioned by their parents to uphold a secular outlook towards all religions, especially in their village where people from three different religions- Hinduism,

Sikhism and Islam- reside. However, the contradiction between the parents' beliefs about the equality of all religions and the living arrangements within the village hint at the complexity of communal beliefs within this rural community. Badami points to the segregation of living arrangements within Bibi-ji's village pre-partition days based on the religions of the people of the village: "The house in which Bibi-ji... lived with her parents and Kanwar was as unassuming as its surroundings. One of a small cluster of Sikh and Hindu houses, it was separated from the Muslim homes by fields of swaying sugar cane" (3). In this instance, there appears to be a sense of equality between Hinduism and Sikhism. The separation of Hindu and Sikh houses from that of Muslim houses suggests a conscious segregation of the villagers based on their religious identifications. Badami points not only to the institution of family in shaping the religious identity of their children, but also to the institution of social community that shapes this religious identity, as is the case with Bibi-ji. While on one hand, the Sikh villagers believe in the potency of all religions; on the other hand, the villagers wilfully keep a distance between their community and the communities of the Muslim others. Bibi-ji's belief of the equality of all religions is confined to her regular prayers offered to the Hindu stone, while her identification as a Sikh is unquestioned even by herself. This contradiction between belief and practice implies the existence of an "Us versus Them" mentality in this pre-partition village in 1928. Therefore, even as a six year old, Bibi-ji does not mistake her mother's tolerance for other religions as a divorce from Sikhism, but as a tolerance that does not challenge her religious identity as a Sikh. Tolerance, then, can exist only in the condition

where separate religious identities are not under attack. Thus, Bibi-ji's religious identity is not shaped as a secular identity, but as a strong Sikh identity with a tolerant outlook.

With her religious identity firmly in place, Bibi-ji's transformation from a rural to an urban woman is a result of her own desire for change; a desire that is supplemented by her husband's desire for a wife who can fit into life in Canada. In other words, Bibi-ji's search to create a new identity works in tandem with her husband's desire for the same:

[Pa-ji] would cover several sheets of paper with impassioned essays on the history of the Sikhs in North America. He seemed to be obsessed with his community, and underlined the richness of Punjabi traditions and culture. Then, in seemingly direct contradiction, he would write that she should learn English ways, should become a modern woman so that she would be able to settle into life in Canada. [Bibi-ji]... was confused- what exactly did he want her to be? A traditional Sikh or an English mem? (32-33)

Pa-ji, Bibi-ji's new husband, insists that his young wife imbibe the best of both worlds (traditions of a rural Punjabi Sikh woman and the ways of an urban English-speaking woman), implying the differences that exist between the two worlds. Badami portrays Pa-ji as a firm believer in his religion. At the same time, she also complicates Pa-ji's religious identity by incorporating "contradiction" into his desire to transform his wife into a person who can straddle both the traditional (Sikh) and the modern (Canadian) worlds. This desire refers back to Vertovec, where he asserts that Sikh diaspora is a representation of a discrete diaspora (10). Therefore, Pa-ji's allegiances lie with a Sikh identity that has adapted itself to Canadian demands. The integration of two different identities (Sikh and Canadian) by Pa-ji implies that he does not believe in sticking to one identity or the other, and uses his Sikh and Canadian identities to suit his desires and needs. For Pa-ji, being modern does not imply being separated from traditional, religious

Sikh ideals, but modification of the self according to the national ideal of the country he inhabits. His Canadian national ideal, then, refers to Hall's theory of diaspora as a site of "becoming" (394). At the same time, Pa-ji's need to assimilate exposes Pa-ji's insecurities of being an Other in Canada. Pa-ji is candid about his otherness and wants to protect his wife from being subjected to such otherness. In his endeavour to protect his wife, he instructs Bibi-ji to imbibe "English ways" so that she can transform into a westernized woman. His intentions are not to create an inner struggle within Bibi-ji. Instead, he hopes that his instructions will help Bibi-ji overcome such struggles when she joins him in Canada. However, despite his intentions, his insistence creates a constant struggle within Bibi-ji; a struggle she negotiates through her religious identity as a Sikh.

Bibi-ji handles the challenges of learning both English and "Gurbani" (33) and living in a city through the stability that her Sikh identity provides her. Her allegiance to her religion becomes apparent in the solace she derives from the Golden Temple at Amritsar in the absence of her husband and her natal family:

From the other window she gazed at the dome of the Golden Temple. When she first arrived, determined if often scared or lonely, [Bibi-ji]... would glance out of the window before her lessons for the blessing she believed she would receive from the mere sight of that golden structure rising gracefully into the hot shine of the sky. (Badami 34)

Bibi-ji's struggle to establish herself as a woman of both lingual worlds (Gurbani and English), as desired by her husband, is a struggle that is eased with the help of the mental peace she derives from the sight of a symbol of her religion. In Bibi-ji's personal struggle to recreate a new self from an older self, Bibi-ji seeks comfort from a part of her old self. This old self is attached to her religious identity as a Sikh, and through this religious



identity Bibi-ji is able to carve out her new (modern) identity with an occasional glance at her old identity to reassure her of the positive nature of the changes desired by her husband. At the same time, her own desire to become a part of her husband's vision of her causes Bibi-ji to experience guilt: "[Bibi-ji] had surreptitiously broken the rules of god-fearing Sikhs and cut her hair a few inches to even out the ragged ends. She was ready to take her future in her own hands and shape it to her liking" (35). According to Sikhism, cutting of hair is forbidden both for men and women (Axel 418). Bibi-ji's act then represents her desire to break from the umbilical cord of her rural (and traditional) past, and her desire to join her husband and her future in a distant land. The act of cutting her hair symbolically represents Bibi-ji's desire for change. However, the "surreptitious" nature of her act exposes her guilt of trying to break from the old in order to join with the new. The guilt also reflects her inner struggle to negotiate changes that she faces as an Indian Sikh woman. On one hand, she desires to be a dutiful Sikh; on the other hand, she wants to become an assimilated "modern" woman. In her willingness to accept her husband's desires, Bibi-ji reveals the complexity of her own inner struggle. Bibi-ji's guilt highlights her trepidation at choosing appearance over religion, despite her readiness to "shape [her future] to her liking" (35). In her struggle, Bibi-ji shows her desire to balance both parts of her identity- traditional with the modern, the past with the present. Bibi-ji also shows the malleability of her Sikh identity, where shifts in her religious identity occur according to the conditions around her.

