

Mobile Identities: Linking Colonial Histories of Displacement with Portable Affective Objects
and Memories

By

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Abstract

This project considers portable affective objects as sites that hold and emit narratives of colonial displacement, generational ties and ruptures, and loss of identity for South Asian diasporas. I propose that the affective objects provide memories, geographies, and emotion. I look to previous scholarship on affect and trauma that suggests that the question of survival can be understood through what is unsaid. My project will add to this discussion by showing how objects and artefacts—material things—can be linked to trauma and displacement; it is specifically the emotions surrounding the affective object—the meanings attached to things—that will uncover some of the unspoken and unsaid complexities of displacement. The very characteristic of portability of objects creates an ability to *carry* a history, narrative and even home. This project is an analysis of three separate objects; these objects chronicle and are read alongside the narratives of my own familial history with colonial displacement. Through tracing personal narratives that attach themselves to these objects, I uncover that what is lost in upheaval and violence can be found, once again, in the memories the objects hold.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Remarks on Affective Objects

As a global nomad of Indian origin, I often find that the concept of “home” can be best described as an emotional location, rather than solely as a material and three-dimensional geographical location. How these “emotional locations” are represented—whether through human relationships or the memory of metaphorical heirlooms and artefacts—has informed my interest in exploring how affective objects engender intergenerational linkages among South Asian diaspora subjects. Put slightly differently, the *idea* of home, and its emotional meanings and its familial significations, can be transferred on to, objects, artefacts, heirlooms. In linking discourses of identity, race, and colonialism to ideas of nationality and community, I have noticed that the question of “home” and belonging, in the South Asian diaspora, are connected to past traumas of colonization and displacement. Home is, then, for many in the South Asian diaspora, a geography that contains feelings and emotions that are linked to colonial exile. My thesis addresses, therefore, how trauma, displacement, and colonialism can be understood through and with material culture, and how familial objects and items emit and/or carry within them, emotional narratives. This thesis will think through and discuss the ways in which colonialism is a process of becoming attached to moveable objects that present and represent home, nation, and location. I will highlight the complexity of the Indian, Pakistan, and Sikh diasporas and draw attention to how various histories of displacement incite the obligation to mark, depart with, and return to family mementos and moments.

In this introduction I trace the various overlapping links between a series of theories and insights that inform my thesis. I attend to emotion, memory, material culture, narrative, displacement, affect, and place in order to introduce and delineate my thinking on how objects and artefacts—“things”—and human experiences, connect. This project pushes against investigations of “official” histories of the South Asian diaspora—those narratives that are deemed “legitimate” or “acceptable” (whether it be memorials, official documents, history books, etc.). These “acceptable” narratives were, mostly, written by those who had not experienced the trauma of displacement. In this work I attend to the voices of displaced post-colonial Indians that were otherwise silenced. The importance of this project lies in its exploration of those silences and the ways in which we can access them without disrupting the well-being of the victims of displacement. I say this with Amitav Ghosh's work in mind when he writes, "when we try to speak of events of which we do not know the meaning, we must lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world" (Ghosh 218). It is from this notion that I propose that we cannot *know* the trauma of the South Asian diaspora, but there are alternative ways to access their silenced stories through affective objects and heirlooms. Bruno Latour suggests that there is a gap between language and nature, which is a space that we must dwell in to understand the power of “unspeakable” forces. In this project, I propose that these forces—memory, emotion, affect—are attached to objects and things that allow us to think about the narratives of those who were never given a voice in official histories.

In this thesis I suggest that objects have a purpose that become apparent in the object's absence; this purpose is the object's “thingness,” and this thingness can be accessed through the “unspeakability” of the forces that are attached to the object itself. This is to say that an object's thingness (purpose) can be revealed once it stops working for us (the subject), therefore studying

an object *as* a thing illuminates the relationship we, as subjects, have with objects. Through this relationship we are enabled to transfer the stories that are held within the object, through forces such as memory, emotion, and affect. Furthermore, the importance of passing on stories to younger generations of South Asians, and retelling stories of displacement and home, is central to this project. Ultimately, I speak to the ways in which a genealogical link is engendered through moveable objects and their attendant affective and narrated memories, thus revealing that the space in which we can talk about forgotten experiences, can be found in objects that are passed down from generation to generation. The act of transferring untold stories for the ancestors of the South Asian diaspora is shrouded in reliving a painful past and therefore is oftentimes avoided. It is this avoidance that reveals the ways in which practices of retelling histories and personal narratives are rooted in feelings of colonial exile. To quote Ghosh again, "It follows then that the reason why I— and many others who have written of such events—are compelled to look back in sorrow is because we cannot look ahead." (Ghosh 317). This whole project speaks to the affective ties of family and how, through time and space, past relatives' stories and experiences still matter—this is what families do to tell their stories.

Affective and Emotional Objects

One of the ways to begin thinking about the connections between objects, memory, emotion, diaspora, and location, is to notice how, during war and conflict, objects are both removed and cherished. The emotive energies emitted by artefacts and objects appropriated during war, by members of the “enemy” community, demonstrate the non-human agency and consequential affective ties that material goods have. Yael Navaro-Yashin's research, for

example, highlights the dualism between the material and the ideational, between tangibility and social imaginaries, and opens up a way to think about how objects and artefacts are often or sometimes invested with emotion. Emotions are defined as an internal response to an event or object in positive or negative calculative states that can be transitory or enduring, objectless or object focused, and of varying intensity (Lawler). I am suggesting, then, that some members of the South Asian diaspora become emotionally attached to, and therefore internally (psychically) respond to, family mementos, objects, and artefacts, and in this, underscore the connections between the material and the ideational. Emotion is therefore understood alongside memory, emotion, and affect, in order to draw attention to ways in which the human "senses" are inseparable from the ways people act and live. This coupling will allow me to think about the relationship between human and object and to generate new understandings of how colonial histories are inseparable from material objects that existed in and through conflicts, displacements, and migrations (Edwards 4). Lauren Berlant's work on "cruel optimism" becomes a valuable source when examining portable affective objects that are concerned with, and hold within them, narratives of trauma, colonial displacement, and loss. "Cruel optimism" describes an attachment we have to conditions of possibility that are in actuality "impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic" (Berlant 94). This notion nods to an understanding of how we remain attached to the *hope* of a better way of living, despite the reality of what this attachment may be. As Berlant states, "cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss" (21). In bringing together these theories I propose that objects themselves can emote and the premeditative emotions surrounding objects can be understood as linked to displacement, migration, and exile. What I will unpack in my thesis are the narratives held within and around objects in order to delineate what is seemingly unseeable:

their affective and emotional currency. Berlant claims there is a magnetic attraction to what she describes as “cruel optimism” towards some objects; this optimism contains in it risks of attachment as the promising object cannot generate “the better good life” on its own (21). This “good life” is where those who have been worn out by their “bad lives” still manage to find a condition of possibility within their existence (Berlant 97).

The affective quality of the objects can create or destroy “the better life” depending on whether the object projects a melancholic history or what Dina Georgis calls “a better story.” Georgis explains that, “narrative is the fantasmatic elaboration of traumatic experience. It is the sense we make of a traumatic experience lost to conscious memory. Indeed, when it comes to trauma, the only thing we can be sure of is that our experience resists thought and language” (Georgis 169). Through this explanation, the question of survival is not only understood through what is said; it can also be understood through experiential knowledge and silences. In my study, I argue that diasporic objects, too, complicate language and do not always depend on language; I argue, therefore, that the politics of survival is articulated through the object's tangibility and materiality—its thingness— as well as language or storytelling. The affective feelings surrounding objects, and the desire to keep, discard, and share objects, I propose, aids in the production of diasporic identities while offering a new or different set of thematics linked to, but outside of, embodied personhood.

Diasporic Identities and Objects

This project will uncover diasporic linkages across generations, with a focus on the ways in which affective objects move from place to place vis-à-vis modern day Indian global nomads.

I understand and define modern day Indian global nomads as those who have spent their developmental years away from India and are thus *geographically* detached from Indian cultures and communities (Fail 320). These communities are still connected to the histories and narratives of their heritage and homeland through familial and community affective objects and the memories they hold, but they are not necessarily familiar or intimate with their place of birth or their parents' places of birth. The detachment from (and paradoxical distanced familial connection to) Indian nationality and colonial history creates a void in some diasporic identities and identifications and asks: where and how does one ground themselves when not linked by borders or community? How does identity formation take place when these geographic particularities of home and family are precarious? With this, the promise that identity "is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world" (Josselson 10) is revealed. Human identity, put another way, uncovers values, beliefs, and behaviour, and influences interactions with one another (Walters 757), and demonstrates how individual identity is folded into collective (i.e. national) identities. The links between individual identity and collective identity—and the promise of stability—must also, however, be understood alongside the dynamic and fluid nature of identity (757). In this project, I keep in mind that the links between national, diasporic, migratory, and individual identifications reveal that identity is constantly in motion and unstable. The fluidity of identity, and varying affective and emotional attachments, reveal that home—as a meaningful diasporic object and idea—is a moveable notion: the individual changes and so does their sense of belonging. I suggest that while Indian nomads might remain without attachment to the specific material geographies of home and national identity, they find alternative (at least momentarily stable or recognizable)

identity narratives through affective portable objects, which may take the form of family heirlooms, memories, and mementos.

The portable objects I analyze (see below) act as markers of identity, allowing there to be a source of recognition despite the lack of ties to definitional nationhood. In terms of identity formation I will therefore also address how some South Asian identities—displaced refugees of Partition, subaltern women, diasporic communities and Indian global nomads—are connected to colonial powers and discourses. This is to say that the colonial legacy of trauma, violence, and displacement informed (and continues to inform) the status of post-colonial identities through their feelings of belonging and unbelonging. Gayatri Spivak explains that despite how globalized the world is today, boundaries of the individual state are still nationally defined; the nation, even for those outside it (or forced outside it), still shapes the diasporic condition (Spivak ix). I want to clarify that this notion implies to all but the Indian nomad, for they are part of the post-colonial group that are not directly affected by colonial violence, but instead, act as the genealogical link (in this project) in bringing forth those narratives of their ancestor's experience. The Indian nomad is, however, more defined by their *lack* of being defined by and through national identity, whereas their diasporic ancestors were captured by the violent colonial invention of the nation and thus tied to the land (whether they were within the nation or outside of it, the Indian diaspora were still defined by its boundaries). Through these notions, I turn to narratives and the “right to narrate,” as a method in this project, to access diasporic stories of experience without relying on the narratives told by the “nation” that was constructed by the very colonial powers that incited trauma and violence on Indian diasporic communities. Through this method, I seek to revise our sense of “symbolic citizenship, our myths of belonging, by identifying ourselves with the “starting-points” of other nations and international histories and

geographies" (Bhabha xx). By placing the displaced individual at the intersections of these narratives, we can re-imagine local histories within a greater transnational history (xx). How these narratives are brought forth, in this project, will be through the portability of objects and my analysis of affective and mobile objects.

As this project considers portable affective objects as the source that holds the narrative of colonial displacement and loss of identity for South Asian diasporas across familial generations, I propose that the affective objects themselves provide memories, geographies, and emotion. Previous scholarship on affect and trauma by Georgis suggests that the question of survival can be understood through what is unsaid. My project will add to this discussion by showing how objects and artefacts—material things—can be linked to trauma and displacement; it is specifically the emotions surrounding the affective object—the subjective meanings attached to things—that will uncover some of the unspoken and unsaid complexities of displacement. The very characteristic of portability of objects creates an ability to *carry* a history, narrative and even home. What is lost in upheaval and violence can, once again, be found in the memories the objects hold.

The context of this project revolves around several different themes: the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, as well as migrant identities that emerge from these histories of displacement and violence. All of these themes are discussed through my own familial history and emerge from stories that have been passed down from generation to generation, reminding us where and from what we came from. The Partition of India into two countries, India and Pakistan, was an event that caused one of the largest human displacements in history (Butalia 3). The stories of my family's experience of and through Partition are ones that inform much of the content for this project; and, despite the survival of my family members,

Partition is not a closed chapter of history for us. It still lingers in everyday life through the ways in which my family, and other affected families, speak and remember their homes and lives before the division of their nation. It is through the stories of conflict, violence, and survival that I will follow my great-grandfather, grandmother, and father's narratives through the traumas of displacement and how it continues to inform the lives and identities of their family for generations to come. As powerfully put by Urvashi Butalia as she explains the significance of her own family's history with Partition:

It took the events of 1984 to make me understand how ever-present Partition was in our lives, too, to recognize that it could not so easily be put away inside the covers of history books. I could no longer pretend that this was a history that belonged to another time, to someone else (Butalia 5).

