

**POST-EMERGENCY INDIA AND SIKH MINORITY DISCOURSE  
IN ANITA RAU BADAMI'S  
*CAN YOU HEAR THE NIGHT BIRD CALL?***

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**Abstract**

Emergency was a turbulent time in the post-independent history of India. It jeopardized the values of democracy and threw the minorities on the periphery of human existence. Anita Rau Badami portrayed the issues of minority discourse and subsequent identity crisis in her novel *Can You Hear the Night Bird Call?*

The novel is a testimony of horrendous effects of Indira Gandhi's assassination on Sikh community in 1984. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards Satwant Singh and Beant Singh. They killed her to avenge the attack on Golden Temple i.e. Operation Blue Star. The separatist tendencies and demands of separate Sikh state Khalistan and political influence of militant religious leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale wrecked the contemporary political scenario.

The present paper is an attempt to trace the aggravated political and religious conditions during 1980s and Sikh minority discourse and identity crisis in Anita Rau Badami's novel *Can You Hear the Night Bird Call?*

**Keywords:** Emergency, Operation Blue Star, Golden Temple, Sikh, Minority, Identity Crisis, Can You Hear the Night Bird Call?, Anita Rau Badami

India is a secular country asserting the equality, equity, brotherhood and multiplicity of its people, religions and languages. Looking back into the post-independence history of India, it can be seen that the national integrity and secularism were put to test and violated in the name of language, religion, region, caste or culture. In such times of crisis, the eruption of fanatic identities are seen and due to identity clash, violence was used to vanquish or avenge the other.

Many novelist in post-independent India have talked about this, ghosts from the past have havocked the burden on present. It has crushed the human status of people. Writers like Rohinton

Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh through their novels initiated the discourse on minority and identity crisis.

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Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Night Bird Call?* describes the historical times in the lives of Sharanjeet Kaur (Bibi-ji), Leela Bhat and Nirmaljeet Kaur (Nimmo). It deals with the separate lives and interweaves the common fabric of their life into a narrative that focuses on various perspectives in national, communal and personal lives of these female protagonists.

Part One deals with narrative Bibi-ji, Part Two with Leela Bhat, Part Three focuses on Nimmo's life, Part Four highlights the events 'Here and There' and Part Five deals with 'Endings'. The first three parts discuss the personal story of protagonist and these three different narratives are interwoven in one in last two parts. Each part focuses on the personal as well as national and public life in a particular point of time in history.

Novel brings out the growing communal enmity between Hindus as majority and Sikhs as minority. The religious identity is subtle in the narrative structure of the novel. Sikh identity is shown undergoing various phases from pride to humiliation, from assertion to denial. Sikh heritage, its history, life and belief are celebrated through the Sikh characters who are Indian first but the increasing demands and separatist tendencies have led to change in the role, Sikh first and Indian then. Aggravated feelings being treated as second-rate citizens at the hands of Hindus especially central government, has significant point of discussion in the later part of the narrative structure in the novel.

Dr. Randhawa is Khalistan-Pro activist raising funds from Sikh community across the world. His visit to Canada brings him in Pa-ji's contact. Pa-ji went to receive Dr. Randhawa from airport. He comes to know that "his guest had arrived on wings of anger and discontent" [251]. Dr Randhawa works for spreading awareness amongst Sikhs from all over the world for a separate nation for Sikh i.e. Khalistan. Jasbeer fell victim to his rhetoric and disappeared somewhere in Punjab to work for it. Pa-ji considers himself a historian and takes pride in the history of his Sikh religion and community. He instils this pride in Jasbeer too which later on proves fatal. Pa-ji was killed at Golden Temple when army breaks in to capture Bhindranwale who was hiding inside the temple.

In the beginning, Bibi-ji did not like this hatred and separatist activities. She convinces her disagreement: "Why should we concern ourselves with such matters? We are Canadians now?"

Also I don't like the idea of more partitions and separations, more fiddling with borders.”[257] It clarifies her experience of nationhood, and alienating it from religious contours.