In Canada, however, Bibi-ji does not display a sense of alienation or additional burdens as postulated by feminist critics like Gopinath, Grewal, Bhattacharjee,

Ramanujam and Ahmed. Instead, Bibi-ji uses her newfound business sense and freedom to run Pa-ji's business. She refuses to take credit notes, unlike her husband, and makes use of the newcomers that litter her and Paji's apartment:

[H]er apartment upstairs... had become a stopping place for newcomers... Pa-ji believed in running an open house. Anyone was welcome... [Pa-ji said,] 'People helped me when I came here, and this is my way of paying back. We are strangers in this land and have nobody but our own community to turn to'... Pa-ji had said nothing when she stopped taking credit notes, even though she knew that the grumblings and the mutterings from the customers had reached him. But on the matter of their house guests she knew he would not budge. However, there were other ways of dealing with the endless train of people wandering through their home... The women understood this and made themselves useful... without being asked. It was the men who lounged around... 'They need to be kept busy... They can help in the shop' [Bibi-ji said to Pa-ji]... 'Yes... you are right,' Pa-ji sighed and gave up. (42-48)

Bibi-ji once again displays an agency that is at odds with the views of the aforementioned feminist critics. Just like she takes her fate into her own hands back in India, in Canada, Bibi-ji manipulates her husband in ways that she knows will be profitable to their business. She displays her inner strength at being able to take control of an unfamiliar situation. Bibi-ji's display of business acumen and her desire for change allows her to take control of both her husband's business as well as matters undesirable to their existence in Canada (such as the presence of unwelcome guests at her house). In this case, Bibi-ji chooses family over community, despite her strong religious identity as a Sikh. In this choice of the personal over the larger Sikh community, Bibi-ji demonstrates the importance of her personal desire over her husband's desire. It is worth noting that this allegiance to the personal over the community is possible due to her husband's support in her decisions. On the other hand, in his desire to provide newcomers with a place to stay, Pa-ji displays his own sense of "feeling" like a stranger (47). He insists to Bibi-ji that

Sikhs are strangers in Canada. By positioning himself as a stranger in Canada, Pa-ji echoes Ahmed's "melancholic migrant" (140). The migrant, here, is Pa-ji and he is unable to integrate himself into the national ideal of his adopted country. His melancholia at an imagined "loss" (140) is reflected in his desire to mark the Sikh community as his family in an alien land. The loss that Pa-ji refers to is an underlying nostalgia for his Sikh community back in India, a community that he wants to recreate in Canada. Pa-ji's extension of the Sikh community as family refers to Ahmed's "affective community" (141), where Pa-ji insists that the new homeland is not home, in any sense: "[Pa-ji said to Bibi-ji,] 'People helped me when I came here, and this is my way of paying back. We are strangers in this land and have nobody but our own community to turn to'" (47). Through his assertion that the Sikh community is an extended family in the diaspora, Pa-ji shows how Sikh communities crystallize around migrant anxieties of beginning anew in an alien land. Despite his earlier demonstrations of being an assimilated Sikh through his letters to Bibi-ji (Badami 32-33), Pa-ji's own sense of alienation is evident in his desire to maintain his ties with his community in "this land." Pa-ji's "paying back" demonstrates his desire for a second imaginary home within Canada in the form of an extended Sikh community. However, I want to argue that this second imaginary home within Canada is not a reference to Axel's "imaginary homeland," or Khalistan (421). Here, Pa-ji's desire does not reflect those of militant Sikhs who insist on Khalistan (Axel 421), which comprises of a separate piece of land, but a desire to build a hospitable Sikh community or an "affective community" of Sikhs in Vancouver. Pa-ji's desire can be read through Mishra's lens of "old diaspora," where he writes about Indian "diasporas of exclusivism"

that wanted to create relatively “self-contained ‘little Indias’” in the diaspora (422).

Therefore, Pa-ji wants to create a second home where he can coexist with his Sikh brethren as well as with other Canadians.

Pa-ji’s alienation in Canada becomes even more evident in his attitude towards white Canadians. A conversation between Pa-ji and Bibi-ji reveals the difference in attitudes between husband (as a former migrant) and wife (as a new migrant):

‘The goras hide behind these politenesses and commits all kinds of sins,’ [Pa-ji] told [Bibi-ji]... But truth be told, Bibi-ji didn’t feel quite as strongly about the goras as he did. In fact, she had a sneaking admiration for the fair-skinned people who had infiltrated every part of the world with their manners and customs and languages. (Badami 41)

Pa-ji reveals contradictions in his attitudes towards Canada. While he insists on Bibi-ji’s “English education” (41), he displays scorn towards white Anglophone Canadians. Bibi-ji, however, displays an “admiration” for “fair-skinned” people. It is worthwhile to note here that both Pa-ji (in his scorn) and Bibi-ji (in her admiration) confuse white Canadians with white British. To Pa-ji and Bibi-ji, all “fair-skinned people” represented the same homogenous racial group.

Similar to Pa-ji, Bibi-ji also facilitates the formation of an “affective community” of diasporic South Asians in Vancouver through the restaurant, Delhi Junction. She chooses this name deliberately to represent the multitude of ethnic identities that exist both in India and in the diaspora:

Bibi-ji felt that they needed to have a broader appeal, so they settled on The Delhi Junction Café... On one wall she hung lithiographic prints of the ten Sikh gurus... painting of the Golden Temple... maps of India and Canada, pictures of Nehuru, Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Marilyn Monroe, Meena Kumari, Clark Gable and Dev Anand. On another wall were clocks displaying the time in India, Pakistan... Vancouver, England, New York, Melbourne and Singapore... Bibi-ji had chosen

the menu items carefully, making sure that neither beef nor pork were included so as not to offend any religious group. (Badami 59-61)

This recreation of a shared community by Bibi-ji is similar to Pa-ji's desire for community as an extended family. At the same time, Bibi-ji is interested in catering to more than just the Sikh community for economic reasons. Bibi-ji's decision to fill the walls of her café with pictures that have an appeal to both Canadians and Indians show her desire to cater to the different religious and ethnic groups in Canada. She also decorates the walls of the café with clocks that display times in both India and Pakistan. This shows that Bibi-ji is sensitive to the Indo-Pak differences, and wants to promote harmony among her Indian and Pakistani customers. She also displays a good business sense in attracting different kinds of customers to the café. She deliberately chooses her menu items that are religiously favourable to both Hindus and Muslims. Bibi-ji displays a conscious effort to bridge any such segregation in the diaspora. For Bibi-ji, the café acts as a neutral zone where she offers free advice to new immigrants (60) and brings about a feeling of a secular community where Muslims and Hindus as well as white Canadians and non-white Canadians can tread about as equals. In this conscious choice of a neutral zone, Bibi-ji's character challenges Gopinath's notion of doubly displaced women in the diaspora. Instead of being doubly displaced, Bibi-ji creates a second homeland within this physical displacement that keeps any form of alienation at bay.