In this statement, Butalia illuminates the feeling that the stories of Partition are not remote, they resonate and continue to do so generations later. In reading these conflicts across space and time (from India to Canada over a span of a century), I use objects as vessels that carry forth these narratives that otherwise so difficult to discuss. In reading personal narratives and memories of my family as they circulate around objects and heirlooms, I am able to understand those objects and stories across these specific spaces of conflict and displacement.

Thing Theory

The aforementioned tensions between emotion, memory, affect, diaspora, and home will be complemented by thing theory. I will theorize affective objects using thing theory in order to make the links between the spoken and unspoken colonial histories of displacement for South Asian diasporas. When I speak of “objects” in this project, I refer to material things, matter, and

non-human artefacts.¹ However, the discussion surrounding objects will look beyond these items as merely man-made and ordinary, and instead to how these items have an ability to go beyond their status of objects and create traces of "aliveness" or "vibrancy" outside of the human experience (Bennett xvi). This notion is what Jane Bennett refers to as "thing power," which encapsulates the idea of lively objects with "effectivity" of their own (xvi). This complements my discussion of affective and emotional objects above, underlining the relationship between humans and objects. Work by scholars such as Bill Brown question how objects mediate social relationships and how inanimate objects can be read as having a form of agency of their own (Brown 5). Brown's research, coupled with writings by Daniel Miller and Alfred Gell, will aid my project by situating the increasingly blurred boundaries between such "things" as object and subject, art and artifact, and alienability and inalienability. I will examine, then, portable objects as things that incite affect and memory, but also as things that complement and produce diasporic identities.

Thing theory investigates how people make "things" by asking also how "things" make people. This theoretical framing deals with both objects and things, but the two should not to be confused with each other. Brown explains that objects are what we *see*, and it is through *tangible*

¹ Despite this project focussing on the non-organic object or thing, I acknowledge the history of commodification and objectification of black peoples and racialized bodies that have been continuously deprived of ever having "owned themselves." As powerfully put by Aimé Césaire,

Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses. No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a class-room monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production. My turn to state an equation: colonization = "thing-ication" (Césaire 6).

Césaire explains the transformation from human to "goods" through colonization and the events of ripping bodies from their homes and lands to become tools of labour for the benefits of their colonizers. That these bodies have been used to build the economy of those who enslave them through the labour cultivating luxuries like "exotic" spices, cotton, opium, olives, and silks. The colonizer celebrate their "discoveries" and "treasures" and the accumulation of material goods by treating humans as something that is void of life, a voice, or agency.

gazing, that we look to objects for what they say about history, society, culture, and about ourselves (4). We look at objects and understand them as meaningful and that allows us to use them as facts and sites that have solid identifiers. The *thingness* of an object, conversely, can be described, as the object's *purpose* or *reason*. Brown explains that we often do not confront the thingness of an object until it stops working for us, such as a car breaking down or a window getting dirty (4). An object *as* a thing, therefore, can be explained as being less of an object but more of a *relationship between the subject and the object* (4) and this relationship acts as a *translation* of the object's thingness. Moreover, translation, in this context, is about exchange and transformation of the object *and* the subject (Coombes 237). Therefore, an object as a thing produces an important balance between preserving the integrity of the historical moment the object represents, while also recognizing the process of construction that pieces that history together.

Affective Histories and Memories

The tensions between objects, translations, and human interactions, bring together two key themes that this project will untangle: history and memory. Toni Morrison sheds light on the difference between historical "fact" and lived experience and memory—as understood through racialized peoples—by stating,

The crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. So if I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean that they didn't have it); if I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left - to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard - then the approach that's most productive

and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image. (Morrison 93)

The notion of revealing the difference between "fact and truth" helps to clarify the narratives of displaced South Asian diasporas, especially during violent moments of history like Partition and the 1984 Sikh-Hindu riots, as official documentations speak from a point of distance and can leave out the voices of those who lived through these moments. The tension of unpacking official histories of colonial and postcolonial identities alongside retold narratives of lived experiences is addressed through particular analyses of objects in this project precisely because they allow me to productively think about how colonial violence and displacement engenders material objects with narratives that are untellable and retold across generations. This is to say that the unspoken narratives held within and around moveable objects push up against, and interrupt, official histories.

These themes also lay the theoretical groundwork for affect, which is used in this project to think through the ways in which memory and unspoken feelings are attached to different objects. Affect, in this project draws on what Sarah Ahmed would describe as, "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 29). Ahmed explains that to be affected by something is to assess that thing, to understand it (31). Affects are those prediscursive forces that are outside our conscious knowing and emotions that compel our thoughts and forms of relationships. Gregg and Steigworth explain that there is no pure or original state of affect. It is something that can be found in the "in-between-ness" of our ability to act and is therefore a result of a state of relation and the passage of that force (Gregg 1). As well, affect is an ever-changing and ever-evolving force and its movements vary depending on the type of body or thing it encounters. Affect is, therefore, always expanding into areas of (and beyond) living, non-living, matter, sensation, events, atmospheres, and feeling-tones (2).

In this project, I look specifically at affect as it extends into the areas of non-organic matter and things. An object's affective quality can be determined based on its location and time—when and where the object is situated is when and where one would experience its affect. This is to say that to experience an object *as* affective is to consider not only the object, but also what is around the object (Ahmed 33). This is important to regard in this project for as I study the particular objects in my discussion, the affect and understanding of each reading will vary depending on whose experience is being examined. An object or heirloom's affective quality that is held in my possession, as an Indian global nomad, in the twenty-first century would vastly differ than that same object being in the space and time of my grandmother, a subaltern woman living through the Partition of India. As Ahmed explains, when we become conscious of feeling happy it becomes an object of thought. In this way, if the bodies that endured displacement and trauma of Partition recognized their unhappiness, perhaps their melancholia also becomes an object of thought (46). Where the object could be described as a melancholic object in the possession of my grandmother (because it is informed by ruins and destruction), its affectiveness would alter as it is passed down to different family members and moved from place to place—potentially becoming what Ahmed calls a "happy object," or one that projects an optimistic guarantee of happiness.

This theoretical understanding of affective objects is not to be conflated with, yet still informs, the ongoing discussion of memory and remembering in this project. Using the example above: that same melancholic object held in the possession of my subaltern grandmother could also induce *memories* of "happy" times; memories are subjective and the narratives surrounding memories will change depending on the person telling or retelling the story of the affective object. With this theoretical framework, what is being questioned is this: if objects outlive

humans, how can we access the narratives that surround those objects once it has moved on from its original possessor? I propose that the gap that separates language and object is memory; this project will dwell in that *space of memories* in order to highlight how material “things” are inflected with diasporic migrations and narratives. Memories can be shaped by affect and, therefore, throughout my thesis I am thinking about memory, affect, and emotion together, as separate concepts, and also as ideas that overlap. This is to say that all of these forces inform one another, yet, each have different ways of understanding the “unspeakability” of the objects of my analysis. It is framing affect, emotions, and memory as the *language* that translates the thingness of the object, that allows us to think about displacement, race, location, and home as they are experienced by displaced and nomadic members of the South Asian diaspora.

Narrative

The affective emotions and memories contained within, on, and through objects can be read as narrative. Working with Dina Georgis, Yael Navaro-Yashin, and Gayatri Spivak, will allow me to situate memory, diaspora, affect, and colonialism, in relation to my family heirlooms and artefacts and think about how material culture is implicit to identity-making for the South Asian diaspora. When focusing on emoting narratives that emerge from affective objects, I draw upon Georgis's conceptualization of "the better story." Georgis argues that narrative is an emotional resource for learning and for generating better futures. She suggests that narrative gives us insight into understanding the unknowable processes by which we create collective memories, histories, and identities. Georgis uses stories to link us to forgotten spaces of history; she highlights narratives that have been disregarded and, by drawing on Spivak's work on the

subaltern's voice, thinks about how social injustice is articulated (and how some narratives, despite *wanting* to speak against injustice, fail to do so). This is illustrated in Georgis' work through the story of Bhubaneswari, a Hindu woman who commits suicide for reasons that Georgis describes as "unintelligible within her social context" (Georgis 175). As part of a political group that strived for India's independence, Bhubanewari was asked to participate in an assassination that she did not want to partake in. With no other outlet for her voice, she killed herself. Bhubaneswari's suicide operated as an attempt to "speak" through the act of death rather than through the words of a suicide note (175). It is through this example that Georgis takes us through narratives that act as a form of voice-giving, which illuminates my earlier discussion of Morrison and the difference between "fact and truth" (Morrison 93). Georgis uses the narrative of Bhubaneswari to exemplify how knowledge can be understood differently, depending on whether it is read as an *account* or as a *narrative*. If we read Bhubaneswari's story as an *account*, we would not learn much (especially because there was no note to explain her death and decision). However, if we read her experiences and death as a *story or narrative*, whose significance is embedded between the words, then the unseeable and "unthinkable" content is revealed to us (Georgis 177). Where Georgis uses stories as this link, I will consider material objects as vessels that carry colonial narratives that, in some instances, are underwritten by stories that are unseeable and unthinkable.

Dina Georgis' theories complement the work of Navaro-Yashin—specifically her essay "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge." As mentioned earlier, Navaro-Yashin focuses on affect and non-human agency by studying the emotive energies discharged by properties and objects appropriated during war. She

explores how it feels to live with objects and within ruins left behind by the earlier, displaced, community. Her specific study on Turkish-Cypriots' relations to houses, land, and objects that they appropriated from the Greek-Cypriots during the war of 1974 and the subsequent Partition of Cyprus can be likened to, but does not twin with, the history and the Partition of India in 1947. The emotive energy of focus in Navaro-Yashin's work is melancholia or what she calls "*maraz*" (Navaro-Yashin 4). According to Navaro-Yashin, *maraz* is a way the displaced Turkish-Cypriots described their condition of depression in their inner state of being. It is state of deep and unrecoverable sadness that is located by the lack of calmness and happiness within their inner being (4). *Maraz*, which Navaro-Yashin likens to melancholia, can be thought about alongside the inner-sadness and loss of honour that was felt by displaced Indians during and after Partition. The refugees call this concept of honour, *izzat*.² The notion that those who have been uprooted from their homes because of the threat of war, conflict, or violence—displaced and displacement—is explored through that population residing and being surrounded by objects of ruin. For Navaro-Yashin "ruined matter" refers to things that are a result of an act of violation (5).³ She explains that the abject object and environments have acquired their status because they could not be carried or taken with their owners due to the displacement incited by conflict or war—not because these things were not needed or wanted. This rejected material is then reused, recycled, and appropriated by those who are left behind. Members of the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim diaspora who were displaced by Partition were forced into the homes and the country of their "enemies," and were required to inhabit these spaces, resulting in many of the displaced residing in and amongst melancholic ruins. These spatial and experiential tensions highlight the

² *Izzat* will be discussed further in Chapter One on Homes.

³ To clarify, ruined matter refers specifically and exclusively to non-organic matter— not to people who are affected by violence.

dualism between the material and the ideational, between tangibility and social imaginaries (Navaro-Yashin 1), which becomes key in analysing the colonial discourses that encapsulate the portable affective objects.

Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha also assist my theoretical frame and critical analysis of the objects and their narratives. Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman, for example, becomes key in analyzing the silences of subjugated voices in Indian history. Spivak argues that colonialism has restricted the voice of the subaltern woman and thus she cannot know and speak about the conditions of her suppression. The subaltern, according to Spivak, are those who have limited or no access to cultural imperialism and exist in a space of difference (Spivak 1992). Through Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," I explore her explanation of the ways in which the historical and structural conditions of political representation—which do not present the interests of particular subaltern groups—cannot guarantee that their voices will be heard (Morton, 71). Added to this, Spivak argues that academics that have written about real historical examples of struggle fail to allow oppressed subjects to speak about their own conditions (Spivak 276). She explains that many western intellectuals silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience and thus, the subaltern woman is treated as an "absent nonrepresenter" of her own condition in documented official histories of India (292). It is from Spivak's thorough critique of the lack of representation of the subaltern women in her *own* voice that I turn to objects or heirlooms that were once used or owned by the subaltern in being the vessel that can recover her voice. I suggest that a genealogical link is necessary for this recovery to happen and that passing down heirlooms from generation to generation—through the language of the object's unspeakability (memory, emotion, affect)—that her story can be shared.