Randhawa shows Pa-ji *The New York Times* and advertisement, “he had taken out calling for “Free Countries” everywhere to support “Independence” for the Sikhs.”[257] For Pa-ji “ an independent Punjab was a ridiculous idea.”[279]

However, many Sikhs demanded a separate homeland for them. Jasbeer wants to join “Damdami Taksal in Bhinder... a religious school”[280] under the influence of Dr. Randhawa. who wears “black turban”[279].

In Canada, many Punjabi immigrants had grievances against the Indian government. They believed that the Indian government did not act fairly in distributing land and river water properly among Punjab and its neighbouring states. This led to the violent reaction by the Sikhs. The situation seemed similar to the conditions during the partition of India. The demand of Sikhs turned into a movement. Pa-ji abhors the idea of a separate homeland: “...But this, this desire to create a separate country within India for the Sikhs, seemed to Pa-ji faintly absurd”.[281] Funds were raised for independent Sikh nation. Pa-ji denied to donate anything for this cause. Pa-ji said, “What I am not wishing to do is to interfere in the business of another country. I am a Canadian, why I should pay for more partition of India?”[282]. Pa-aji makes clear his priorities thus: “As a Sikh I am interested in putting money into building things – like schools, and hospitals – not for breaking up countries”[283]. As a consequence of his stand, Pa-ji suffered alienation from the community. Delhi Junction was attacked and he was severely injured . Pa-ji wrote an article in Punjabi newspaper, “urging moderation and asking his fellow Sikhs not to bow to the wave of fundamentalism”[283].

Dr. Randhwa instigated his Canadian Sikh brethren by showing their religious historical artefacts like “flag, coin and map, and a few archival photos of Maharaja Ranjit Singh”[290] and urged them to demand separate state for Sikhs. Randhawa exploited the excesses committed on Sikhs during emergency. His prejudiced view becomes apparent as he says: “There are some witnesses here, who come straight from the torture chamber of the Hindu Raj”[290]

A young Sikh narrated his story of torture and killings of his family members which evoked emotional hatred for Hindu Raj in India. Religious identity like hair knot, kirpan became the easy target for killings. Pa-ji too was disturbed. He pondered:

”Was this Dr. Randhawa right after all? Was the situation for Sikhs in India so wretched? Could yet another division of the country heal the wounds that had been caused by the first one? Pa-ji realized it was difficult, from this distance, to have a proper perspective. But he held onto the flickering idea that somewhere, between the boy's raw story and Dr. Randhawa's posturing, lay the truth”.[292]

On the other hand, in India, Satpal was worried about Jasbeer's decision to join religious school in Bhinder. He was “God-fearing but not fanatical”[295]. He wanted his son to be away from Punjab. Nimmo did not like to discuss the worst conditions of Punjab when Satpal informed, “No news, except for more deaths in Punjab. More violence, encounters with police, encounter with militants, more widows and orphans on all sides” [296]

Trenched into her past, Nimmo distanced herself from the events. She tried to erase her roots from her life: “You sound like your nephew Sunny talking about killing and war and trouble in Punjab. We live in Delhi, It is not our problem.”[296] But Satpal was worried about his people

and co-religionists: “How can you say that, Nimmo? We are Sikhs, our relative live in Punjab, it matters to me what happens there. You lost your family and your property because of what happened in Punjab. Now my family is also getting affected.”[296]. The difference in perception of the concept of religious identity and regional identity can be seen the views of Nimmo and Satpal. Nimmo, who suffered at the hands of Muslims during partition for being Sikh and being a girl, was afraid that he might drag young Pappu into this mess. He might fill “his head with ideas of fighting to create an independent country called Khalistan”[298]. It can be witnessed that identity can’t be wiped out completely.