Bibi-ji demonstrates herself to be secular when she chooses to hold onto parts of her religion that are non-militant or non-violent in nature. Despite embracing her husband's "made up" family history (203), she does not approve of her adopted son's

embracing of the militant aspects of Sikhism. Bibi-ji's disapproval is evident in her open contestation of Pa-ji's decision to educate Jasbeer in the militant aspects of Sikh history:

'What did [Jasbeer] do this time?' Pa-ji asked...  
 'He took a kitchen knife to school. He said he wanted to be like your father[,]'  
 [replied Bibi-ji.]  
 A guilty look crossed Pa-ji's face... 'A few days ago he wanted a kirpan, like the  
 one in my father's photograph.'  
 'Your *fake* father's photograph,' corrected Bibi-ji. (205)

A kirpan (or, a dagger) is one of the physical markers of Khalsa Sikh men (Axel 418). However, in Pa-ji's case, he falls into the category of non-militant Sikhs, unlike Khalsa Sikhs (Axel 414). Pa-ji does not subscribe to the violent, militant aspects of Sikhism, unlike Khalsa Sikhs. In this example, Pa-ji's guilt rises from the misinformation about his own family history that he provides to Jasbeer. The man in the portrait that Pa-ji claims to be his father is a photo of a Khalsa Sikh that Pa-ji picks up from a roadside vendor (203). By imbibing a Sikh identity that is not part of who he is, Pa-ji's pretence reveals the deception and the duality of his own Sikh identity. While he claims to be a Sikh proud of his religion, history and heritage, Pa-ji uses photographs of other people to lay claim to a history that he is not a part of. In this self creation of a Sikh identity, Pa-ji shows his own insecurities as the Other in a foreign land. His need to use a made up history shows his desire to be respected among his own community in Vancouver, which is also an "othered" community in the diaspora. Pa-ji negotiates his otherness in a new land through his claim to a false self history. His claim to a false history through his creation of an imaginary lineage reflects Hall's theorization of diaspora as a site "of becoming" (394). Pa-ji strives to become a new person through his creation of a false historical identity.

The diaspora, then, acts a site of transformation for Pa-ji who uses a false past to build his present and potentially, his future.

Bibi-ji also displays longing to establish her identity as a Sikh within the diaspora. Bibi-ji's encounter with white Anglophone Canadians, in particular, throws light on her desire to align herself with her Sikh identity. In an exchange with her adopted son's principal, Bibi-ji is adamant about addressing the misconceptions that white Canadians might hold against the minority Sikh community. Through her conversation, it becomes clear that Bibi-ji resists being othered in the diaspora:

The principal tried again, 'I understand that in your part of the world it is okay to carry swords, but –'  
 'Our part of the world?' interrupted Bibi-ji. 'No, there you have made a mistake, Mr. Longman.'  
 'Longbottom,' the principal corrected her.  
 'Mr. Longbottom. On Main Street we are *very* law-abiding citizens. Nobody carries weapons, Only religious leaders are permitted to carry the kirpan, and baptized Sikhs. Of course for children it is not allowed.'  
 'No, Mrs. Singh. I don't mean Main Street.' The principal sounded weary.  
 (Badami 210)

The principal insinuates that Sikhs are a violent group of people. In this insinuation, Mr. Longbottom shows the kinds of attitudes that white Canadians hold towards first-generation Sikh immigrants to Canada. By aligning Bibi-ji's "part of the world" with that of Punjab, India (210), instead of with Main Street, Vancouver, the principal immediately "others" Bibi-ji and the community she belongs to. In his failure to recognize that Bibi-ji is also a Canadian citizen like him, he reveals his own Anglophone Canadian national ideal (that he sees as being the dominant Canadian national ideal). But Bibi-ji refuses to conform to the ideas that Mr. Longbottom holds about her or her community. Bibi-ji asserts her Canadian identity and shows Mr. Longbottom that she aligns herself with a

multicultural Canadian national ideal. Bibi-ji's assertion shows the divide between her religious identity, which she firmly attests to being a Sikh, and her national identity, which she insists on being that of a Canadian. Moreover, this exchange also throws light on the fluidity of violence across borders, where Mr. Longbottom aligns Bibi-ji's community with violence committed by her community back in India. The disconnect between Mr. Longbottom's misinformation and the reality of Bibi-ji's existence in Vancouver shows how women in the diaspora are othered by the dominant national ideal (here, Anglophone white Canadian) based on their religious identities and skin colour. Mr. Longbottom, then, sees Bibi-ji not as a successful Canadian businesswoman, but as an uneducated Sikh Indian living in Canada.

The complexity of Bibi-ji's religious identity becomes evident in her visit to India to celebrate "the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev" (310). As Axel notes, for the Khalistani Sikh subject, the Sikh martyr is of importance. The martyr becomes a symbol for heroism and takes away the connotations of violence from the "tortured body" (414). Even though Bibi-ji is not a Khalistani Sikh subject, she engages in the celebration of Guru Arjun Dev. For her, Guru Arjun Dev represents a Sikh hero, and not the violence of martyrdom attached to his tortured body. Moreover, her choice to visit the Golden Temple under risky circumstances shows her personal agenda to rid herself of the guilt of having failed her niece Nimmo in the upbringing of Jasbeer (311).