Bhabha's work on home, hybridity, and the third space also becomes important to consider when discussing the space in which these heirlooms are passed down and then exist as identity-making objects. This project engenders a dialogue on how the histories of displacement of postcolonial subjects are shared and passed along, *through* the portability of heirlooms, to family members who have not experienced the same traumas as them, but have identities that are still shaped by colonialism and displacement. How these conversations can be translated within that context is where I turn to Bhabha and his work in *The Location of Culture*. The Indian global nomads I speak of in this project are those who have ultimately come into possession of the objects of analysis. As mentioned before, I suggest that the link of familial ties *to* the object is necessary for the object's narrative to reveal itself (an example of this would be how the same object, if placed in a museum, would not be able to transmit the same emotional energies as it would through a family member). Furthermore, and to explain why the familial ties are necessary, I suggest that these objects are identity-making for the Indian global nomad because it connects their identities back to their homeland. Bhabha's concept of the nomad outlines how the nomad's identity is tangled with—and relying on—India's history of colonialism and tradition despite their “unrooted” national identities. The history of the ways in which their ancestors became minorities in their own homeland, because of violent displacements through events such as the Partition of India and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, becomes key to this identifying process. Bhabha's work thus speaks to the construction of the minority's identity within the context of violence, colonialism, and displacement. He defines “society” as a place where “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 2). From this classification of society, he interrogates how subjects are formed in the “in-between” or excess

of those categories and describes the minority within that sphere as the *representation of difference*. He warns us against reading the representations of difference as having “pre-given” ethnic traits set in tradition (3). Minorities, according to Bhabha, have identities that are part of an on-going negotiation that access cultural hybridities that appear in "moments of historical transformation" (3). This is to say that minority identities are only partially formed from tradition; identities do not have "originary" roots or clear-cut and authentic traditions. The minority identity's *difference*, in this sense, is formed through what Bhabha describes as "the borderline engagements of cultural difference [that] may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress"(3).

Existing in a space of in-betweenness—that is neither “traditional” nor “modern,” nor specifically identifying as "Indian" or "foreign"—displaced Indian minorities are migratory and unanchored to a specific nation. With this in mind, I suggest that the displaced population of India are a part of the sphere of minority identities whereas, generations later, the Indian nomad also experience unbelonging through a minority status but because of their own volition to leave their homes. This paralleling history is important to consider because of the ways in which it informs the Indian nomad's identity as understand *through*, but not replicating, their ancestor's struggles. This allows the nomad to exist in a space where carrying forth the narratives of trauma, experienced by their ancestors, in the form of heirlooms, is possible. The objects I speak of in this project have affective qualities that are prediscursive; they exist in the place of “in betweenness” Bhabha writes of. I propose, furthermore, that because the Indian nomad's identity parallels (but certainly does not twin) existing in that “in-between” space, they become

appropriate vessels to carry forth the narratives held within and around the objects. It is through the affective memories of their relative's past—affective memories contained within and around moveable objects—that Indian nomads can negotiate their identities and also remain in a space of "in-betweenness."

By looking to objects that emote energies and narratives of the past, Indian nomads are able to position themselves in relation to something that is close to, but is not quite exactly, "home." Home, I uncover throughout this thesis, is where one's identity is rooted and therefore for migrant populations, as well as nomads, it is a concept that remains unstable. Whether the home is a physical place, a house, where one's family is, a metaphorical place, a memory, an object, or a story—or some and all of these—is based on whether the individual can relate and recognize it as a part of their self, identity, and identifications. As this project considers portable affective objects as the source that holds the narrative of colonial displacement and loss of identity for South Asian diasporas across familial generations, I propose that the affective objects themselves provide memories, geographies, emotion, and even home. In recognizing objects as having the ability to carry forth these energies, this project ultimately discusses how objects and things are linked to trauma and displacement that, through the link of familial ties, can be accessed through narratives that emit from the object's unspeakability.

Methods

Using the above theorists and a theoretical framework, I will do a discourse analysis of the objects noted below. Using discourse analysis will enable my research to reveal the underlining narratives and politics behind the objects and will allow for a deconstructive reading

and interpretation of that revealed information. As well, I will employ Dina Georgis' method of storytelling, which will include weaving my own family history into my readings of the objects as an analytical framework. This method—a discourse analysis of the objects that is complemented by family narrative—will allow my research to highlight how colonialism is a process of attachment to portable affective objects and how these objects can work to disrupt the otherwise celebrated conversations on resistance and emancipation. Put differently, my methodology will analyze the objects and their stories in order to uncover the ongoing traumas of colonialism and displacement. Through the combination of a discourse analysis and theories of affect, memory, emotion, (post)colonialism, things, and storytelling, the selected objects will be analysed in a way that creates an understanding of the production of diasporic identities while offering an alternative set of thematics linked to, but outside of, embodied personhood.

The physical objects I will be focussing on are:

- Abandoned homes (abandoned homes of displaced diaspora)
- A wedding necklace
- A gun

Each of these objects was selected because of the role they have played in my own family's history of displacement. Each of the objects has an “unspeakability” that I will analyze through the theories stated above. I will also use storytelling as an analytical device to bring forth the representations and hidden narratives of such affective objects. To give a brief example of each: the gun stands as an illustration of how the purpose and the narrative of the object can evolve and reflect the moment in which it exists. The handgun was once owned by my great-grandfather as a symbol of prestige that signified practices of owning and protecting one's own property in colonial India; it eventually became an object of violence and survival when he was caught up in

the upheaval of Indian/Pakistan Partition. This gun would later be passed down to my father who would once again use it as an object of violence and survival during the 1984 Hindu/Sikh riots in New Delhi. The gun would finally be left behind in India as my family moved to the West, thus representing the hopeful end of forced violence. The wedding necklace (known as a Rani Harr) is a family heirloom that has been passed down from great-grandmother to grandmother to mother; it is as a mark of marriage and signifies the entrance of women to a system that places them under the control of a new patriarch. As noted above, necklace speaks to Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman and, I will argue, is an object that works to give voice. The abandoned homes of displaced diaspora will exemplify a space of melancholy that is created when it is re-occupied by those uprooted by Partition. The conversation on homes will, once again, follow the narrative of my great-grandfather as he was forced out of his home, in what is modern-day Islamabad, into the newly created India after Partition. Referring to Navaro-Yashin's work in this analysis, I will look at the everyday presence of objects belonging of those who had lived in India, or the newly formed Pakistan, who were not forced out of their homes, and how a loss of a sense of moral integrity was consequently created. I will uncover what voices that are being represented in these objects as well as the politics they represent.

Breakdown

Chapter Two will be an analysis of homes. Home, for the South Asian diaspora, is a particularly precarious issue as it troubles notions of security, belonging, and unbelonging. Home is a place, for some, that is meant to keep the “stranger” or Other out. For the South Asian diaspora, who have been forced from their homes and into the homes of strangers, they suddenly

become the Other that they had been keeping “out” their whole lives. In the recognition of their unbelonging, what remains is a deep sense of melancholia that the South Asian diaspora uses to articulate their relationship with home. Through the works of Gyanendra Pandey, Veena Das, Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj, I address the violent events leading up to, and following, India's independence and Partition in 1947 and how these histories shaped the South Asian diaspora's sense of home. This chapter will also draw on Yael Navaro-Yashin's work and underscore the ways in which war-torn homes become matter of ruination. I will follow the narrative of my great-grandfather, Bhag Singh, and his traumas experienced through the event of Partition. The conversation will follow the object of analysis, home, and its unspeakability as it links to emotion and melancholia. Working with and through thing theory, emotion, memory and melancholic displacement, I interrogate the notion of home, what it means to be home, what it means to have a home, and what it means to return home.

Chapter Three focuses on a wedding necklace, owned by my subaltern grandmother, known as a *Rani Harr*. In this chapter a specific type of object-subject relationship is being addressed in the form of heirlooms. I discuss heirlooms as they are tied to familial histories and are read as replacements to memories and as identity-bearing objects, as they intermingled with the heirloom's thingness and the residual effects of the individual's experience as it is passed along. Following the theories put forth by Gayatri Spivak and Dina Georgis, I analyze the necklace as a voice-giving object, which provides the subaltern women, my grandmother, with an otherwise silenced narrative. The object's unspeakability will be tackled in this chapter through its memory-making abilities. Using Avery Gordon's work on “ghosts” and Toni Morrison's writings on memory, the conversation works through representation, remembering, and narratives.

Chapter Four pursues a conversation of affect and addresses the unspeakability a gun. Scholars such as Steve Pile, Melissa Gregg, and Gregory Seigworth provide me with some theoretical insights to think about a gun in relation to affect. Following the narrative of violence and trauma, and the residual effects of Partition that led to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the story will turn to my father, Surinder Singh, and his use of the gun as a moment of survival. This chapter will thus discuss the evolving nature of the narrative concerning affective objects as well as the object's ability to shift in its affective qualities depending on its capacity for survival. While utilizing aforementioned theories on affect, trauma, memory, and displacement, I will analyze the gun as an object that represented a promise of protection, and then, in its desertion, a promise of a better future.

I will conclude this project with a brief discussion that points to further study and the politics of reading affective objects as identity-making for those who have been displaced. I will address the ways in which my own position, as an Indian global nomad and the daughter and great-granddaughter of these stories, affects the ways in which these objects form part of my family's history with displacement yet also yield larger questions about migration, home, location, and moveable things. This conclusion will also ask how the lasting traumas of colonial legacies affect the South Asian diaspora's family, generations later? I will address the ways in which we can look back to these identity-making objects as vessels that can carry their familial histories forward in the hopes of creating a space where the stories will always be remembered.

Chapter 2

Diasporic Homes and the Emotions of Partition

If home is where one builds their own cultural environment *within* another macro cultural environment, a safe haven of sorts, what can be said for people of the South Asian diaspora, whose ideas of home are tied to feelings of colonial exile? In this chapter, I explore what it means to be home, to have a home, and to return to home. I address how memory, emotions, and space play an integral role in the forming of postcolonial identities and how those identities negotiate their sense of belonging, nationally and community-wise, after the Partition of India and Pakistan. I work with the tensions between memory, forgetting, and silence, as well the limitations of memorialization, in order to address how the object—home—is a site of emotion and melancholy. I also explore the emotions that emerge for South Asian communities that have been uprooted from their homes and untangle the tensions that exist between humans and objects, drawing specific attention to objects that are removed or demolished and thus do *not* "out-live" their owners. I ask: if objects are supposed to be cherished sites of memory, what happens when these sites are destroyed or ruined? What is at stake if an identity-forming environment, like a home, disappears? And, finally, how does the idea of home, and displacement, play out across generations?

It is important to restate here that "home," in this project, is understood as a site where one negotiates belonging and unbelonging; in this chapter home is also discussed as a "thing." It is worth recalling Brown's thing theory and situating it alongside houses and homes: if the house is the object, then home is its "thingness" (Brown 4). A house holds an array of different materials and therefore collectively creates a living experience that is more important than the

total of its parts (Hecht, 123). All of these materials are supplied with meaning, memory, and emotion, which are what turn a *house*—infrastructure, property—into a *home* (inciting its thingness, uniting our pasts with our presents and potential futures). As Brown notes, we often do not notice an object's thingness unless it stops working for us—as in a drill breaking or a car stalling. Although a “thing” is characterized by its absence, it is constantly present as a determining force in unconscious energies. With that in mind, I propose that when we are uprooted from our houses what becomes apparent is its thingness, its ability to be a home. Once we realize that the thingness of a dwelling—its home qualities and energies—had been present all along, what is left in its absence is a deep sadness and a realization that a sense of rooting and belonging has been lost.

As powerfully put by Anat Hecht, "to lose a home is to lose a private museum of memory, identity and creative appropriation" (123). To be separated from your home and belongings is often equated to being separated from all that is familiar and steady. This separation is particularly important to note, in terms of the South Asian diaspora, because diaspora cannot exist without the *loss* of home or the displacement from homelands. This unfolds vis-à-vis identity formation (the loss of home is a kind of identity loss, too). Moreover, homes are not just sites of conditioning, social relations, and economic management; they also represent a position that is in relation to the nation and class politics as a whole. The house is not only integral to the individual identity, but that of the community and nation in its entirety. This is to say that place and home represent belonging in terms of individual identity as well as citizenship and national identity. Scholars such as Anh Hua therefore rethink the idea of citizenship as being solely grounded to the nation-state (Hua 52). To elaborate, citizenship—or the belonging to a nation—is re-imagined by Hua as being rooted in "culture" (rather than the

nation) which allows her imagine new ways for dislocated cultural communities to belong (52). Hua considers the many varied types and understandings of home for diasporas.

The writings of bell hooks also clarify the complexities of home. She explains that "home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the constructions of a new world order that reveal more fully where we are, who can become..." (hooks 148). Hooks explains that our relationship with home can produce fear and anxiety when conceptualized in a certain way, particularly when linked to racial violence, issues of safety, and the loss of security. Places can be home, but they are not always thought of in that sense—they are not always places of nostalgia. Homes can also be places of melancholia, which demonstrates how home *is* emotion, which is very evident for diasporic communities. The anti-Sikh riots, as explained to me by my family, exemplify my thinking. After the violence of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, many Sikhs who had fled from their homes did not return despite being told it was "safe" to go back. For some, it was fear or anxiety based on the threat of violence occurring again; for others it was that home now represented a disappointment and rupture in their sense of belonging. For this population, their once friendly Hindu neighbours now become enemies that turned on them during the riots and handed them over to arsonist mobs and India. India, too, a country that once was home, turned a blind eye to unspeakable atrocities happening to Sikh communities. Home was now a place laden with melancholia.