Pa-ji and Bibi-ji came to Amritsar to offer Seva at Golden temple. Manpreet and Balraj, Satpal’s sister and brother in-law insisted them to stay with them but Pa-ji and Bibi-ji decided to live in Golden Temple. Manpreet was worried about their safety. Bibi-ji said, “How can your home be safer than a place of God, sister?”[315] Balraj cautiously warned, “In this country, a breeze can change into a storm before you end a sneeze!”[315] The staunch belief of Bibi-ji and practical experience of Balraj are contrasted. The belief is victimized at the hands of experience. Bibi-ji had her own perceptions. She remarked:

“There was always something going on in this city, in this contradictory country – [...] Religion and politics were always causing some conflagration or other”[315]. Bibi-ji remembered the English lessons taught by Mrs. Hardy : “It is symbolic of your faith [Golden Temple] , in which everyone is equal. Caste or class does not matter. Every caste is required to go down a step in order to enter the house of God. I [Mrs. Hardy] think that is beautiful lesson in humility.”[318]

The emergence of extremism and fundamentalism is rampant in the novel. Some school teachers named Rani, Kashmir discussed extremism emerging in India and Punjab especially. Kashmir blamed Indira Gandhi for causing this trouble as she thinks “*She* is the one who has no respect for our faith. *She* is the one who has sent the army into this sacred place”[326]. Rani blamed extremists “hiding here [The Golden Temple] all these months with their weapons”[326]. She blamed them equally as Kashmir blamed government. But Bibi-ji called these extremists as “freedom fighters... Fighting for us. It is the *government* that is against us”[326]. Bibiji was unable to accept to loss of Pa-ji. It has turned her into staunch Sikh in this context.

Rani held Bibi-ji and other immigrants from Canada responsible for trouble in India. She believes that these immigrants provide funds to extremists for carrying their insurgent activities. She exclaims:

“How could you *not* know? It is people like you sitting in foreign countries, far away from everything, nice and safe, who *create* trouble. *You* are the ones who give money to these terrorists, and we are the ones who suffer!”[326].

Golden Temple became the hideout of Bhindranwale. He started to pressurize government from there. To make him bend on his knees, government cut off electricity, water supply and food supply gradually. It was expected to make Bhindranwale and other extremists to surrender. So, to resolve the problem, government ordered military to attack on Bhindranwale. This compelled army to enter into the Golden Temple with arms. A young Sikh informs Pa-ji about the trouble in the Golden Temple and its probable consequences. He talks about the rudeness and cruelty of Indian soldiers who defiled the sacred place. He was sorry to see his fellow religionists among them: “And it is not just soldiers who desecrate with guns and bombs. Over our heads, on the

roofs and under our feet in the storage rooms, our own brothers and sons and fathers, armed too, stamp as hard as demons”[328].

Army started shooting guns inside the temple without distinguishing terrorists and innocent people. Pa-ji was killed in the firing. Bibi-ji turned bitter against Indian government. The author described the situation poignantly as:

“A knife in the heart. A dagger in the back. An insult. An outrage. Shock, then anger, spread across the world like acid, burning into the soul of every Sikh, turning even moderate, temple once-in-a-while worshippers into true believers. Their most holy place had been desecrated by the Indian government. Tanks had rolled across delicate marble floors, crushing ancient inlay. The library had been consumed by flames; centuries-old sacred manuscripts had been destroyed. Pilgrims had been killed. Nobody was sure how many- some claimed that it was two thousand people and other insisted that it was much higher. Humiliation, indignity, death”[335].

Bibi-ji went through the traumatic experience. Her inability to survive the incident, made her take refuge in her religious identity as a Sikh. Bibi-ji cut off contact with her non-Sikh friends, “... in this time of mourning she preferred her own people: she found comfort in hearing the sound of her mother tongue all around her.”[337] It suggests the acceptance of religious and linguistic identity as a Punjabi.