Bibi-ji visits the holy city of Amritsar in the background of Operation Blue Star for more information, see Introduction 30). Due to her unawareness of the impending military action by the Indian state, she disregards the advice of her relatives (315). Bibi-ji



insists on staying at the temple with Pa-ji during that period. She hopes that through such outward acts of devotion towards her religion, she will be able to overcome “her sins” (311). Her personal agenda also reflects back upon her selfish desire to steal her sister’s prospective groom, along with her “surreptitious” cutting of the ends of her hair (35), even though it went against her religion. Therefore, Bibi-ji chooses to practice her religion according to situation and personal need, rather than from her inner sense of loyalty towards her religion. Bibi-ji’s desire to turn towards militarism after Pa-ji’s death (337) also highlights her lack of judgment on the consequences of supporting violence. As Axel notes, the self aligns oneself with the violence of Khalsa Sikhs in order to alleviate the minority status heaped upon them by the Indian state (425). Bibi-ji, too, aligns herself with the violent Khalsa subject seeking to transform Pa-ji’s death into martyrdom. Bibi-ji’s changing allegiances point to the fickle nature of her own religious identity. In Pa-ji’s absence, she strives to overcome her personal loss through an attitude of revenge. She assigns blame for his death to the Indian state and the Hindu majority, rather than resign herself to his death. Through calls for revenge, she hopes to not only overcome the trauma of her husband’s death, but also avenge his death.

In Bibi-ji’s decision to break away from Pa-ji’s previous tolerant influence where he did not support the cause for Khalistan, Bibi-ji demonstrates her own agency. She joins other members of the Sikh community in a rally against the Indian Commission in Vancouver:

‘I wish to join the rally too,’ Bibi-ji said... surprising herself... Dr. Randhawa arrived again... He had been right after all, she told herself. The Indians had humiliated the Sikhs and they had killed her Pa-ji. It was now a question of

defending the faith, the thing that gave them, as a tribe, a face and a distinction.  
(Badami 337, 343)

Just like she had acted on an emotional impulse at her sister's bride viewing, here as well Bibi-ji allows her emotions to take over. Instead of abiding by "her" Pa-ji's non-violent disposition, she chooses violence to assuage her grief over his death. Despite her earlier disapproval of Dr. Randhawa and his views on Khalistan, she welcomes him into her home, and uses violence to reason away Pa-ji's violent (albeit accidental) death. Bibi-ji's reasoning is skewed by her grief, and in this grief, she allows the militant part of Khalsa Sikh identity to become a part of her religious identity. Allegiance towards religious identity, then, depends on the situation (here, Pa-ji's death) and personal (Bibi-ji's decision to support the Khalistani movement), rather than being determined by her allegiance to the dominant identity of the community at that moment of crisis. Even though the Sikh community in Badami's narrative largely calls for allegiance towards the Khalistani movement, it is only the violence of Pa-ji's death that triggers Bibi-ji's shifting allegiance from being a non-Khalistan supporter to being a Khalistan supporter. Religious identity then is at the mercy of personal emotions, rather than the emotions of the community. Bibi-ji turns towards anger as a way to overcome the affect of loss that she experiences. While Ahmed refers to an imagined loss of a beloved (140), Bibi-ji's loss is a reference to an actual loss of a beloved. In this actual loss, Bibi-ji's motivation to alleviate her affect is stronger than a desire for an imaginary homeland, Khalistan. Her desire to fund the Khalistan movement does not lie in the desire for another homeland. Rather, her decision is based on personal motivation based on revenge for Pa-ji's death.

In *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, Badami does not restrict her narrative to a portrayal of a woman whose religious identity allegiances change according to personal desires and needs. Through her fictional character Leela, Badami portrays a woman who adopts her father's patrilineal religious identity of a high caste Brahmin in her desire to belong. Born to parents of mixed heritage, a high caste Brahmin Hindu man and a "casteless" (77) white German woman, Leela makes a conscious decision to stick to her Hindu Brahmin identity out of her need for familial and societal acceptance. When her grandmother compares her to Anglo Indians, her grief lies in the separation her grandmother insists between Leela (her grandchild from a mixed union) and Narayana and Vishnu (her grandsons from the union of pure high-caste Hindu Brahmins), Leela agonizes that: "...she is also half here and half there...[l]ike the Anglo-Indians of Cox Town.' Leela felt as if her heart would burst with shame and hurt. To be compared to those people, so reviled by good Hindu families like her own- it was unbearable!" (78). Leela's grandmother attempts to shame her into being confined to her mixed heritage by her constant taunts: "'Half breed,' Akka would mutter out loud. 'Worse than an untouchable. At least a toilet cleaner has caste. But this girl, where does she belong? Tell me, somebody, *where?*'" (82). Akka, Leela's grandmother, compares Leela to being lower than an untouchable, outside the Hindu caste system. In this comparison where Akka's family belongs to the highest caste in the Hindu caste system, Akka sees Leela as an orphan with no belonging. Leela's grandmother aims to segregate her granddaughter from her pure breed grandsons born of her other children. She constantly reminds Leela of her place as being outside the pure Brahmin family. However, Leela's resilience in

insisting on upholding her Brahmin status highlights her desire to belong to her father's family against all odds. Leela finds her survival in embracing a religious identity that her grandmother is intent on separating her from. In this act of embracing what she is forced away from, Leela highlights her rebellion and her agency at being able to choose her identity for herself. In this desire, she relies on the family servant Venki, as her ally, and makes herself indispensable to her father, to gain his support in maintaining her position in the family (88). In recognizing and choosing her allies in her natal house carefully, Leela demonstrates her skills in shaping her own religious identity for herself. Unlike Bibi-ji whose childhood conditioning by her mother imbibes her Sikh identity within her, Leela's religious identity is a result of a reverse negative conditioning. However, both women make personal choices. While Leela chooses her religious identity as a shield against her mixed heritage, Bibi-ji's religious identity evolves as a result of personal choices. Leela decides to stick to her chosen religious identity by further cementing it through marriage.