When the idea of home is entangled with deep feelings of loss and sadness, and home is based on the displacement, home becomes an emotion. This becomes particularly true for the South Asian diaspora; violent upheavals caused by Partition led to their homes becoming representative of melancholia and, subsequently, the event of Partition came to be representative

as home. Therefore, and in this sense, Partition *is* home for the many in the South Asian diaspora who endured the violence and displacement. To elaborate, Arun Mukherjee—who was born as a British subject in 1946 and became an Indian citizen upon its independence and Partition in 1947—writes, "postcolonialism is my 'living'" (Mukherjee xii). In this statement, she is addressing how those who experienced Partition cannot escape it being in their "living." For Mukherjee, home *and* life *are* Partition and the two cannot be separated. Mukherjee explains that the word "postcolonial" itself is one that signals the past, further reifying the ways in which the history of Partition with the Indian subject cannot be untangled. "Postcolonialism," she explains, draws us to a painful lived past that is real, not just a literary and cultural movement (216). It is from this notion that we can look at postcolonial diasporic subject's relationships with home and belonging to uncover a lost and silenced past.

In diaspora studies, home is a particularly contentious issue, which becomes apparent when reviewing key diaspora theorists' discussion on home. Martin and Mohanty's 1986 essay "What's Home Got to Do with It?", concedes that identity is shaped by the individual's experience of home, but they also question the given atmosphere of safety and security that surrounds the notion of home. They claim that "being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries, but "not being home" leads to a realization that home was an illusion of safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance—and even the repression of difference *within* oneself (George 26). I want to emphasize the importance of the latter half of that concept: I look at the repression of difference through the politics of recognition (Taylor 25)—an internal battle that happens when the diasporic subject realizes that those who are being repressed, are in fact, themselves. This is to say that "being home," for diasporic communities, is also "not being home"; there cannot be a

diaspora without the loss of home. Furthermore by emphasizing the significance of how home has been taken up by a range of women of colour theorists and writers who do not easily assume "home" within their feminist communities, Martin and Mohanty recognize that the notion of home varies and is based on absolute divisions between different sexual, racial, or ethnic identities (Martin 86). This variation unsettles conventional notions of experience, boundaries, and identities through the understanding of privilege and positionality—for example the consolidation of the "white home" in response to a "threatening" outside and that the experiences of the "white home" is certainly not the same as the "diasporic home"(98). Martin and Mohanty disassemble the notion of home beyond its "safe boundaries" by also recognizing the terror and violence of securing one's home (where home becomes the place one is *in* to keep the Other out) (George 27). This, once again, points to the dilemma diasporic communities have, because in keeping the Other out, they are also keeping themselves out. To elucidate, for white homes the threatening outside is the Other, and for the diaspora—who have fled or being violently removed from their homes and are forced to be outside their homes—the threatening outside of the Other is suddenly humanized. Therefore, for diasporic communities: the Other is you. The combined theories of home from Hua, hooks, Mukherjee, Martin, and Mohanty troubles the notion of home as a solid, unmoving, protective boundary. In understanding the complex relationship the South Asian diaspora have with their dwellings allows us to think of houses as experiential and emotional *things*, and therefore, homes.

In bringing together the above theorists' conceptualizations and critiques of home with the thingness of houses, I turn to Yael Navaro-Yashin and her study on home from the perspective of those who experience inhabiting a home that belongs or belonged to other people. Navaro-Yashin's research thinks about people who are displaced from their homes and are forced to flee

and take shelter in other abandoned houses, resulting in the diaspora living in the homes of another diaspora. Navaro-Yashin describes the things within houses as being charged with the traces of other people's lives. Her work explores how homes are charged with "cultural agency" and as objects of political and legal substance (Navaro-Yashin 179).⁴ The idea of a charged object, or site, when coupled with Martin and Mohanty's understanding of home, is the focal point of this chapter. Navaro-Yashin's study, on the diaspora being forced to live in a home of another fled diaspora, allows me to think through how the Sikh diaspora negotiated their sense of home after Partition. When combined with Martin and Mohanty's concept of homes as a place that keeps the Other out, I ask: what happens when the Other is let into the home and the Other is *you*? What is at stake when the "enemy" that was once kept out of your home is now living in *your* home and you are living in *their* home? I suggest that these overlapping losses, dwellings, and displacements results in an internalized mourning for the loss of self—further reifying the concept of home, for the diaspora, as engendering melancholy, the a deep emotion of sadness born out of the loss of identity and the loss of honour. I return to honour (*izzat*) later in this chapter, but for now I want to highlight how home engenders melancholia.

Melancholia, as I am conceptualizing it, is the feeling that remains when our home becomes a site of ruin or violence. More specifically, melancholia is identified through the *ruination* of the home. Freud argued that melancholia is an inner state of being and psychical condition generated out of the loss of a loved object who/that could not be grieved over. If mourning allows for grieving, this would result in overcoming the feeling of loss, and closure, through time passed. However, melancholia resists such closure (Navaro-Yashin 15). Peter

⁴ This is comparable to the agency of ghosts and ancestors (my Subaltern grandmother), which will be discussed in Chapter Two through the necklace, the Rani Harr.

Shwenger explains melancholia as a core of darkness that is found through "losing personality" (Shwenger 4). He analyzes Freud's death drive and reads it as the subject's instinct to return to an inanimate state (in death), which manifests what he calls "losing personality". Freud's description of melancholia is understood as an internalization of the lost object and through that internalization of pain, the loss becomes identified with one's self (9). When it comes to the South Asian diaspora, especially those that experienced Partition and have lost all their things, and their homes, through violence and war, their melancholia also becomes internalized—the loss felt is as a loss of self. This is to say that the process of violence produces the condition where home becomes a ruin and therefore becomes a site of loss and, in some cases, a location or memory one *does not want* to hold dear. However, for the South Asian diaspora, the promise of the object (home) is still there. The desire to keep the object in advance of its loss is something the displaced South Asian community—particularly the Sikh community—experienced *after* their dislocation into the newly created India. This is to say that the anticipation of loss is fueled by having previously experienced loss and in that lays a cruel desire surrounding the promise of home. To rephrase, the cruel desire of home is in the anxiety that surrounds the want for belonging despite the potential of loss.

When working through emotion, specifically melancholia, as the representation of the “unspeakable” aspects of home ruination, the process of instant abandonment becomes central. Discarding things and possessions, quickly and due to force or violence, shapes the conditions of loss and belonging. Homes carry with and in them, for example, the aspirations that individuals might want for themselves; these aspirations are often created out of a set of wider societal ideals. The ways in which we create our homes can reflect our desires to belong within society in distinct and individual ways. Miller gives a range of examples of these aspirations that take place

in and through the home: an immigrants' desire towards assimilation, a single woman's desire for an ideal partner, the desire to give a promising future to one's children (Miller 7). These aspirations, for diasporic communities, can be read as a yearning and longing for an ideal place or the promise of a better place that does not really exist. The failure to attain these promised places—that are underwritten by colonialism, whiteness, and patriarchy—is melancholy. As Miller states, "if home is where the heart is, then it is also where it is broken, torn and made whole in the flux of relationships, social and material" (15). To say home is also where the heart is broken we are, indeed, acknowledging that if the home is in ruins we must reorient aspirations and the promise of home.

In bringing together melancholia, home as emotion, and the ruination of home— I look to colonialism as a process of becoming attached to objects. In this chapter, spaces, homes, and environments are discussed as “things”—vibrant matter—that are laden with identity-making emotions. Colonialism, in this way, is a process of displacement that engenders an emotive desire for things, for return, and for belonging. I am proposing that the thingness of an object can be articulated through its unspeakability and that the thingness of houses, for the South Asian diaspora, can be read and accessed through the “unspeakable” language of melancholia. I look at homes as having a familiarity in their presence and as sites that tell us who we are and where we have been. Homes, as things, partake in our everyday lives and from their long-term alliance with us. Homes become "custodians of our memories" (Schwenger 3) and our emotions are attached to those memories. The relationship we have with things reveals our profound investment in them, which often carry with them "a melancholy in the very heart of comfort" (3). This is to say that objects have an evocative power to produce emotions through the act of perceiving the object *by* the subject. As explained by Schwenger, "this perception, always falling

short of full possession, gives rise to a melancholy that is felt by the subject and is ultimately *for* the subject. It is we who are to be lamented, and not the object that evokes this emotion in us without ever feeling it themselves"(2). To elaborate, objects do not speak in a written language but have a language in our perceptions; the object draws out perceptive language from us and creates an embodied experience. This language I speak of is in the unspeakability of the objects; the unspeakability is expressed through memory or emotion or affect (or a combination of these). In their very existence, objects can create a space that can provoke feeling (3). In understanding the use of emotion this way, what becomes clear is the loss that is incited when we read the house as an object that has the thingness of a home for the South Asian diaspora. If an object's thingness is only apparent in its absence, what is being implied is that the house has been lost in order for us to recognize its ability to be a home, and in this realization—for the displaced Indian population—leaves a deep sadness in its wake.

In what follows, I examine the ways in which memorialization of ruined homes—as understood alongside the history of Partition that led to the uprooting of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims—can be accessed through the feeling of melancholia for South Asian diaspora. I unpack the events of Partition and the unsettling rifts it left in India as a country and, through this event, a large part of its population was left in dislocation. I suggest that violent displacement under colonialism creates loss through forced removal from a place. In investigating the impact of this displacement, I follow a personal narrative of my great-grandfather, Bhag Singh, and his experience with loss of self and home through the event of Partition. This narrative stands as an example of how both "being home" and "not being home" (George 26) is particularly true for the Sikh diaspora my great-grandfather was a part of: the ways in which they resettled into India was coupled with the realization that they were foreigners living in their own country. These stories

of displacement were not only identity-making for great-grandfather but also impacted upon the identities of his family—including myself. Without Bhag Singh's experience of Partition, and my family's memorialization of that experience, I would not be living the life I live today. This is to say that this whole project (and chapter) revolves around the “unspeakable” ties among family members and asks how, in drawing attention to melancholia and loss, we are able to tell otherwise erased or obscured stories about home.

The Partition of India and Memorialization

There was not one Partition of India, but three related Partitions. The end of the British Raj resulted in the birth of two nations: India and Pakistan—an event that led to murderous riots, unspeakable violence, and masses of people losing lives and their homes. Ranabir Samaddar recounts Gyanendra Pandey's definitive account of Partition in *Remembering Partition* by illuminating the details of those events. During the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, both Muslim and Sikh families were forced out of their homes and fled to new dwellings, which were until then considered to be their “enemies” homes. Partition created a trauma that resulted in a sharp division between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The fifteen-month event resulted in unimaginable horrors that saw the death of half a million people. In the name of religion and patriotism, thousands of helpless women, children, and seniors were brutally killed through unspeakable atrocities (Das 20). Samadarr illustrates how Pandey breaks these events into components. The first Partition, Pandey notes, was geographic division that would produce a homeland for the Muslims of India. The Muslim League devised the homeland option just seven years before the 1947 Partition by formally proposing the establishment of separate states for the

Muslim-majority regions of northwest India and northeast India (Samaddar 92). This option quickly gathered momentum and led to the 1947 Partition. The second related Partition, as put forth by Pandey, was the splitting up of the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. This resulted in violence between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta and several thousand people were killed over four days. It was from here, that the violence of Partition, now ignited, spread to include many parts of northern India (Pandey 23). Finally, Pandey notes that the third related Partition was the massacres, mass displacement, and horrors people would have to live through for decades to come (Samaddar 93). These three conceptions of Partition are not easily separable.

India's Partition also designated the Independence of the Indian subcontinent from its British colonizers. As Pandey explains, "as a Partition, it shares something with the political outcomes that accompanied decolonisation" (Pandey 1). As a result, the relation between violence and community are linked to the establishment of political community (Samaddar 92). The outcome of genocidal violence marked the moment of rupture, where one regime ended and another began. The violence of Partition was not "industrialised slaughter" that was controlled from a distance, but a very direct "hand-to-hand" and "neighbour against neighbour" type of destruction (Pandey 46). The locations and acts of violence were often random, leaving the records and accounts inaccurate and sparse. Therefore, the relationship between memory and history and the study of such violence has always been an unsteady, for it is a part of India's history that has been largely silenced in Indian public culture.

Partition, as a subject, has been generally neglected— there have been no attempts to "memorialize Partition" through monuments, museums, or even public hearings and trials (Das 19). However, despite the lack of memorialization of Partition, there is something to be said for

the limitations memorials place on the narratives of victims. In this way, we can look at the *lack* of memorial as an opening to talk about what is at stake in remembering violence and critically question how memorials can mask individual struggles through promoting “official” histories commissioned by the State. Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj, for example, examines the ways in which forgetting is an important part of memory and how it causes individuals to remember by organizing disjointed facts (Raj 31). She looks at memory and forgetting as analytical categories that can be used understand the lives of Partition refugees in Delhi. She explains that memory is the presence of knowledge and forgetting is the erasure of that knowledge—which is a concept that is evident in the ways the Indian public and victims of dislocation dealt with the aftermath of Partition. It must therefore be recognized that families and communities who were dislocated by Partition had to remake themselves in their radically altered settings.