The discussion on separation are triggered everywhere. Lalloo too openly expressed his ideas of separation, “They have no respect for us Sikhs... That’s why they could go in like that and trample on our beliefs. I am beginning to like the idea of a divorce from India”[337]. Another young Sikh from India affirmed his belief, “Yes, Khalistan is what we need! ... They forget we are Sikhs, the lions who protected them from the Mussulman invaders, and now they treat us like this?”[337]. Another young Sikh blurted, “Blood for blood! ... For every dead Sikh, a hundred Hindus.”[337] Remembering the great past in times of crisis gives courage to survive in hostile environment whereas it also enrages the community to seek revenge for the injustice.

The Sikhs in Canada decided to hold protest on 15<sup>th</sup> August against Indian government’s insensitive attitude towards their minority community. The diasporic community that used to celebrate Independence Day then turned into the protest day for Sikhs. Even Bibi-ji decided to join the procession to show her grief at the loss of Pa-ji. Anger and protest was expressed in slogans like, “Indira Gandhi, down, down!”, “Khalistan forever!” “Blood in return for blood!”[338]. The novelist maps the change in Bibi-ji’s outlook and behaviour as, “[s]he was as hard-eyed in her rage against the Indian government and Hindus as the young men who surrounded her had been. That night, for the first time since Pa-ji’s death, she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.”[338] This assertion of her Sikh identity and protest to underscore it. It is an expression against the atrocities which gave her psychological balance. When people are losing the mental and emotional balance, some maintained their equilibrium irrespective of being Sikh. They have an objective point of view on Golden Temple attack:

“All I am saying is that there were militants and snipers from our own community hiding in every corner of the temple complex as well. They too had stockpiled arms, they too committed sacrilege by turning our temple into a war zone. How do we know it was not their bullet that killed our Pa-ji”[339].

Harish Shah too questions about Bhindranwale armed with guns and bombs inside the Golden Temple whereas he disapproves the stance taken by Indian government as:

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

“What was Bhindranwale doing inside the Golden Temple? A preacher with guns and bombs? ... but it was wrong of Indira Gandhi to send in the troops to stop it? What else could she have done?”[339].

Mr. Majumadar blames both Bhindranwale and Mrs. Gandhi for creating anxiety and wave of anger amongst other young Sikhs. A young Sikh glared at Mr. Balu and others, “Bastard Hindus, you will pay for this.”[346] The prevailing situation drifted the Hindus and Sikhs into polarities. Operation Blue star has affected the communal harmony between Hindus and Sikhs in Canada. The situation in Punjab and India was worse as religious identities and minority status is clearly marked. The combing operations in Punjab grew worse as the author points out:

“Anyone with a beard and a turban is suspect. They army and the police are dragging people out of their houses in the middle of the night and taking them away. ...To tortured... People disappear without trace.”[341]

In Canada, Indian community has been divided into two. Delhi junction, an emblem of homeland became the specific Sikh community symbol. Regular visitors like Shah decided not to visit Delhi Junction any more for this religious animosity and hatred: “I [Mr. Shah] don’t trust her waiters – or Lalloo, for that matter. Did you see the look in his eyes when he brought us the bill? Those bastards are so angry with us, I wouldn’t be surprised if they spit in our food before serving it.”[341] The suspicion and doubts have shrouded over the trust and belief in each other. The communal divide which was a consequence of Operation Blue Star is aptly described by the novelist:

“*Us and Them*, Balu thought uneasily. When did we split into these groups? The Singhs were family. How could Shah, who had known them even longer than he had, abandon the friendship so abruptly and without a second thought?”[341-342].

