



TEARS OF CONTRITION: GUILT AND REMORSE IN ANITA RAU BADAMI’S CAN WE HEAR THE NIGHTBIRD CALL?

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Abstract

Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? by Anita Rau Badami, Indo-Canadian author, is an intriguing narrative with complex layers of guilt and betrayal within the family and society against historical and political backgrounds. The novel intersects with the characters in unexpected circumstances, which expresses their emotional interconnectivity. This abstract examines the multifaceted conditions of guilt and remorse that haunt them in their lives. The characters in Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? struggle with guilt that comes from many situations, such as betraying loved ones, seeing horrific events during the partition, forgetting traditional practices, and finding out identity in a diasporic environment. By resulting from the lives of people like Bibi- ji, Nimmo, Leela and Pa-ji this study seeks to clarify the relationship between trauma, guilt, and memory, illuminating the long-lasting effects of past events on personal psychology.

Keywords: Guilt, Trauma, Remorse, Memory and Identity Introduction

Anita Rau Badami’s Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? is an agonising novel that explores the intricate relationship between pain and guilt that is felt by its broad range of characters, especially women. Badami creates a story that examines the long-lasting effects of violence and displacement on individual lives against the backdrop of historical events like the Partition of India, the Air India bombing and communal violence.

The title Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? is important because it alludes to the novel's violent themes prevailing in the novel. Characters such as wounded Nimmo,



recount the ghost story about a four-winged night bird whose song drove people insane until they finally passed away. This image of the singing nightbird is used by Badami in her novel to bring together several representations of ruthlessness. In the phantom myth, the singing night bird is the messenger of death, bringing violence into people's lives. Furthermore, the image of the enormous fledgling serves as a warning to the reader about the violence that will emerge in the lives of the protagonists and runs firmly around the narratives that are told through the novel. Reading the novel reveals the various instances of trauma, and helplessness, cultural and religious conflicts that the music of the night bird alludes to in Badami's tale.

The story explores the stories of three major women characters, they are Sharanjeet Kaur, also known as Bibji in Vancouver and Leela Bhat, Bibji's neighbour from Bangalore and Nimmo, the niece of Bibji, who has confronted childhood trauma in their past and tries to rebuild their future lives. The emotional traumas and the challenges they faced there resulted in deep guilt and remorse, which they experienced in their lives and they also wanted to repent to appease their inner self. The character of Bibji dreamt about migrating to Canada and settling in a sophisticated foreign land which has nostalgic memories shared by her father. She always wanted a foreign land for herself. She considers Canada as her fate and plans to deceive her sister and get her sister Kanwar's fate for herself. She has never realised that her desire for a foreign land is not her desire but her father's intention. Finally, she got married to Khushwant Singh, widely known as Pa-ji. Even, after settling in Canada, Bibji maintains contact with her sister Kanwar using letters. On the contrary, Kanwar suffered in the rural village with her family and her fate completely changed after marriage and falls victim to the communal conflicts in the country. The novel has a central character known as Nimmo, who faces traumatic incidents since her childhood, which include her mother's death and being forced to migrate to Canada, where she reconciles with Bibji, her aunt and again she starts experiencing traumas with her memories and also feels alienation in the foreign land and she was separated by her elder son Jasbeer. The religious dilemma, which prevails in the mind of Nimmo also explores the themes of guilt and remorse. Thus, as the title suggests the nightbird calls remain through the shadows, which serve



as an emotional symbol of the protagonist's unresolved guilt. The prevalence of false identities, where characters struggle to reconcile their true selves with the personas they present to the world, is central to the story. The characters capture the complexities of identity in the face of trauma, whether it's adopting false identities to survive, hiding upsetting truths, or fitting in with social norms.

Review of Literature

According to Ghouse (2021), the experiences of two immigrant generations. There is a conflict of loyalty between the adopted and native cultures when the first generation relocates to a Foreign country in search of better opportunities but retains a strong connection to their home country. Since they have fully settled into their birthplace's culture and do not feel the same emotional connection to it as their parents in the first generation, the second generation—born in the new nation—does not experience this conflict.

Aslam & Khan (2020) highlight that the fictional story explores more than just the violence against women; it also explores its aftermath and the struggle for survival and rebuilding of the broken self. The violence used during the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots is also touched on in the novel. According to this paper, women tend to suffer the most during unstable social conditions, but they are also capable of handling difficult situations and fighting for their lives. Anita Rau Badami is a post-Partition generation member and has an intense connection to women who remember the partition from their childhood is also demonstrated in this article.

Sonthalia, S., & Karuna, B.(2021) highlight the involvement of Sikh immigrants who have made Canada their home. The distress endured by Sikhs, and their detachment from their native country and family. Their separation from their native land and family, the eternal resonance of longing to see their relatives, nostalgia, and the pain of separating will never go away. This paper shows the thoughts of Badami on the faults of Indian politicians and society, and thousands of innocent lives were lost as a result of their actions. Her primary goal in writing the book is to promote

Shilpa Dalhota Bhat(2018), discusses how Sikh consciousness has been impacted by the perceived connection between the Sikh religion and extremism, as well as the

false association of Sikhism with Islam. These factors have historically presented challenges for Sik.

This study by Jennifer Randall (2014) highlights that Badami's writing displays a mastery of ambivalence; owing to a performance of uncanny in-betweenness that is reminiscent of Bhabha's "politics of polarity," the narrative goes from comedy into mongrel degeneration

Thus, the literature review offers several points of view on how Anita Rau Badami's *Can We Hear the Nightbird Call?* These analyses agree on several themes, including the experiences of immigrants, the fallout from violence against women, Sikh consciousness, and the subtleties of Badami's storytelling.