Conflict, dislocation, and Partition engendered new struggles, new fears to contend with, the rebuilding of trust and hope, in order to conceive new histories in a way that could preserve the population’s honour or *izzat*.⁵ To elaborate on the concept of honour or *izzat* for the newly located populations of India, I turn to Veena Das’s explanation: “the idea that life was a calculated performance and that one’s honour (*izzat*) had to be preserved by careful management of the narratives about one’s family in public spaces was, indeed, part of the rhetoric of life” (Das 81). In a way, preserving their *izzat* was an attempt to regain control of the narratives of their lives. What Das describes in her explanation is the mentality behind the lack of response to

⁵ In speaking of *Izzat*, I do acknowledge the ways in which “honour” for the victims of Partition resulted in unspeakable violence against Indian women. Partition was an event that saw the abduction of masses of women (both Hindu/Sikh and Muslim) by their rival counterparts, as a tool to “dishonour” each respective side. Women’s bodies were treated as sites that, in their purity, would reflect the honour of the nation. The national narrative of recovery of honour (in the recovery of women to their families post-Partition) would see to women “sacrificing” themselves after being recovered, or allowing themselves to be killed by their families for the honour of their country (Didur 10).

Partition; the lack of response is, for Das, as a reoccurring trope in Indian historiography that views trauma as "witness to some forgotten wound" (102). Sharon Rosenberg helps clarify these links between memorialization, memory, and narrating history in her work on the Montreal Massacre. She asks: "how will you live after the event, how will you live with the images and narration of the Massacre?" (Rosenberg 133). In asking these questions Rosenberg demonstrates that to capture the legacy of trauma—and for this study the legacy of the violence of Partition—it requires that the structure of the event, which is constantly evolving and changing, must be taken up and read. This is to say that the reading of such events is what will determine how “the event” is understood, which will result in its legacy of affecting lives (133). Put differently: in reading an event, we must regard not only what might be learned through its memorialization, but also how memories will affect our own actions (133). Furthermore, Rosenberg troubles concept of memorialization by investigating what bodies are ignored or left out from public memorials. For example, the memorialization of the Montreal Massacre, which is meant to critique violence against women and honour their lives, leaves out the missing and murdered indigenous women of Canada (133). Thus, this memorial that represents the fourteen women killed in 1989, becomes a symbol that seeks to represent all women who are subjected to violence at the hands of men, *despite* the fact that there are many bodies being left out of this representation. In this way, memorialization gives onus to social memories (the way the State wants us to remember an event) over individual or personal memories (the way we, ourselves, remember). In understanding and drawing attention to the potential problematic nature of public memorialization, I seek alternative ways to remember Partition in ways that do not undo the *izzat* of its victims. Through this analysis I turn back to those silent voices of Partitions and the ways

in which we can now read them as being part of a legacy that continues to filter through to (and affect) the generations that followed Partition.

Raj notes that amongst the three different generations that experienced different stages and moments of Partition and post-Partition, there are various understandings of what Partition is and was. These generations grew up in different periods and their family narratives are disjointed. At the same time, those who directly experienced Partition, often obscured their stories when passing them on to other generations by often sharing “new” or “different” memories of the events. As Pandey explains, these new memories did not often include Partition when they were retold: what emerged was the mentality that stated, "what is the point telling today's children about these things?...All that has nothing to do with their lives and their problems" (Pandey 16). From this, the story of Partition as told to the children and grandchildren of victims, becomes faded from shared stories. As previously mentioned, the voices of the victims of the violence of Partition are strikingly silent and many do not recount their experiences unless asked (Das 80). As well, the knowledge of Partition's trauma is not explicitly shared between parents and children—therefore the sharing of stories between family members becomes understood as silent practices (Raj 31). Raj explains that individuals do not want to remember, that families do not want to "recall the bad times" (36), and that many would rather avoid the stigma of being known as a refugee. However, the remembering that does happen, often takes on a quality of a “frozen slide” and storytelling would therefore include the details of everyday life: stories of neighbourly gossip, how fresh the fruit used to be in their old homeland, or how they missed the shopping at their neighbourhood bazaar (Das 80). In this way, a type of recovery to their *izzat* is being attempted in the ways that brings the focus back to the life experienced prior to displacement and, in this, *forgetting* the homes that were lost and the

violence that occurred. Raj, in her reference to David Lowenthal, further elucidates to this notion in stating, "[a]n important condition of remembering is that we should be able to forget" (30).

In this attempt to forget and remake a future, what are produced are boundaries between generations. This is illustrated in the ways in which descendants of the refugees do not realize that when their refugee family members had left the Pakistan side to come to India, they had assumed the move was temporary (39). There is a lack of understanding, by the later generations, on how the perceived impermanence of the migration and what difficulties were faced when the refugees realized they were, indeed, not going back home. What resulted was a deep feeling of nostalgia and a desire to see their homes one last time, which they could not do, leaving many not wanting to speak about Partition at all (39). Despite wanting to forget, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims were all still defined by the event of Partition; they were cast, too, as *distinctively individual* groups that stood separate from one another. This definition of divided entities (as opposed to a collective Indian identity) acts as a constant reminder of the traumas of Partition, making it more difficult to forget and causing the deep-seated melancholia in its wake. Moreover, and in specific reference to the Sikh population, the homeland of Punjab was lost and therefore, as a political community, they have never been able to forget what they suffered in Partition—leaving them as perpetual minorities (17).

The remembering and forgetting of Partition, as well as the absence of memorials, illuminates the tensions that underwrite home, nation, and place. From the examples noted above, it becomes apparent that these complex displacements, coupled with the paradoxical workings of remembering and forgetting, reveal why there are not many interviews or first person accounts about Partition. While there is a lack of first-hand retellings of Partition, this

history it is often taken up within creative works and academic criticism. This is to say that the lack of public memorials and firsthand accounts of Partition in India allows us to ask where, exactly, these memories reside? The answer lies in the numerous works that speak to Partition through poetry, novels, films, music, visual art works, short stories, and spoken narratives. I, too, seek alternative avenues for memorialization through the physical objects and houses left behind. In investigating these places we are able to find the link between the violent loss of the home, for the South Asian diaspora, and memories, identity formation. To borrow from Rosenberg's questioning of memorials and the politics of memory, I ask: If memorials are thought of as practices that foster the relaying of traumatic awakenings for the refugees of Partition (that invoke unwanted memories), how can we access memories from that event in a way that allows following generations to understand their ancestor's melancholia while also preserving the *izzat* of their families? How can we honour the silent experiences of trauma in way that does not continue to re-traumatize? Through investigating how the thingness of home incites deep feelings of melancholia, what I propose is this: the home, itself, becomes a site of memorialization for Partition refugees. As I discussed previously in the construction of the diasporic home, in their relocation, these diasporic communities are Othered within their own homes—which acts as a constant reminder of their past lives. This is to say that, yes, a rupture occurred, but a recovery of a different kind of national past is possible through the act of remembering, nostalgia, and storytelling of the everyday. The melancholia that is shared and felt by those that experienced Partition, if understood through the paradoxical workings of forgetting and remembering, allows later generations to grapple with the trauma their ancestors endured

and notice that—as the children and grandchildren of Partition—these difficult histories led to their current place in life.⁶

Melancholic Homes

To illustrate the ways melancholia can be used as a language—and underscore the unspeakability of homes—I look to Pandey. He argues that violence is the language that writes the history of Partition. He further suggests that the history of Partition violence and community inform each other with goal of survival and reparation. This was seen in the way people bound together in their struggle and fight to cope, survive, and to rebuild. What was left behind from these events is a tumultuous relationship on two sides of the Partition border. Pandey claims that on the one hand there is "deep resentment and animosity, and the most militant of nationalisms Pakistani against Indian, and Indian against Pakistani, now backed up by nuclear weapons; on the other, a considerable sense of nostalgia, frequently articulated in the view that this was a Partition of siblings that should never have occurred" (Pandey 2). This is to say that there is a deep sense of emotion that is incited in remembering Partition: on the one hand, there is loss and anger, and on the other hand, there is nostalgia for a homeland that now belongs to the other. These deep feelings allow us to think about how, Steve Pile suggests, the body is a site for feeling and experience. More specifically, although experiences, memories, nostalgia are circulated socially, they can be located in the body and through the relationships between different bodies (Pile 11). Pile explains that there are experiences behind emotions that take on social forms of expression. Drawing on personal narratives, told after Partition, while honouring

⁶ To clarify, and as to be discussed in Chapter Two, understanding trauma and *knowing* trauma are not to be conflated. The generations that followed the refugees of Partition cannot know the experience of their uprooted family members. However, I am suggesting that it is through learning the deep-rooted sadness that is invoked in remembering and forgetting that a new understanding of Partition can occur.

that the ways in which the South Asian diaspora are remembering and forgetting, produces an alternative space to understand the making and meaning of home. It is through the memories of houses—as homes—that the emotional work of the object is illuminated. This remembering of unspeakable histories is what I propose is told through the emotive energies that are dispelled from the ruins of homes left over from the violence of Partition. In an attempt to break these reoccurring arguments while not disrupting the *izzat* of the survivors of Partition, I turn to the home and what stories remain amongst the ruins.

In what follows I look to what ruins and lost homes, and the experience of those who had to live amongst them, have to offer in giving a voice to those that were silenced through the ordeal. I am seeking, then, to give a voice to those who had to give up their *izzat* to survive. Through retelling Partition in a way that accesses *memories* as opposed to memorializations, the unspeakability of homes in the diaspora is revealed through melancholia. Situating myself as an Indian global nomad and invoking the methodology of storytelling, I shall refer to my own familial history to explore the ways in which homing and belonging can evolve over time and through generations. Furthermore, through storytelling, what I illustrate is how the generations that did not experience Partition directly can learn what this event meant to their ancestors by attempting to understand their melancholia. Recollecting memories that are linked to narratives and storytelling can become a powerful way to convey histories of the past when there *is* nothing left but memories. Therefore, narration can be perceived as having a means to constructing and maintaining a sense of identity. Through remembering stories, we can link the past, present, and future—allowing us to reflect on our own experiences while determining conflicts and events in the past (Hecht 129). As Hecht states, "autobiographical narration is also regarded as a means of defining and articulating our notion of society and history, as they often include social and

historical information about people and events that goes beyond the subjective experience of the narrator" (129). Through storytelling I am able to share the narrative of my great-grandfather, Bhag Singh Koli, and how the notion of home, identity, and displacement can be uncovered through the lens of material culture. This project and story, ultimately, is centered around family ties and connections to the past through objects passed on over generations, therefore it is only appropriate that I use this ethnographic moment about my *own* family to focus on artefacts of destruction, caused by Partition, and the residual effects that linger in the aftermath of war or violence.

Narratives of a Lost Home

Bhag Singh Kohli grew up as an orphan in colonial India in a large village called Adiala, which is a place that now exists near modern-day Islamabad, Pakistan. He was the second oldest of six siblings who were left parentless after his mother and father lost their lives to illness, leaving the children in poverty. Out of the siblings, Bhag was the most industrious and inclined to create what Georgis would call a "better story" for himself and his family. Upon reaching early adulthood, Bhag was hired by a local, wealthy landlord who owned a vast amount of agricultural property. He was hired to manage the labour force of the properties and over a period of time created his own pool of wealth. As he went on to own his own properties, becoming a landlord himself, his house became his home—filled with objects and materials that incited feelings of belonging. All of his possessions, from utensils and plates to furniture, had the family name engraved in it, marking it as owned property. These objects, as bearing emblems of the family name, were clearly linguistically and symbolically involved in the making of Bhag's—and

Bhag's family—sense of identity (Navaro-Yashin 9). This practice of engraving the family name into one's possessions was a common occurrence that was meant to keep the family's things from mixing with their neighbour's things. It could be argued, according to Navaro-Yashin, that the act of engraving these objects showed that they generated feelings of identity, ownership, and belonging.