Dr. Randhawa visited Sikh community in Vancouver again. He was welcomed, provided shelter and his activities were approved by Bibi-ji too:

“This time Bibi-ji prepared a lavish welcome for him, cooking a variety of dishes with her own hands and insisting that his acolytes stay in the house with him as long as they wished. She suppressed her dislike of his pomposity, his arrogance. 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.”[343]

The support given by Bibi-ji underscores her failure in belief of secular ethos of India. Being in Canada and loss of husband in religious-political crisis compelled her to exert her religious identity and politicize the scenario to quench the thirst of revenge in the name of religion. Taj Mahal became the centre stage of Sikh community, “Talk of revenge and Khalistan whipped around like a bitter wind fuelled by the arrival of yet more people from Punjab. Their stories were of more brutality, murders, disappearances, torture, humiliation.”[343]

The prevailing circumstances were anxious that Jasbeer too was frightened to be a Sikh with beard and turban in India. The Sikh identity and its outward marks were given second thought as: “... how dangerous it was to be a turbaned Sikh man in Punjab, how you could be picked up by the police or the army, thrown into jail or shot dead in fake “encounter.””[343]

Nimmo too was caught in the web of suspicion regarding her Sikh identity. She found herself in the abyss of darkness amid hostilities on Sikhs. Nimmo’s letter was suggestive of her contempt

for Indian Government. She felt that Indira Gandhi was responsible for defiling their sacred place:

Bibi-ji, I went with Satpal to do seva at the Golden Temple, to join with thousands of other Sikhs who come daily to build our sacred place. I saw for the first time the bullet holes in the walls of the shrine and I cried with hurt and with fear. And anger- with the government for sending tanks into our temple. Are we the enemy, or are we citizens of this country?

I am not the only one who feels this way. Indira-ji may have withdrawn the army from the Golden Temple, but she has left a sea of anger behind. I hope we don't all drown in it. [344]

As an eruption of suppressed anger against Indira Gandhi, she was assassinated by her two Sikh guards on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1984 at 9:15 am. The news spread like fire throughout the country as the novelist expresses: "Indira Gandhi had been shot. By her own guards both of whom were Sikhs." [346]. Here the identity of guards is underscored. This connotes the impending danger and atrocities that would prevail upon the community of guards. It created panic situation for Sikhs as being Sikh was a crime as well as found to be Sikh in public sphere was a punishable crime. Nimmo was worried about the safety of Satpal, Pappu and Kamal. The ghost of partition memories haunts her. The priest of the Golden Temple expressed apprehensions about the impending danger:

"I think everybody should go home and stay there", the head priest said anxiously. He pointed to his turban. "It is not difficult to spot one of us, and anyone looking for a fight would have an easy target. If the prime minister really is dead and if the killers were Sikhs, I am afraid there may be trouble." [347]

Nimmo was worried about her children and husband. Asha, her neighbour informed her about the phone call of Satpal. Nimmo saw degrading change and hatred for her in Asha's eyes, "Asha waited in her front room, clearly irritated and continued to stand there, arms akimbo, while Nimmo talked." [347] Nimmo began to consider herself a culprit as she "...ploughed on awkwardly, feeling ridiculously guilty, as if she were implicated in the murder merely being a Sikh." [248] This guilt was outcome of her religious identity as a Sikh which was under scrutiny under the majoritarian community to which Indira Gandhi belonged. Asha abused Sikhs who murdered prime minister, "Crazy people with God only knows what wickedness in their hearts." [348] It suggests the split among neighbours. Asha raised doubt that Satpal too must be involved in this murder, "...your husband did not like her, did he? I know. And you were also angry when she sent the army into your temple! So why are you pretending to feel sad?" [348]. In such conflicting situations, identity becomes method to justify the debate and legalize the atrocities.

Nimmo rehearsed the acts her mother asked to perform during partition. Though, Nimmo was saved at the hands of Muslims then, her mother was brutally violated and killed. She exchanged the roles. In this crisis, she was mother who wanted to save her daughter at any cost. Nimmo's psyche and body react to such situations as she has already undergone the pain and anxiety of being in jeopardy during the partition. She remembers the caution received from her mother during partition riots. She felt threatened by the furious looks of her neighbours. Their "stares" [349] made her alien in her own locality. She was fighting inner dilemma. Those who killed prime minister were "strangers to her" [349]. But just they happened to be Sikhs, her

neighbours whom she knew all her life, shared joys and sorrows became “strangers” [349] to her and she became “stranger”[349] to them. Nimmo hurriedly rushed back to home as , “the black dog of fear that had stayed low for so long rearing up again, full grown and monstrous.”[349] The echoes from the past disturbed the present.