The guilt and trauma in the life of Bib-ji

Bib-ji's life has faced numerous events over the period. Her father ingrained her thoughts about Canada and she doesn't realise that her want is a desire that her father has transferred to herself rather than being her own. She deceives her sister Kanwar and steals the fate of Kanwar, because, she thinks, she is more deserving than her sister and tries to stoop to any situation to get her desire for a foreign land. She kept in touch with her sister Kanwar through letters and remembers guiltily her enviousness towards her sister's blessed family with children before the political conflicts. Once, political conflicts started spreading, so many innocent people lost their lives and women were objectified and killed. Bibji 's Sister Kanwar's life ends during the partition of India. Eventually, Bibji loses her contact and once she gets the information about the awful death of Kanwar. Bibji regretted her past deeds against her sister and realised that she was barren without any child as a punishment because of her cruel nature towards Kanwar. She searches for her history constantly, changing the pieces to fit her present situation. Her attempts eventually pay off when she locates Kanwar's daughter, Nimmo. By supporting Nimmo and her family she started adopting Jasbeer, son of her niece Nimmo. She is successful in getting permission to parent the older son Jasbeer of Nimmo after much convincing. She made a mistake twice when it came to her sister's family. Out of a desire to turn from her sin, she takes Jasbeer away from his mother.



Her past terrible deeds would haunt and guilt prevails throughout her life, she has desired to repent. She loses her mother and sister the same cross-border movement that causes Nimmo to lose her. The distress that Bibi-ji experiences originates from her feelings of helplessness and remorse about being unable to protect her family from the Partition's instability.

She aspires to be her husband's ideal wife and also wants to fit in as a modern woman in Canada. There is a guilt in the mind of Bibji, where she wants to balance her life between traditional identity with modern and past with present. Also, it shows the malleability of Bibji's sikh identity, where she shifts her religious identity based on the situation around her.

Pa-ji's Guilt in his Fake identity

Pa-ji character explores the deep identity crises and he wants to fit in his community. He gives false information to Jasbeer, his adopted son regarding his family history, which serves as the origin of his guilt. Pa-ji has taken a photograph of a Khalsa Sikh from a roadside vendor, whom he claims to be his father Pa-ji exposes the deception and deceit of his own Sikh identity by adopting a Sikh identity that is not his own and also, he claims to be a proud Sikh concerning his history and heritage. Pa-ji feels like an outsider in a strange place and has insecurities about his own identity.

The Feeling of In-betweenness for Leela

The feeling of in-between and otherness would haunt Leela throughout her lifetime. She was born out of interracial marriage, where her father was a high-caste Hindu Brahmin and her mother was a casteless German. Leela was rejected in both worlds, which resulted in psychological trauma and suffering based on the ambiguousness of her identity. Leela, finally married someone from a high-class Brahmin so that she could stick to one identity for her own and could overcome inbetweeners. However, she is about to encounter another kind of in-betweenness in life. Leela longs for a homeland, throughout the novel and eventually falls victim to communal violence.

Religious Guilt of Nimmo



Nimmo understands that her identity has resulted from her wish to bury her past to live in the present, although she doesn't express her concerns to her partner about being Sikh. Because she can't remember her early years, Nimmo feels as though she has been metaphorically uprooted from her native country. To forge her own identity, she simultaneously decides to conceal this allegory of exile beneath a false identity. She also battles the guilt of adopting a religious identity that she might not truly identify her. Nimmo also shows acceptance of other religious perspectives. Even though Nimmo became a Sikh, she still has a Tulasi plant before her house because, according to her Hinduism, it brings prosperity and peace to the home. Never one to disregard the beliefs of others, she followed her neighbour's advice and planted the bush in the year of the delivery of her second child.

Nimmo, who considers herself to be Sikh, is tolerant of other religions and even places faith in them. Nimmo shares her internal conflict over her uncertainties about her religious identity by making the deliberate decision to be open-minded. Based on the postcard that was found on her, she openly declares herself to be a Sikh, but her religious practices allude to the religious ambiguity. Nimmo feels guilty because of this religious ambiguity when she interacts with Bibi-ji. She is content to live a Sikh life with Satpal and her kids, but she also feels guilty about this because she wonders if she is taking advantage of Bibi-ji's assurance about Nimmo's past. She is then compelled to think back on her traumatic past by this guilt.

Conclusion

In the novel *Can We Hear the Nightbird Call?* by Anita Rau Badami the themes of guilt and remorse prevail throughout the narrative. The story uncovers the characters' actions in the past, which resulted in unforgivable guilt in their mind, which creates a traumatic past with unforgettable memories in the minds of characters. The novel depicts self-realisation, which focuses on the past mistakes and awful deeds committed by one character. The significance of forgiveness and redemption is emphasised in this paper. The characters accept responsibility for their acts and work to compensate for their actions as they face their regret and guilt. By doing this, they experience inner peace and reconciliation in addition to receiving forgiveness from

others. The traumatic past can help them to transform, which forces people to confront the challenges and leads to progress in their lives. The novel emphasises the long-lasting effects of trauma on women's lives as well as the different ways in which they negotiate their identities in reaction to social pressures. Certain characters, like Bibi-ji, find comfort in customs and religion, while other characters, like Leela and Nimmo, struggle to cope with their inner traumas while trying to fit in with society's expectations. Thus, the paper highlights the internal conflicts of the characters, which eventually lead to guilt and remorse in their mind.

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