Leela marries into a high-caste Brahmin family in order to consolidate a high-caste identity through marriage. This consolidation on Leela's part ensures that her religious identity is never brought into question by either her natal family, or other high-caste Brahmin families. Leela's constant search for acceptance, leads her to find ways to make Balu Bhat choose her as his wife. Through her connections, Leela discovers Balu's interests and uses this information to make herself seem appealing to Balu:

[A]lthough Balu Bhat was an eligible bachelor, ... he was difficult to please... Leela wasn't unduly worried... She asked her father to send her horoscope... but she wrote the letter that accompanied it; and her father, used to letting her handle all his correspondence, signed it without bothering to read it. If he had, he would

have been surprised to see that Leela had not included the usual information about her beauty, the colour of her skin and her talents as a cook... [S]he intended to capture this Balachandra Bhat, most eligible of bachelors... (Badami 91-92)

Although Leela's relatives are sceptical about this match, Leela uses resources at her disposal in order to capture Balu Bhat as a prospective groom. Similar to Bibi-ji, Leela uses deception to become Balu's bride. However, while Bibi-ji's actions were driven by jealousy and a desire for the unknown, Leela's actions are driven by her desire for the known, for the stability of a known Brahmin family that she can align herself with. Leela's actions are a result of her need to be anchored, while Bibi-ji's desire is to de-anchor herself from her small village. Therefore, when Leela's husband decides to migrate to Canada, Leela experiences a feeling of disorientation that is at odds with her desire for stability. While Bibi-ji marries Pa-ji to escape her village life, Leela admits to marrying Balu for his "apparent stability," where his ancestors were "purebred Hindu Brahmins, untainted either racially or in their religion" (99). However, Balu's decision to migrate to Canada later in the novel results in Leela's loss of the stability she experienced in Bangalore as Balu Bhat's wife and daughter-in-law of the renowned Bhat family.

In his desire for the unknown, Balu chooses to uproot his family from the familiarity of their hometown in India to a foreign city, Vancouver. Leela vehemently opposes this move and hopes to return to her home in India. Leela experiences difficulty in immediate assimilation into Canada, as she consciously decides to hate Canada, in order to convince her husband to return to India:

She would not allow herself to be beguiled. She was feeling the oddest mix of emotions, agitation and anger, for no particular reason. Disappointment, yes, that's what it was. She was *disappointed* that Vancouver was not something she could readily and immediately hate. (Badami 107-108)

Leela's alienation reflects Gopinath's theory of double displacement. Instead of the diaspora othering Leela in these first moments in the diaspora, Leela *others* the diaspora. Her disappointment in Vancouver rises not from the city's failure to please Leela, but from Leela's own failure to please herself. The disappointment that Leela experiences makes her alienate herself from her immediate surroundings. She begins by comparing Vancouver to India (108), and in that comparison, reveals her strong desire for the homeland that she has left behind. Leela experiences a double displacement due to her conscious choice of rejection of the diaspora. Leela feels like a stranger in Canada, and this "feeling" or affect (Ahmed 141) causes Leela to alienate herself. While Leela's determination to hate Vancouver lingers, she realizes that this determination rises from her fear of losing her identity as a high-caste Brahmin: "*I am Leela Bhat, of the famous family of Kunjoor Bhats? Would it mean anything here?*" (115). Leela questions the familiarity of her religious identity back in her home town, and wonders whether she can hold onto the same familiarity and status in the diaspora. Leela's sense of displacement is a result of her desire to hold onto her past identity. Since Leela has always experienced stability and defined her personal identity through her religious identity, she feels the slippage of her personal self along with her religious self in an alien land. The slippage causes her to hold onto the religious identity even more, which then creates an increasing feeling of alienation within Leela. To hold onto her religious identity, Leela continues her religious practices in Vancouver. She transforms her basement into her place of worship and describes a feeling of happiness within that created space:

[T]he basement, her India, where the fragrance of incense lingered in the still air, the water pipes had been camouflaged by a false ceiling and the unfinished walls were draped with an assortment of colourful cotton bedcovers. Her gods were waiting for her there, their silver faces impassive as she rang a small silver bell loudly to catch their attention. (236)

Leela recreates “India” through improvisation. For Leela, her religious identity provides a connection to her old homeland. And, to recreate that homeland, Leela uses idols that transform her basement into a space of worship. Although Leela substantiates Vertovec’s findings that women carry over religious rituals into the diaspora (15), she also echoes Hall’s theory of the diaspora as a site of “becoming” (394). She *transforms* a physical space in her home in Vancouver into an appropriation of her old homeland. The transformed space represents the way Leela views India in her imagination. Therefore, diaspora acts both as a space of being for Leela, as well as a space of becoming. She employs her religious identity to maintain a connection with the old homeland. At the same time, Leela’s identity also shifts in the diaspora, as she makes friends with Bibi-ji, Mrs. Wu and Erin. Leela begins to assimilate herself into her new homeland.

To contrast with both Bibi-ji and Leela, Badami uses the character of Nimmo to show how double displacement can occur within the homeland. While Gopinath’s notion of double displacement refers to being physically and metaphorically displaced in the diaspora, Badami challenges this notion through Nimmo’s narrative. Nimmo’s need for an identity is born out of her physical displacement within her homeland as a result of the 1947 mass migration and the disappearance of her entire family following Partition violence. Nimmo’s trauma makes her grab at an identity as a Sikh based on a postcard she happened to be holding onto:

‘What about that postcard you showed me? That is proof, is it not? It has the name of your parents, doesn’t it?’ [her husband’s] voice rose in excitement. Nimmo was silent. She had never told him that the postcard might not be hers, that she might have picked it up on her journey to India during Partition, twenty years ago. (148)

Even though she does not articulate her misgivings about her Sikh identity to her husband, Nimmo realizes that her identity has been a product of her desire to bury her past, in order to live her present. Nimmo experiences a sense of metaphorical displacement in her homeland due to her lack of memories from her childhood. At the same time, she chooses to bury this metaphorical sense of exile under an assumed identity in order to create a self identity for herself. She also struggles under the guilt of having taken on a religious identity that may not be her own.