Nimmo became extremely cautious. Kamal was unable to understand her anxiety in the same way as she failed to understand the severity of situation when her mother asked her to be in the bharoli. Kamal was casual and questioned, “What can happen?”[350]. Nimmo perceived violence against her community. She “could sense it lurking out there in the silent street, in the narrow gullies, in her neighbour’s yard.”[354] Kaushalya informed her that Hindus in their locality listed the names of Sikhs from ration shop and found their address. Nimmo made the necessary arrangements to secure herself from the mob frenzy.

Kamal got frightened as Nimmo was “locking everything”[356]. The novelist has shown the contradictions between innocence in Kamal’s expression “Nothing will happen!” [356] and Nimmo’s extra cautious nature. Nimmo blamed herself for letting Pappu go out of the house. She consistently thought of Satpal and Pappu’s safety and fortified her house to keep Kamal safe from trouble mongers. She felt the “waiting stillness on the busy street.”[356] In the evening her fears came to realize, “*They were here.*”[357]

Kamal found herself in life-risking condition. So, “[She] entered the cold metal cupboard reluctantly and sat down. Despite its size it was a tight space, and she had to make herself thin in order to fit in.”[357] Rioters broke in her house. They searched for Satpal and Pappu. They were the neighbours from her locality; ration shopkeeper, Asha’s husband and Doctor Jaikishen. She pleaded to Asha’s husband: “Brother, why are you doing this to us? We have been neighbours for so many years, tell these people we have nothing to hide, tell them. Please”[359]. Nimmo asked for help to Kaushalya. Kaushalya too went to call Police.

Looking at the heap of scattered clothes, the mob thought that Satpal or Pappu might be hidden inside the cupboard. One of them took kerosene can and poured it onto the cupboard and lit the “bonfire” [361] that consisted of everything that can be burnt. Nimmo screamed and ran to save her daughter who was trapped inside. She wailed:

*“My Kamal is inside! ... Inside the steel cupboard, the safest place-she is there, my little daughter, wailed Nimmo “No body can touch her there.”[362]*

The extreme cautions of safety and following the patterns from history has caused panic and death of Kamal. On the other hand, Mohanlal gave refuge to Pappu in his home to hide from Hindu fanatics:

“You are too conspicuous with that turban and beard, especially today, son, especially today. I live a few minutes away, and you will be safe in a Hindu home- they won’t look for you there.”[363]

Mohanlal’s wife Shanti treated him like her own son. After sometime they heard knocks on the door. Hindu neighbours were searching for Pappu yelling , “Where is the Sardar?”[365]. Pappu hid himself in the bathroom. He even thought of relinquishing the commandments of his religion. The novelist succinctly described his predicament thus:

Looking around in a panic, Pappu spotted Mohan Lal’s old-fashioned razor on the sink and grabbed it. He removed his turban and unbound his hair. Gripping the razor, he started sawing clumps of hair, cursing at its thickness.[365] .... What was he to do with so much hair? And so little time? *God, he prayed, send me a miracle. I will do any seva*

*for you, i will wash the floors of every temple in this country for a year, for two years. I will dedicate my life to the poor, oh God send me a miracle.* He attacked his face, scraping away at his beard and moustache, cutting himself all over in his haste. Blood flowered against his skin and flowed down his neck. ...He grabbed a bunch of his beard and pulled it hard, trying to wrench it out by the roots, his eyes filling with tears at the shooting pain.[366] ... The bathroom floor was covered in hair. Pappu didn't know what he was supposed to do. Turn into a woman? He looked at his square-jawed face in the mirror, half-shaved, bristly and bleeding where the razor had cut through skin, his long tresses unevenly butchered. And he gave up. It was no use, they would get him anyway. There was no miracle for him today, he knew that now. With a steady hand, he finished shaving his face, trying not to think of the sacrilege he was committing. The he gathered his remaining hair into a ponytail. He pushed the mess on the floor to a corner and emerged from the bathroom.”[367]

In life risking situations, one has to compromise the tenets of the religious identity for which ancestors have sacrificed their lives. It is contradiction focusing the human predicament. After catching him, they dragged Pappu out into the silent lane. One of the men set him on fire. Thus Pappu met his pathetic end.