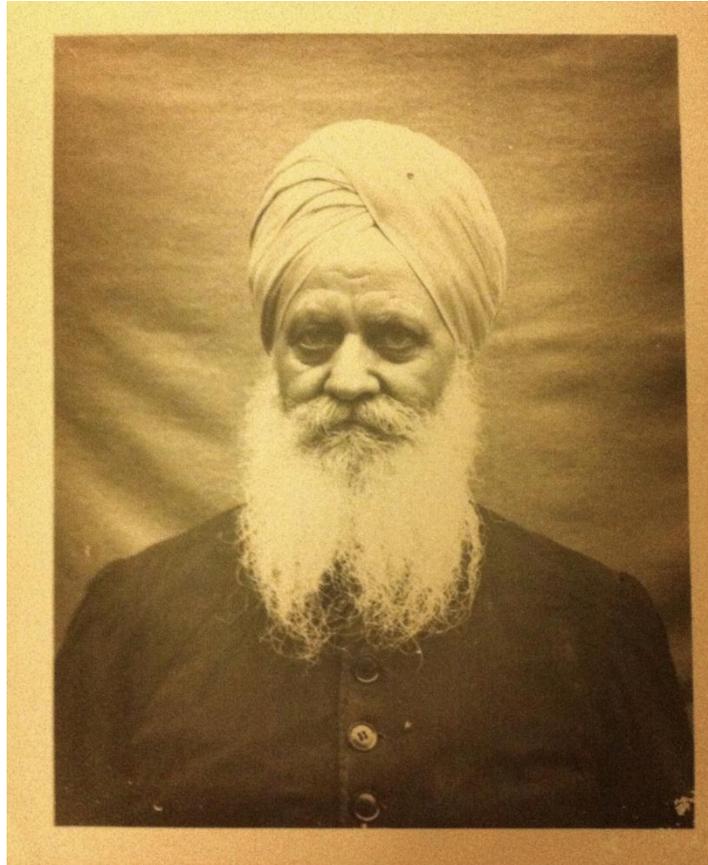
Through the violent event of Partition upon India's independence from its British colonizers, Bhag's family were forced out of their homes and into the newly created India—abandoning their lives and possessions and leaving stability behind. Bhag forcefully resisted the idea of being displaced because of Partition and despite his family crossing the border to the reformed India, Bhag refused to migrate. For Bhag, having risen from poverty into owning property, his “non-human entities,” his possessions and objects, represented his achievements and status. Like many of the other refugees of Partition, the idea of losing one's accumulation of success and status, was deeply unsettling. Rather than to leave them behind, Bhag would instead risk the looming threat of violence that was headed his way and stay in Adiala. His claim was that even if India divided into two countries he would continue living in the newly created Islamic Republic of Pakistan and adopt it as a country. It was a hope that, perhaps, was born out of the initial temporality of the migration. As I previously discussed, most refugees of Partition did not realize that the move was actually permanent. However, despite his sentiments, he found that he could not continue to stay after the massacres of Partition grew into a greater more alarming possibility, as all non-Muslims were being displaced out of Pakistan while Muslims were being forced out of India.

Bhag left, deserting all his possessions with the exception of a handgun and money strapped across his body, and walked across the border. That the only object he brought with him was his handgun was not only because of its use for protection. In bringing the gun with him, Bhag was making an active choice to survive in his attempt to make it across the border into perceived safety. It is important to note that the same handgun that was once used as a symbol of prestige in owning and protecting one's own property, was now an object of violence and survival. This gun would later be passed down to my father who would once again use it as an object of survival during the 1984 Hindu/Sikh riots in New Delhi (an event, as discussed in Chapter Three, that unfolded because of the residual tensions of the unsettled Punjabi population in post-Partition India—a population that never lost the status of being outsiders to the country and who continuously struggled to find “home”). It would also be the object, notably, that made my great-grandfather valuable to the throngs of caravans of Sikhs that were escaping to India and allowed him to join them in case there was a confrontation with those who were crossing over to the Pakistan side.

When Bhag arrived in India, after suffering through the violence of crossing the border on foot, he made a declaration that he would never return to his home in Adiala. It was unclear whether those homes would still be standing when (and if) he attempted to return. Bhag settled in Delhi, where many of the Sikhs from same community in Adiala and Rawalpindi relocated to recreate the same Punjabi village on the India side. However, the norm that accompanied being a Sikh in Adiala shifted; the community, now in a Hindu majority setting, was marginalized. They were now living in the village with members of a different community that were construed as “the enemy.” As previously mentioned, this contributed to what would be a deep sense of melancholia through the loss of *izzat* that comes with living in a stranger's home. This is to say

that the strangers they were keeping out of their houses, up until that point (as previously discussed in reference to Martin and Mohanty), were now living in their homes and vice versa. The Other that had been shut out of the home were living in each other's home and as a result each were accessing what was left behind by the other community—their objects. The Sikh community was significantly made up of refugees who, having been dispossessed of their own belongings, found themselves in a new space and political contingency, surrounded by the properties and belongings of another community (Navaro-Yashin 3). Their home space could therefore act both as a spatial resource and constraint, and affected those individuals' emotional lives in different ways (Hockey 138).

What remained was the memory of accountability to their lost community in their recent past. Relations with their past community persisted through dealing with the idea of their abandoned properties, spaces, and belongings (Navaro-Yashin 2). Even years after Partition, the Sikh community in India continued to refer to things, especially land and houses belonging to them on the Pakistani side, as India, ethnicizing and personifying the properties which they used (2). They were unable let go of the idea of their past dwellings as their home and they continued to treat their new environment as temporary despite its permanency (an initial mentality that they were never able to undo). They were naming the *feeling* that their environment inflicted upon them: it was the melancholy experienced via the everyday presence of objects belonging of those living in India who were not forced out of their homes. In this sense, what they felt was a loss of a sense of moral integrity or *izzat* (16).



Bhag Singh Koli

The residual effects of such a displacement continued to inform the identities of Bhag's family, immediate and generations later, through the ways in which their homes incited emotional memories of a life no longer lived. I remember my father telling me, in the midst of the post-9/11 induced economic recession (which result in major financial difficulties that had greatly affected the well-being of our family), that if Partition had never occurred and if our family was still on "the Pakistan side" and had still owned the property and wealth acquired by Bhag, we would have been very financially privileged and thus not be facing the difficulties we had at that moment. The remembering, demonstrates the forgetting as a part of memory, as put forth by Raj. Here my father specifically chose to remember, and share, the successes and

wealth of pre-Partition India, as opposed to the traumas of displacement. This was also the way the story of Partition had been told to my father by his family (as he was a year old when Partition occurred), and how the story was then told to my sister and I. However, in preserving their *izzat*, my grandparents (the daughter and son-in-law of Bhag) only nostalgically reminisced the happy times in Adiala; they created a boundary between knowing and not knowing the traumas of Partitions amid them and the generations to follow, in the same way Raj explained many refugees did to avoid the stigma of their post-Partition status. This story stands as a small example of how those melancholic emotions were still evident in the ways both my father and I, despite being geographically and generationally away from Bhag's experiences, were only able to understand our family's experience of Partition through remembering by forgetting.

Bhag stayed in India, longing but never returning, to his home in Pakistan. After his death about twenty years after Partition, Bhag's younger brother Methab returned to Adiala seeking his old home and roots and to see his family home one last time—a desire many Partition refugees longed for. Upon finding his old family home, in which he lived with Bhag, Methab found it to be occupied by a young Pakistani family. This once again was not a rare occurrence, for just as the Sikhs had appropriated the abandoned homes and communities left behind the Muslims in India, the same event was happening in Pakistan. Yet, in Methab's case, the family acknowledged his past ownership and his prior life in their dwelling and warmly invited him in. The family invited him to stay for dinner and exchanged their familiar stories of displacement with one another that suddenly transported Methab back in time to a life that he thought he no longer had access to. His Sikh community that had fled to India always referred to Adiala as home, so for Methab, to return to this place was like interacting with a ghost—a memory of a not so distant past. However, as Methab drank from a cup that the family had served him with, he

noticed something: his family's name, Bhag's name, was engraved into the cup's lip. He began to notice that the plate, on which his dinner was served, his utensils, all the objects in the room, had Bhag's name on it. He asked the Pakistani family if they knew what those markings were, and when they explained that they could not read *Gurmukhi* (the Punjabi-based script that Bhag's name was written in), Methab told them the origins of all those possessions. The Pakistani family, demonstrating their desire to preserve their own *izzat*, asked him to take all of these objects with him when he left. They claimed that, after all, these things were his family's things to begin with. Or perhaps, as I speculate, they might have also felt the deep melancholia of living in a dwelling left behind by a family that faced the same trauma they had. However, as Methab looked around at these artefacts of his family's past life, objects of melancholia, he said no. He would not take them with him and would leave everything behind, once again, and return to India.

Foreigners at Home

What compelled Methab to leave everything, all of the familiarities of home that he had longed for, behind? We may never have a solid answer to this question, but we can look to the ways in which human relations with objects and homes change and determine the conditions that resulted in Methab's decision. Miller explains that studying the way in which people interact with material culture of the home can lead to insights about the societies in which they exist. He suggests, then, that people play out their relationships and experiences through that material culture (Miller 15). There is a wide range of ways in which things can mean something to people and those meanings can change with interpretations and are in a constant flux. As David

Fontijn explains, "transformations can take place when objects change ownership and *travel*, though shifts in meaning are just as likely to happen when objects stay where they are (Fontijn 183). For example, a distinction can be made between items that build communal identities and personal identities (189). We can look at the structure of the home, and the things in it, as being part of a family identity. And further still, the architecture and material culture of a house can be understood as being part of a neighborhood community and contributing to the general development of civil society—thus serving as part of a communal identity. Objects that have names engrained in them (like Bhag's objects), household items, jewelry, things that lay against the skin, can be seen as contributing to personal identities. Furthermore, some of these items are sacred objects that are viewed as embodying values of that society and are objects that should not be exchanged and are to be kept (190). We can therefore look to the home through its processes—embellishing, furnishing, and moving—and how these processes reveal aspirations held by people who engage in that homing relationship. In this way, we can also explore the mobility of home and how moving one's notion of home through space and time aids in the identification processes of post-colonial bodies. Jean-Sebastien Marcoux argues that the things people take with them when they move are "at the heart of the constitution of a memory which often resists displacements" (Marcoux 70). Further, the memories comprised throughout the process of displacement are frequently altered and renovated; this forces us to study the relationship between people and things, and consequently the relationship between people and places (70).

In understanding the relationship between the South Asian diaspora and their things we must, once again, recognize that in their moment of displacement they were unable to take most of their things with them. They did not know the permanency of their move nor did they have the

luxury of choosing what items they would prefer to take. The refugees of Partition mourned the loss of their things and home and would often demonstrate this by a constant nostalgic retelling of their past dwellings. Could we look at this rupture as a way to ponder Methab's decision to leave everything behind a second time? Was the melancholia too deep to bring back reminders of their past lives to his family's new lives? In abandoning those engraved objects, perhaps what is being demonstrated is the internal realization that his home was lost and he had no home to return to. I say this with Hua's discussion of citizenship and belonging in mind: "the stranger is always in proximity" (Hua 50). This is to say that the stranger or foreigner does not just live close to us but also within us. Hua explains that the stranger is not simply those who are unknown in our homes, but those who in their very existence are already recognized as not belonging (50). Methab was part of a diaspora that were forced from their homes into a new country where there was no escaping "foreignness," even within their own homes. They were strangers to their past homes and strangers in their new homes.

The obvious change in India's geography resulted in the relocated Sikh population not being considered a part of their new nation—by both themselves and by those who were already residing in India. Methab was part of a population that was forced from one side of a country to another, but in the deletion of Adiala as being part of India, this population became foreigners in their own country. In a way, the presence of "foreigners at home" worked to solidify the newly formed India's sense of national "self" (Gelder 179). This is to say that the refugee Sikh population that settled into various parts of India were suddenly a minority in their own communities—a notion that was not lost on the Hindu-majority population of India. When thinking through the concept of "foreigners at home," I bring together Kavita Daiya and Julia Kristeva. In her text in *Strangers to Ourselves* Kristeva works through the tensions between

“union” and “separation” through “reconciliation” and the impossibility of reconciliation (179) while Kavita Daiya's work in *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India* allows me to think about these tension in relation to Partition.