Nimmo also displays a tolerant outlook towards other religions. Although Nimmo takes on the religious identity of a Sikh, she plants a tulasi plant in front of her house: “Her Hindu neighbours believed that the tulasi brought peace and prosperity to the house. She wasn’t one to scorn other people’s beliefs, so she had taken [her neighbour’s] advice and planted the bush the year [her second child] was born” (163). Nimmo, a Sikh by belief, exercises tolerance towards other religions to the extent of putting faith in their faiths. In this conscious choice to be open-minded, Nimmo reveals her inner turmoil at her own doubts about her religious identity. Although she openly claims to be a Sikh, based on the postcard discovered upon her, her religious practices hint at the religious ambiguity that she carries within herself. This religious ambiguity creates a sense of guilt within Nimmo when she comes in contact with Bibi-ji. Although happy to lead a life of a Sikh with Satpal and her children, she experiences a sense of guilt wondering if she is



taking undue disadvantage of Bibi-ji's certainty in Nimmo's past. This guilt in turn forces her to recall her traumatic past.

Bibi-ji and Nimmo, both Sikh women, suffer in different ways from the violence against Sikhs in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots (see Introduction 30-31). While Bibi-ji loses her husband, Nimmo loses her entire family (except her son, Jasbeer). This shows that religious violence crosses borders despite their differing locations in Vancouver and Delhi, respectively. While Bibi-ji suffers in Amritsar after the immediate impact of her loss of Pa-ji, and then in Vancouver, where her loss travels across space (as Bibi-ji is unable to let go of the trauma of Pa-ji's death), Nimmo's suffers through the daily reminders of her absent family from the house they inhabited together for many years. Yet, in their mutual loss of family members, they are unable to connect with each other. While Nimmo removes herself from public life, and even attempts suicide (Badami 380), Bibi-ji uses her financial power for revenge on the behalf of militant Sikhs in Canada. Their ways of dealing with loss also point to their evolving religious identities in the face of trauma. While Nimmo stays away from a revenge mentality, seeing no retribution in it, Bibi-ji gives in to the war mentality in hopes of inner peace. This refers back to Veena Das (see Introduction 15-16) who argues that women mourn their loss either through silence (68), or through the fictionalization of accounts of violence (69). While Bibi-ji uses her monetary and community resources to deal with her loss, Nimmo uses silence and then denial through a fiction of the arrival of her already dead family. Nimmo cooks the favourite dishes of her family members in the hope that they will show up at the house (Badami 401). In the end, Badami chooses to "reward" Nimmo with the return of her son,

a return that also alleviates Bibi-ji's guilt for having taken Jasbeer away from Nimmo (401-402).

Badami also represents the Hindu Leela as a victim of the confrontational politics between the Indian state and Sikh militants. By making Leela the victim of the 1985 Air India 182 Bombing, Badami shows that in the end, Leela's high-caste Brahmin identity fails to save her from death. The planned terrorist attack by Sikh militants against the Air India flight represented an attack against the Indian state, even though the passengers were mostly Canadians. :

She thinks about Brian Mulranoy's gaffe, calling India's prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, to offer his condolences when it was a planeload of mostly Canadian citizens who had died. How have Leela have felt? Preethi wonders. Even in death, neither country claimed her poor mother as its own. A Trishanku for all eternity, Leela used to say. (396-397)

Preethi, Leela's daughter, ponders over her mother's state of being a "half and half" (78) even in death. Trishanku, a reference to the Hindu myth of a king who was stuck in a space between heaven and earth "for eternity" (76-77), refers to Leela's state of a "half" German and a "half" Indian. Just like the mythological Hindu king, Trishanku, who hangs between the space between heaven and earth, Leela's death also takes place in a space between Canada and India. Leela is unclaimed in death by her new homeland of Canada and her old homeland of India. She becomes stuck in a space of uncertainty, just like Trishanku.

Communal violence, then, creates a space of instability for women, whether in the homeland or the diaspora. Leela loses her life to communal violence, while Bibi-ji and Nimmo suffer personal losses in the form of the death of their husbands and family. In all

three instances, we see how communal violence cuts through religious, class and geographical locations and affect the lives of Indian women in different ways. The novel evocatively reveals how women are torn apart by their losses and how communal violence takes away the stability that these women initially find through their religious identities. The fictional representations of the three women show how dynamics of class, caste, religion and location can function in the background of communal violence, and trauma as a result of that violence. The novel also shows the ways in which women can respond to trauma, and how sometimes, their responses are contingent on their financial statuses.

## CONCLUSION

## COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND THE EFFECT OF TRAUMA

This thesis investigated the formation and transformation of religious (and to some extent, national) identities in the background of communal violence through fictional representations of women by two authors of Indian origin: Manju Kapur and Anita Rau Badami. The representations of women's religious and national identities by the two authors highlight the complexities of identity formations in India and its diaspora. Their female protagonists demonstrate that women's religious identities are fluid ; they shift according to changing familial and political circumstances. In exploring the identity formations of Astha, Pipee and Sita in Kapur's *A Married Woman* and Bibi-ji, Leela and Nimmo in Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* in the background of communal violence, the relationship between the national and the religious comes into focus, both in India and its diaspora in Canada.

The impact of Hindu nationalism on the religious and national identities of the Indian populace cannot be ignored. In late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, through national propaganda that posited the nation as fundamentally Hindu and as against the Muslim Other, Hindu right-wing parties were able to gain majoritarian status in India.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Indira Gandhi's projection of herself as a "Hindu goddess Durga" and the "saviour of Hindu nation [of India]" in 1984 (P. Singh 562), ended up othering Sikh (and other) minorities within India. Mrs. Gandhi openly stated that "Hindu dharma [faith] was

---

<sup>11</sup> This is only one reason for the success of the Hindu Right. They also helped to consolidate upper-caste Hindu youth votes (through the Mandal Commission), and Hindu votes in general, through the positing of Pakistan (in addition to Indian Muslims) as a threat (for further details, see Chakraborty, Chapter 4).

under attack from the Sikhs” (562) and used this to secure her political image in the eyes of the majority Hindu population in India. Both the Indira Gandhi-led Congress and the BJP governments projected the nation as fundamentally Hindu, and in war with religious minorities within the country. Thus, national politics produced a narrative of religious and national identities that affected not just women, but also men *belonging to* religious minorities. This is evident from Kapur’s and Badami’s portrayal of men of religious minorities in the two novels analyzed here. Kapur’s Indian Muslim Aijaz and Badami’s Indian Sikh Satpal and Pappu become victimized as the Other in the 1992 anti-Muslim and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, respectively, and in both cases, the men lose their lives to communal violence.