At Modinagar Bus terminus, no bus allowed Satpal to travel as he would be easily targeted because of his turban and beard. When he was searching for hotel to hide himself, he was attacked by mob who exclaimed, “Fucking murderer! We'll teach you to kill helpless woman.”[369] He ran away and asked help to a police but policeman exclaimed, “I have no orders to help”[369] and the other policeman said, “I am on duty only from ten o' clock.”[370]. Satpal ran into a narrow street with “no exit” [370]. He was trapped into a dead end. Satpal begged for life:

“I have children, I have a wife,” he pleaded, looking at the blank, implacable faces of his attackers. “I voted for Indira-ji, Please.” He folded his palms and fell to his knees and cried: “I didn't do anything, brothers, I didn't do anything.”[370].

Identity thus plays pivotal role in socio-political life. Humiliation of others on the basis of their identity degenerates human beings into animalistic primal mode of behaviour. They ridiculed and humiliated him:

“Hey, look at this brave lady-killer on this knees! And these bastards call themselves lions! Does a lion grovel like this? ... Let's see what he keeps inside his turban. Definitely not brains!”[370].

One of them removed his turban in an insulting way and ordered, “Open your hair, sardar-ji! Let's see how long you have grown it, eating the salt of this country.”[371]. Satpal uncoiled his hair and thought of more indignities that could be inflicted on him. He wished he could phone Nimmo again. He remembered her vividly and lost into the reminiscence of the memories of his home. One person immobilized his arms and another set his hair on fire.

The atrocities havocked on Sikhs during the post-assassination of Indira Gandhi was symptomatic of the deep hatred of one religious identity against another if it threatens the existence of each other. It also suggests the lingering violence that can erupt at any point of time with slight hint.

In Canada too, Indian community split into two: anti-sikh and anti-Indian government. Leela Bhat tried to lessen the grief of Bibi-ji by calling her out of care and longingness. But Bibi-ji witnessed the increasing drift between Sikh and the rest of Indian community. The tensions after Golden Temple attack and Mrs. Gandhi's murder increased. Leela Bhat was happy to inform Bibi-ji about her visit to India on Air India flight. But Bibi-ji kept silent with an indifferent attitude as though, "it was none of her business what happened to them. No, it was not her business at all." [383]. Her silence severed long relationships, friendships, attachments. However, this silence was an outcome of the feelings of revenge that torn the world abroad as well as at home. Leela Bhat who all through her life came across the questions of 'in-between-ness' too died like "a King Trishanku, a floating, rootless, accursed creature, up-in-the-air." [392]. When Jasbeer wanted to go to India, Lalloo cautioned him, "Not Air India... There is talk that flights on the airline will be sabotaged. ... May be a boycott—symbolic because it is India's national airline." [374] But Jasbeer never reached Nimmo. The novelist presented a balanced picture of the situation. Sikhs distributed sweets to celebrate the death of Indira Gandhi. The non-Sikhs extracted revenge and did not bear any feeling of remorse for atrocities committed on Sikhs.

Thus, Anita Rau Badami's novel *Can You Hear the Night Bird Call ?* is a fine example of minority discourse and identity crisis. The Sikhs perceived that they were discriminated on the basis of their religion as the Indian Government did not share the natural resources equitably. This injustice led them to demand a separate state which was dealt with iron hand by Indira Gandhi. The army attack on Golden Temple led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. As a consequence, Sikhs were persecuted. Thus, identity crisis which emanated from the crisis forms the crux of the novel.

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