Through Partition, the boundaries that would have previously aided in distinguishing one region from the other no longer existed and what results is a tension that comes from detangling what is one's “home” from what is not one's “home” (and what is foreign and strange) (Kristeva, 199). Kristeva claims that is not nation or race that is “foreign” but that we all carry foreignness within ourselves—hence, we are strangers to ourselves (Kristeva 181). In admitting that the stranger lives *within* us, what is being demonstrated is that we are strangers amongst strangers. Kristeva notes that the “foreigner” arrives when our consciousness of difference arises and they disappear when we recognize ourselves as foreigners ourselves (Kristeva 1). The foreigner embodies unbelonging without roots to a time, place, or love (Hua 51). I couple this notion with Daiya's research, as she traces the limitations of citizenship and belonging for refugees and states, “there was no place like home, even if home no longer existed” (Daiya 185). Daiya's thinking speaks to the Partition refugee's fantasy of “returning home” (185) while troubling the notion of “home” for the victims of Partition through the recognition of the disappearance of the material home and, at the same time, acknowledging the refugee's perpetual *desire* to return home. Through this we can see how the foreigner, particularly the refugees of Partition, not only experience nostalgia but also melancholia for having lost their homeland (and, for some, they have also “lost paradise”) (Hua 51). This is to say that if the displaced Sikh population could not see the newly formed India as home, and therefore viewed it as a foreign or strange location, they themselves became strangers to themselves—recognizing the “otherness” within themselves within their new “strange” environment. To elucidate, again, when homes were destroyed in the

massacres of Partition, what was left was ruins. When the displaced populations began to move into the foreign and strange ruins of the others (who were as identified “foreigners” themselves), it marked the end of their homes as a cherished possession. Even if they were able to rebuild and live in the environments they had appropriated, it would no longer be home—or at least would not feel like home again for generations to come. Kristeva writes that the foreigner feels this melancholia because of an inability to move past the abandoned period of time; they can never recover (Kristeva 9). She also touches on the conversation of the Other being you, as I discussed earlier in relation to homing for the diaspora, by claiming that it is not simply about "accepting the Other, but being in his place" (13).

To couple Kristeva with the experiences of the refugees of Partition, what becomes apparent is this: there *is* a recognition of being a foreigner *within* themselves for the South Asian diaspora, and this is evident in the ways they remember Partition by also forgetting. In doing this, they name the deep melancholia that results from losing homes, country, status, and *izzat*. For the Sikh refugees of Partition, the element of foreignness is not diminished by merely acknowledging foreignness within themselves; it is perpetually enforced that they are outsiders by their new surrounding neighbours and country. I suggest that although there may never be a recovery for the lost past, there can be a recovery in the way later generations understand their ancestor's past—specifically through noticing the thingness that incited by homes of the refugees. This is to re-emphasize that, in this chapter, objects of houses are used as a vessel that carries forth the forgotten melancholia of the victims of Partition and in doing so, acts as alternative way of remembering Partition while preserving the *izzat* of the victims.

To conclude, homes, spaces and environments have an ability incite emotions that induce melancholia, belonging, and unbelonging for the South Asian diaspora who experienced the

trauma of India's Partition. Filled with objects and being an object itself, houses and dwellings are things that are known to us as homes. They are vibrant matter that have a familiarity in their presence and tell us who we are and where we have been. However, for diasporic communities, the notion of home has lasting feelings of unbelonging through the ways they are forced to recognize the Other in themselves. The Sikh population that resettled in India post-Partition, began living life as calculated performance through the idea that their honour was now in their own hands and they had to have control over their own narratives. This reiterates, again, why storytelling is an important part of recovery for those who have faced past traumas. What is born from this is a continuous silence on the traumas of Partition, which attempts to preserve their honour by forgetting the past in order to re-imagine a better future. Addressing and utilizing the combined theories put forth by Hua, Navaro-Yashin, Pandey, Das, Kristeva, and Raj, I am arguing that there is a space for post-Partition generations to understand the untold history violence and trauma of the refugees of Partition through the analysis of the relationship between humans and objects as it pertains to diasporic subjects and the ways in which their homes and possessions tell narratives that are laden with melancholia. This is why understanding the emotive energies that are dispelled from objects, homes and spaces are imperative: because it breaks silences while preserving the *izzat* of those people.

Chapter 3

The Rani Harr and the Memory of the Subaltern Woman

Home is a geography that contains memories and emotions. These memories and emotions, for many in the South Asian diaspora, are linked to displacement, the histories of Partition and conflict, and colonial exile. The memories and emotions that also emerge for the separate, yet connected, identities of the Indian global nomad—those South Asian communities, as I mentioned in my introduction, who have spent their developmental years away from India and are in many ways geographically detached from Indian cultures and communities. Home, then, is not solely a material geography but also concept and feeling. Home is understood in this project as where one's identity is rooted and where one negotiates belonging and unbelonging. In this chapter I begin to think through and discuss the ways in which colonialism is a process of becoming attached to moveable objects that represent, or hold in them feelings of, home, nation, and location. I look to these objects—specifically my grandmother's wedding necklace, the Rani Haar⁷—and consider how it is an artefact that transmits memories. These memories contribute to the identification process of not only the Indian nomad, but of the subaltern woman as well, which draws attention to the gendered workings of recalling the past through moveable objects. These memories are also informed by the intergenerational connections between different family members. Keeping in mind the different ways history and memory shape identity formation, I turn to narratives and the “right to narrate” as a way of accessing memories that connect the

⁷ The Rani Harr is a “standard” item that different families and communities cherish, hold on to, and discard differentially. The fact that my family's Rani Harr is still intact demonstrates a specific generational decision to keep it as a whole piece. It is also demonstrative of the class privilege my family had, for some families have their Harr broken up into pieces or melted down in order to create or sell new jewelry. Selling family heirlooms and jewelry was sometimes an act of necessity to survive, therefore it is significant to note that my family's Harr still exists in its entirety.

object discussed in this chapter to the question of home and belonging. More specifically, I use the “right to narrate” as a way to illuminate the narrative work of objects, which is to say that objects can tell a different, less well-known, story. In using personal narration, a space for accessing those otherwise unknown stories is possible.

Gayatri Spivak claims that, historically, it has always been the powerful and privileged that have been able to speak and share their experiences, which are recognized as forms of legitimate and documented histories (Spivak 6). The marginalization and erasure of oppressed histories is revealing, especially in the ways certain bodies are considered worthy of representation over others. Bruno Latour explains that the human way of being is "representation" (Miller 63). While linking this idea to artefacts and objects we must notice how objects, after all, are representational in the sense that they do not explicitly speak a language, but are symbolically representational. Therefore they are oftentimes used to represent other objects by “speaking” on their behalf in their physical form. This being said, the objects discussed in this chapter and project do not speak on behalf of anyone; rather they are exposed for being vibrant and extraordinary “things” that can carry forth representations of narratives and stories that would otherwise be silenced. As an alternative way of teasing out excluded experiences of the unrepresented, namely the subaltern woman, I look at objects and their “thing-power” as they travel through time and location. This is to say that through the use of memory, I look to uncover the Rani Harr's *thingness* as the ability to connect stories back to familial ties and therefore home.

I read these themes of home, memory, and moveable objects, as an Indian nomad who has not faced the traumas of colonization like my subaltern grandmother before me, but who falls into contemporary definitions and discourses of a postcolonial "hybrid" identity. My location as

a nomadic subject illuminates the tensions that emerge from different and overlapping processes of displacement and colonialism. In positioning Indian global nomads as postcolonial subjects, the links between past and present, and the ways in which objects are embedded with difficult histories, can be highlighted. As noted by Homi Bhabha, postcoloniality assumes a relationship of continuity rather than rupture between the era of colonialism and the contemporary period; he refers to this as "the on-going colonial present" (Moore-Gilbert 114). This understanding of postcoloniality recognizes that the effects of colonization continue to resonate and cannot be "erased" or situated in the past. With this continuity in mind, the subject of the nomad extends into existing notions of postcoloniality. However, the Indian nomad is at a generational distance from their ancestors' experience of colonial trauma. For the violence of displacement—which is rooted in loss and upheaval, conflict and war—is something that the Indian nomad is not forced to experience. Indian nomads do not experience colonial displacement directly, yet are part of the continuing conversations on postcoloniality and displacement.

In their relationships with moveable objects and family heirlooms—wherein affective memories are being circulated—Indian global nomads do, however, play a part in connecting the past and the present. The memories of these objects, I argue, are accessed through genealogical connections and intergenerational stories. The same objects I speak about in this project as having transmittable memories, I contest, cannot do so if freed from their ethnographic ties and are reclassified as "art" in a Western context (Myers 10).⁸ The relocation of materials and material culture insists on an understanding that value cannot be simply defined and is engrossed in various routes of exchange, display, and storage (12). In the context of familial heirlooms, a

⁸ I acknowledge the conflict of conversation on whether Indian nomads, as hybrid subjects and therefore in a paradoxically dependant relationship between colonizer and colonized, are in fact separated from being in a "Western" context. I address this conflict in the conclusion chapter.

genealogical link is used as a space to communicate, but while keeping in mind the complexity of such relationships. As Spivak explains in her discussion of the gendered subaltern, communication between daughters and mothers, and between grand-daughters and grandmothers, is difficult. Language, location, and time create barriers that are difficult to penetrate (Spivak 7). With these barriers in mind, the portability of objects and materiality become a non-linguistically based route to admitting the excluded histories of the gendered subaltern that dwell in the space of memories.

Materiality is not just the value of an object. The value, for the most part, exists in the tangible processes of human's interactions with things (Hockey, 138). Humans are as material as the objects they make and are also moulded by the supposedly "dead matter" that they are surrounded by (138). As stated by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, "things also tell us who we are, not in words, but by embodying our intentions. In our everyday traffic of existence, we can also learn about ourselves from objects, almost as much as from people" (138). Objects and material agency foster powers that raise hope, induce loss and sadness, create fear, and happiness—amongst other human-based senses and emotions. Here Latour's term "actant," is useful. Actant refers to an either human or non-human source of action; it something that has an ability to make a difference or an effect. As actants, objects have a vibrancy that can alter a course of events (Bennett viii). It can be argued that the real reason people are halted or affected by objects is because of their humanity—or the cultural meanings behind the materials. However, this is only to consider *objects* and not an object's *thingness*—I say this referring to Bill Brown's thing theory where he explains that objects are understood by their human subjects as meaningful, which allows for them to be used as facts and sites that have solid identifiers; the *thingness* of an object, on the other hand, can be described, as the object's purpose or reason.

The *thingness* of an object acts as a translation that human subjects have with objects. This is not to deny human power but to see human power itself as a type of thing-power (10). As Jane Bennett explains, humans, after all, are composed of assorted material pieces (the minerals in our bones, the metal in our blood), but we oftentimes do not consider them as self-organizing actants that are not under the direction of a non-material entity (mind or soul) (10). These tensions—between human agency and the narratives that objects hold—are highlighted throughout this chapter in order to draw attention to the on-going conversations that work through the legitimacy of object agency and the effectiveness of thing-power and how heirlooms open up ways to access memories of silenced colonial identities.

In this chapter a very specific type of object-subject relationship is being addressed in the form of heirlooms. Heirlooms are symbolically heavy with cultural meaning and are collected as prized ancestral relics (Myers 9). Annette Weiner describes how the heaviness or "denseness" of such objects is created through ancestral histories, the object's association with its "owner," secrecy, sadness, and sacredness. Artefacts are highly prized as "inalienable possessions"; they are things that cannot be replaced by any other object (9). The individual or group create the value in objects, and engender them as commodities or treasures. Additionally, in this chapter, the value of the object emerges because it is understood as something that aids in constructing cultural identities and intergenerational ties. In the traditional sense, objects and art objects are used to construct or deny identity and cultural difference. They are used to address questions about local identities, globalization, and commodities—which can be divulged through the genealogical histories of heirlooms (Myers, 4). Heirlooms and objects are also exchanged, passed around, and passed on—and they are often understood as "replacements"(Weiner 13). More specifically, if heirlooms are tied to familial histories they can be read as replacements to

memories. As identity-bearing objects, that hold memories, heirlooms become what Weiner describes as "keeping-while-giving" (13). The residual effects of the individual's experience are intermingled with the heirloom's thingness as it is passed along. Therefore, the materiality of everyday objects and their survival across time and location illuminates a particular relationship between human lives, memories, experiences, and culture.

The exchanging of heirlooms, or their "gifting" from one person to another, stands as an example of a special human-object relationship. This exceptional relationship between humans and an heirloom is demonstrated when "material" aspects are played down, with their thingness lying at the core of that relationship (4). While humans have a range of experiences with and through the objects that surround them, the significance of the relationship becomes particularly meaningful because many objects will "out-live" humans and therefore become vital pieces in the puzzle of recollecting memories. Taking into consideration the conversation above, and thinking about the ways in which many objects can, in fact, out-live humans—remaining as cherished pieces of memory, or "replacements"—inalienable objects such as heirlooms can remain as sites of colonial trauma and memory for colonial and postcolonial peoples.

The specific portable object I discuss in this chapter acts as a marker of identity; it is a wedding necklace known as the Rani Haar. In terms of identity formation, and drawing on Gayatri Spivak's work, I will be reading this object in relation to South Asian identities who, in postcolonial contexts, are connected to colonial powers and discourses. More specifically, I argue that that the question of survival can be understood through discussing how objects and artefacts can be linked to trauma and displacement; it is specifically the memories surrounding the affective object that will uncover some of the unspoken and unsaid complexities of displacement. In order for us to recognize the difficulties of those identities, such as the subaltern

woman—whose reality is expressed, albeit silently, from sites of trauma and injury—we must pay attention to personal and individual narratives, rather than solely relying on institutional dialogues (Georgis, 174). This reiterates the notion of official histories being representative of those in power and excluded the stories of struggle of the oppressed. In order to access these untold narratives through heirlooms and objects, I suggest that memory is voice-giving. Put differently, memory gives voice to the object.