Aijaz, through his work with the street theatre group, resists many attempts by others to place him outside the Indian nation. He sees himself both as a Muslim and an Indian. He chooses to tackle politically sensitive issues, such as the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, in both an urban area like Delhi, and politically sensitive areas such as a Hindu majority town called Rajpur (Kapur 139). Through his desire to resist, despite the danger to his life, Aijaz demonstrates his refusal to be othered either through the hate directed by the Hindu population towards Muslim minorities, or through the fear of losing his life as result of hate violence. The complexity of Aijaz’s religious and national identity then gestures towards a new site of enquiry for religious identities of men in India, where a site of resistance can act as a site of agency.

Similarly, in Badami’s text as well, Satpal’s and Pappu’s religious and national identities shift in the background of the Indian state’s unjust treatment of its Sikh

minorities. Satpal insists on Punjab as his “home,” even though he is born and brought up in Delhi (296). Even though Nimmo chooses to stick to Delhi as her “home,” Satpal’s allegiance to Punjab lies in his affiliation to the Sikh majority Punjab and to his extended family who continues to reside in the state of Punjab. At the same time, when Satpal shows excitement at the prospect of war against Pakistanis in 1971 (247), his national identity emerges as an anti-Pakistan, and thereby, an assertively nationalist Indian. This is made explicit through his use of “we,” as in “We will thrash the Pakistanis...” (247). However, in his fear at being thrown into jail by the state if heard speaking against the state during the State of Emergency<sup>12</sup> called by Mrs. Gandhi, he warns Nimmo to keep her opinions about the Indian state to herself (275). His fear is a result of feeling excluded from the national imaginary by the Indian state.

Similarly, Nimmo and Satpal’s son, Pappu, openly defends Indira Gandhi’s murder (352). His reasoning stems not from Nimmo’s allegiance to an Indian national ideal, but from Mrs. Gandhi’s machinations behind the Blue Star Operation that killed thousands of innocent Sikhs, including Pa-ji. Pappu, therefore, justifies the violence committed against Mrs. Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. He reveals his anger at being othered through his vehemence towards the Prime Minister. Both Satpal and Pappu hold Indira Gandhi responsible for treating Indian Sikhs as second-class citizens. And, just like Aijaz, Satpal and Pappu experience othering in a time of communal crisis and are killed

---

<sup>12</sup> A State of Emergency was declared in India by Indira Gandhi’s government between June 25, 1975 and March 21, 1977. This allowed Mrs. Gandhi to assume supreme power, while suspending elections and civil rights of Indian citizens.

by Hindus. This begs the investigation of male religious and national identities in India in the background of communal unrest and communal violence.

The men in the diaspora, however, experience othering due to contradictory reasons. In Badami's text, both Pa-ji and Lalloo assimilate themselves into the Canadian national ideal by adopting a western way of dressing. Pa-ji, for example, chooses to wear a suit and tie when he visits his adopted son's school for a meeting with the principal. Lalloo also changes from being an uneducated Sikh labourer to a man who owns a travel agency in the diaspora. However, in the midst of communal violence in India, Pa-ji experiences othering by his own community because he refuses to subscribe to a militant Sikh ideology. He experiences violence from his own Sikh community in Canada, where he is physically attacked and his café also becomes a target for vandalism. On the other hand, Lalloo lends his support to the militant Khalsas. While both Pa-ji and Lalloo are of Sikh backgrounds, they come to occupy two contradictory positions in the diaspora. Their national identities as Canadians also reflect the complexities of their religious identities. Paji's peaceful Sikh outlook contrasts sharply with Lalloo's aggressive militant outlook as an imaginary Khalistani subject. While Lalloo and other militant diasporic Sikhs seek a new territory, a new homeland of Khalistan, Pa-ji views himself as a Canadian national. Also, while Pa-ji experiences othering from his Sikh diasporic community in Canada, Lalloo's sense of alienation rises out of Sikhs being othered in India. Evidently, both of these male characters illustrate how alternate positions on national and religious identities can be maintained in the diaspora.

Badami's novel complicates the notion of national belonging for women by moving her female protagonists from India to Canada. Leela's and Bibi-ji's narratives show that their national identities are dynamic. As discussed in Chapter 2, we see that in the conversation between Bibi-ji and Mr. Longbottom, for example, Bibi-ji refuses to succumb to Longbottom's insistence on categorizing her and her family as a Sikh Indian living in Canada. Instead, Bibi-ji makes her position clear as a Canadian Sikh living on Vancouver's Main Street. While Longbottom, a White Canadian, others Bibi-ji based on his misconceptions about her religion and her nationality, Bibi-ji insists on her Canadianness. Moreover, Bibi-ji sees her home in Canada through the created community of friends (of different religious backgrounds) and other Sikhs (who act as her extended family), whether in her house, or at her café, The Delhi Junction. For Bibi-ji, her home is with Pa-ji, in Canada. Similarly, Leela transforms Canada to a home she can identify with. Through her friendships with women from other racial and religious backgrounds, like Bibi-ji (a Sikh), Mrs. Wu (a Chinese) and Erin (a white Canadian), Leela aligns herself with a multicultural Canadian national ideal. Instead of feeling a sense of alienation, as suggested by Ahmed of first generation female migrants, Leela eventually makes Canada her home. She also expresses her sense of delight at having transformed Vancouver into a place she can recognize as easily as her birth city, Bangalore, in India. However, Leela's view shifts from being a Canadian to an Indian as she plans her journey to India to visit her family. For both Bibi-ji and Leela, their national identities change in the diaspora, where they see themselves as both Indians and Canadians at the same time. Their dynamic national identities echo Mishra's hyphenated existence in the diaspora (433).



Mishra claims that hyphenated existence in the diaspora signals being simultaneously “here” and “there” (433). However, while Badami’s Leela and Bibi-ji appear to occupy this hyphenated space, they seem to belong more “here” (in Canada) than “there” (imagined India). Through both of these characters, Badami demonstrates that it is possible to be both Sikh or Hindu, and a Canadian.

Similarly, through Astha and Pipee, Kapur highlights the possibility to be a practicing Hindu and at the same time have a secular outlook towards other religions. Here, secular refers to tolerance towards other religions. Therefore, both Astha and Pipee are tolerant towards Muslim minorities, despite being practicing Hindus. Through Sita as well, Kapur shows another possibility of being a practicing Hindu, without indulging in a right-wing Hindu set of mind. At the same time, by drawing parallels between women as othered, and Muslim minorities (like Aijaz) as othered, Kapur suggests that women are able to experience trauma through the trauma caused to religious minorities. Both Astha and Pipee are affected by Aijaz’s death. Both women, due to their proximity to religious minorities, become receptive to the pain of these religious minorities. Just like trauma crosses borders in Badami’s text, Kapur’s text demonstrates how trauma crosses religious borders of Hindu-Muslim.

It is important to note here that the preceding chapters are an investigation of Badami’s and Kapur’s fictional representations. As mentioned in the Introduction, fiction allows a reimagination of women’s conditions, and opens up spaces for debates about such conditions that are otherwise shrouded in silence and fictive narratives. My aim in this thesis has been to explore women’s position in the debate about religious and national

identities. But it is also important to note that theorists like Gopinath and Bhattacharjee have ignored the different walks of life that women come from in India. Here, in regards to new avenues of research, I want to point to “class” as a possible avenue. For example, Bibi-ji and Nimmo come from two different class backgrounds and deal with trauma in two different ways. While Nimmo turns to suicide and then fictional narratives about her dead family, Bibi-ji chooses to turn to a militant rhetoric of Sikhism. Bibi-ji uses her financial power to invest into Dr. Randhawa’s rhetoric, even though she had distanced herself from him when Pa-ji was alive. This gestures towards how women from different classes can choose to deal with trauma differently. There is then a need to explore the dynamics of class in the debate about religious and national identities of women during moments of communal crisis.

In the two novels I examined, communal violence subsumes nationality, religion, class, caste, gender and space (homeland versus diaspora). In the face of communal violence, we see how national and religious identities of fictional male and female characters are affected. The difference, however, the novels suggest, lies in the ways in which they deal with the trauma of communal violence. Then, it is important to note here that through both ethnographic research and the study of fictional representations, it is possible to open up debates about the coexistence of religious minorities within the national imaginary of both India and its diaspora. However, while fictional narratives may be considered limiting in their authenticity, they can allow a circumventing of the ethical question of inflicting further trauma upon victims through a researcher’s desire for that same authenticity.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Sara. "Melancholic Migrants." *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 121-160. Print.
- Axel, Brian Keith. "The Diasporic Imaginary." *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): 411-428. Print.
- Badami, Anita Rau. *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. Print.
- Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press and Women's Press, 2000. Print.
- Basu, Amrita. "Hindu Women's Activism in India and the Questions it Raises." *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. Eds. Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu. New York: Routledge, 1998. 167-84. Print.
- Bhattacharjee, Anannya. "The Habit of Ex-Nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Immigrant Bourgeoisie." *Public Culture* 5.1 (1992): 19-45. Print.
- Brazier, Jana Evans, and Anita Mannur, eds. *Theorizing Diaspora*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. Print.
- Bryjak, George J. "The Economics of Assassination: The Punjab Crisis and the Death of Indira Gandhi." *Asian Affairs* 12.1 (1985): 25-39. Print.
- Chakraborty, Chandrima. *Masculinity, Asceticism, Hinduism: Past and Present Imaginings of India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011. Print.
- Crossette, Barbara. "India's Sikhs: Waiting for Justice." *World Policy Journal* 21.2 (2004): 70-77. Print.

- Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: UCL Press, 1997. Print.
- Das, Veena. “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain.” *Daedalus* 125.1 (1996): 67-91. Print.
- Davis, Richard H. “The Iconography of Rama’s Chariot.” Ludden 27-54. Print.
- D’Cruz, Premilla, and Bharat, Shalini. “Beyond Joint and Nuclear: The Indian Family Revisited.” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 32.2 (2001): 167-194. Print.
- Freitag, Sandria B. “Contesting in Public: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Communalism.” Ludden 221-231. Print.
- Fox, Richard G. “Communalism and Modernity.” Ludden 235-249. Print.
- Gopinath, Gayatri. “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion.” *Brazier and Mannur* 261-279. Print.
- Grewal, Mandeep. “Mass Media and the Reconfiguration of Gender Identities: The *Bharatiya Nari* in the United States.” *Gender, Technology and Development* 7.1 (2003): 53-73. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Brazier and Mannur* 233-246. Print.
- Hasan, Zoya. “Communal Mobilization and Changing Majority in Uttar Pradesh.” Ludden 81-97. Print.
- Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: IndiaInk, 2002. Print.
- Ludden, David. “Introduction.” Ludden 1-23. Print.
- Ludden, David, ed. *Making India Hindu*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Menon, Ritu, ed. *No Woman’s Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh write*

- on the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004. Print.
- Mishra, Vijay. “The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora.” *Textual Practice* 10.3 (1996): 421-447. Print.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. “Community and Violence: Recalling Partition.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 32.32 (1997): 2037-2045. Print.
- Ramanujam, Bindignavle. “The Process of Acculturation Among Asian-Indian Immigrants.” *Immigrant Experiences: Personal Narrative and Psychological Analysis*. Eds. Paul Elovitz and Charlotte Kahn. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1997. 139-47. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994. Print.
- Sanyal, Usha. *In the Path of the Prophet: Maulana Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama’at Movement in British India, c. 1870 – 1921*. Diss. Columbia University, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. Print.
- Sarkar, Sumit. “Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva.” *Ludden* 270-293. Print.
- Sarkar, Tanika, and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* London: Zed, 1995. Print.
- Schlesinger, Ben. “The Changing Patterns in the Hindu Joint Family System of India.” *Marriage and Family Living* 23.2 (1961): 170-175. Print.
- Schermerhorn, R.A. *Ethnic Plurality in India*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1978. Print.
- Singh, Narinder. *Canadian Sikhs*. Napean: Canadian Sikhs’ Studies Institute, 1994. Print.

Singh, Pritam. “The Political Economy of the Cycles of Violence and Non-Violence in the Sikh Struggle for Identity and Political Power.” *Third World Quarterly* 28.3 (2007): 555-570. Print.

Van der Veer, Peter. “Writing Violence.” *Ludden* 250-269. Print.

Vertovec, Steven. “Religion and Diaspora.” Conference. *New Landscapes of Religion in the West*. Oxford: New Landscapes, 2002. 1-45. Web. 5 July 2011.