Considering Memory

In "Hearing the Better Story" Dina Georgis closely analyses how we experience and learn from trauma narratives. She refers to such scholars as Wendy Brown and her work "In Politics Out of History," where Brown explains that, "the ills of our present will not happen by more policy changes but by cultural and political transformations that address the question of how we invoke the memories of people in the present. Memory, in other words, has to be considered for political recovery" (174). This chapter emphasizes the validity of memory, as it relates to material culture and objects, in order to uncover some of the otherwise unheard voices of colonial trauma. Memory, differently put, is being used as the representation of the "unspeakability" of heirlooms; it is the "thing" that exists in the gap between language and reality—especially when it comes to unveiling the suffering of colonialism.

When speaking specifically on racial memories Toni Morrison's vivid dialogue on writing black histories is useful. Morrison explains that narratives that retold the brutality of slavery, and "slave stories" of violence, had great popularity amongst white readers, despite the initial received hostility from some of the white population (Morrison 88). Black writers became

the persuaders, to the readers, to reveal slavery as evil—knowing that these stories of violence would, perhaps, elicit abolitionist activities among the white population. In using their own lives to reveal the terrors of slavery black writers exposed their motives for exerting efforts to tell these stories. In knowing the severe consequences of teaching a slave to read and write, these writers understood literacy and language as power (89). Understanding literacy, memory, and narratives as power, and linking this power to the task of retelling racial histories, complicates how “legitimate histories” are conveyed. More specifically, Morrison allows us to think about how counter-narratives undermine white supremacist histories. In my research, I use Morrison’s understanding of narrative to think about how non-human “things” are “readable” despite their “unspeakability.” Of course, I am not conflating slaves and objects. Rather I am highlighting the power of counter-narratives that emerge from sites and voices that are otherwise silenced. Objects do not speak in a written language but, in their very existence, they can create a space and incite us to return to forgotten memories. This calls to mind Latour's conversation on the gap between "words and the world" which draws attention to the fissure that exists between language and nature (Latour 24). Latour suggests that words are just objects and objects are what exist within that gap. If objects are in the space between language and nature, I suggest, that memory, as it attaches to objects, also dwells within that space. With this in mind, unrepresentable or silenced narratives of trauma, can be given a voice within the realm of memories.

In terms of racial histories, reading memories becomes the route through which we can decipher between, Morrison notes, "fact and truth": here she asks us to distinguish between what is officially accepted as a part of history and the actual reality of the daily horrors experienced. The voices lost in upheaval and violence can, once again, be found in the memories some objects hold and emit. In saying this, I want to think through how these postcolonial generational ties

and ruptures, as experienced by the global nomad, can be understood not simply through human experiences, but also through the ways in which objects and humans, together, reframe memory and memory making. Spivak's work, if coupled with memory, trauma and thing theory, opens up a way to think about how moveable objects stand-in for unspeaking subjects—thus necessarily unsettling the silence of the subaltern yet also forcing us to think about the gendered workings of memory, voice, and knowledge.

The Subaltern Woman

My analysis of the wedding necklace, the Rani Harr, speaks to Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman and Dina Georgis' analysis of Spivak's insights. The subaltern woman, the intended wearer of the moveable object, demonstrates how gender permeates objects. Spivak argues that colonialism has restricted the voice of the subaltern woman and thus she cannot know and speak about the conditions of her subjugation. The subaltern, according to Spivak, is not just another word for the "oppressed." Rather, she claims that, in postcolonial terms, the subaltern are those who have limited or no access to cultural imperialism and are existing in a space of difference (Spivak 1992). She explains that within the construction of the subaltern the significance of "color" is lost when we shift our focus from the first-world to post-colonial world. Historically, the dialogue in postcolonial studies centers on "class-consciousness rather than race-consciousness" (Spivak 30). The very nature of the hierarchical structure of the colonial subject constitution in terms of "capital imperialism" makes "color" useless as a necessary implication (30). As well, and adding to the construction of the subaltern, was that India had achieved political independence from the British Empire without a parallel social

revolution in the class system (Morton 48). Spivak thus alerts us to how gender underpins, yet is often representatively and theoretically absent from, questions of capitalism, colonialism, race, and postcolonialism. In taking into account the historical arguments by other subaltern studies scholars and adding a post-Marxist approach to her views, Spivak's definition of the subaltern takes into account women's lives and histories (48).

Through Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," it is explained that the historical and structural conditions of political representation do not guarantee that the interests of particular subaltern groups will be recognised or that their voices will be heard (Morton, 71). Spivak believes that intellectuals and academics that have written about real historical examples of social and political struggle, fail to allow oppressed subjects to speak about their own conditions (Spivak 276). In terms of the subaltern woman, for example, all that has been written about her experiences have been *by others*, not herself. She is an "absent nonrepresenter" (292) of her own condition in the historical representation of her story. For Spivak the active involvement of women in the history of anti-British-colonial rebellion in India has been excluded from the official history of national independence (Morton 73). As Spivak writes:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak 287).

Spivak uses the "Sati"—who is the Hindu widow that sacrifices herself after her husband's death—as an example of her thinking. She juxtaposes this gendered history with the claims of twentieth century French intellectuals, such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, and their

aims to speak for the unauthorized claims of British colonialism and "rescue" native women from the practice of the Sati sacrifice in nineteenth-century India. She uses this juxtaposition to emphasize how the good intentioned western intellectual can, in contradiction, silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience, in the same way that the "good intentioned" colonialist silenced the voice of the widow, who "chose" to die on her husband's funeral pyre (Morton 70). She also claims that the use of Indian women in British archival history is manipulated and narrowed as her particular histories are only revealed when she is needed in "the space of imperial production" (61). It is through these examples that Spivak concludes that the subaltern cannot speak and that the "benevolent impulse" to represent subaltern groups appropriates the voice of the subaltern and therefore silences them. (70).

Conversely, Dina Georgis argues that the subaltern woman *does* speak, not as victim, but through a voice that reveals the difficulty and loss incited by colonialism, Partition, and patriarchy. Georgis does acknowledge, as Spivak does, that official historical records silence the voices of those who experience traumatic tragedies. Georgis claims that notions of oppression can be formed from the projected perception in these official histories, and when emotional realities are disregarded from those perceptions, what remains is a reality of injustice (Georgis 170). In other words, only a particular privileged voice is focussed on in documented histories, which therefore leaves out the emotional experiences of the oppressed; because lauded and recorded histories are recognized as "official," this creates an unfair, unbalanced representation (or lack of thereof) of those afflicted subjects. If there is no space for the oppressed to share their stories, the only history we learn of and consider to be real, is that of the powerful.

Avery Gordon complements these insights. She also touches on the ways in which personal accounts in history are understood as "fictions of the real" (Gordon 11). She points to

the importance of challenging the assumption of official histories being an "unproblematic window" to a "secured reality" when ethnographic representations are powerful "fictions" that we experience as true (11). Official records use a rational discourse that allows us to forget that their "facts" are also manufactured through the discarding "difficult content" (Georgis 170). From this, Georgis declares that narrative and art are significant resources for hearing the excluded voices of women, queer and trans individuals, raced subjects, and the subaltern. This is because, unlike dominant histories that are detached from these marginalized groups, narrated stories of struggle aid in ridding of only privileged perceptions (170). Our complex understandings of representation means we must consider multiple sites of power that produce and destroy narratives about "our" culture and artefacts and silence of many suffering subjects (Gordon 11).

Georgis explains that some narratives allow us to enter a "space of woundedness" (170), which creates an area for us to work through mourning, loss, and trauma. As she states, "since the work of narrative opens us up to loss, then learning is not a cold and objective experience but involves a dialogue between what is inside the self and what is inside the work" (170). However, Georgis also raises caution by asking that we do not assume that we can help the "injured" by merely identifying with their pain; she explains that we cannot learn the meaning of trauma by encountering "secondary effects" of suffering and loss that pain symbolizes. Furthermore she explains that learning from pain implies having to work and think through the compulsion to want to feel the other's pain—which would only create a protected boundary that would, in fact, prohibit us from identifying the "injured person's" experience (171).

These insights raise the question of how we relate to the injured person that *does* recognize their difference? Georgis refers to Deborah Britzman who explains that when we are

hearing narratives of trauma, we are placed in a position of "unknowing," and that we must absorb the experience of learning from being near to someone's loss. This means, too, that we must pay close attention to, or witness, what we have not noticed or experienced. When partaking what Britzman calls "ethical witnessing," one must identify their vulnerability to the narrative of trauma and recognize the other's difference within their story; this recognition is not with the aim to reproduce experience but to launch its "unthinkability" (172). I propose that a way of understanding the "unthinkability" of colonial trauma is *through* the "unspeakability" of—therefore memories contained within and emitting from—objects. It is important to note that the way Britzman speaks about "unthinkability" is not to be conflated with the "unspeakability" of objects. The "unthinkability" of trauma refers to the way in which we cannot *know* someone else's trauma and that individual suffering cannot be understood by anyone but the person who had experienced it. What we can do, however, is to observe the moment of suffering in way that does not seek to legitimize it into *our* reality, but recognize it as being part of the individual's narrative. The unspeakability of objects, on the other hand, refers to the gap that separates non-human things or objects to the human experience. To dwell on this point, once again, I propose this gap is filled by the space of memory that allows us to access those unthinkable experiences from objects (or in the case of this particular argument, heirlooms).

Having established the significance of stories and how they can be read, Georgis speaks to Spivak's work on the subaltern woman to consider how an aesthetic perspective on learning can help us access the real voices of excluded cultures. She recognizes Spivak's argument that "the postcolonial representation of identity as resistant does not belong to the subaltern woman because the conditions of her life preclude her from speaking out" (172). In Spivak's opinion, colonialism has suffocated the subaltern's voice. She claims that the subaltern woman's voice is

the "most deeply injured" and cannot be recovered from colonial violence. Here is where Georgis makes a counter-argument that the subaltern subject does speak, not as victim, but through a "voice that belongs to the obscured experience of her difficulty and loss" (173). Moreover, that when we respond to the subaltern, it should come from what we are able to learn from and through her (174). If we see the subaltern as a victim, she loses her agency and becomes abstract—resulting in the loss of identity. Georgis claims that perhaps the women themselves cannot express their survival—that they may not be able to speak—but she refers to Amit Rai's statement as he asks, "can we be sure that her ghost does not?" (173).

What Rai is pointing to in his use of "ghost," is memory. In doing so, Rai adds to Georgis and Spivak's conversation on the recovery of the lost subaltern voice, which ultimately leads to narratives in memory. If the subaltern cannot speak through spoken or written narrative, Georgis, in referencing Rai, asserts that they do through their "ghosts." Carrying this idea forth, I return to heirlooms as moveable objects that can allow those ghosts to speak and memories to emerge. Put differently, objects are unspeaking yet demand human interpretation. This interpretation, I suggest, is memories and the stories that accompany them—the unwritten *as* narrative. Therefore, and as mentioned above, memories are the unspeakability of objects that allow us to contact the "unthinkability" of colonial trauma for the subaltern.

The "Thingness" of the Rani Harr

From this, I refer to not a written history, but to that of a material history that encompasses human relationships to objects. I am not drawing attention to the representation of the subaltern woman from the official documented narratives by postcolonial scholars and

academics, but rather the narratives that are passed down in her family in the form of heirlooms and the gendered ghostly traces embedded in and around moveable objects. To begin, I note Bill Brown's Thing Theory:

If, more recently, some delight has been taken in historicism's "desire to make contact with the 'real,'" in the emergence of material culture studies and the vitality of material history, in accounts of everyday life and the material habitus, as in the "return of the real" in contemporary art, this is inseparable, surely, from the very pleasure taken in "objects of the external world," however problematic that external world may be—however phantasmatic the externality of that world may be theorized to be. (Brown, 2)

Brown claims that things are something we encounter and ideas are what we project. It is the type of encounter we have with things that determines their presence and power. When we can look at objects as *things* (as vibrant units rather than inanimate lifeless sites), there is a possibility of uncovering a source of untapped actants that are otherwise ignored. These concepts offer alternative ways to consider objects and another way of showing how crossing with the nonhuman world elicits meaningful affective narratives.

I return to the Rani Haar in order to work through my above discussions. If the necklace is the object, then the thingness of the necklace would be, I propose, its ability to carry forth the subaltern's "ghost" and her memories that connect her back to family and belonging. The necklace's "unspeakability" of memory is the untold narrative, the particular subject-object relation that is laden with emotions. The analysis of the Harr will speak to Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman and how the question of gender permeates objects; the analysis will also speak to Georgis' understanding on how the subaltern woman *does* speak, not as victim, but through a voice that reveals the difficulty and loss incited by colonialism, Partition, and patriarchy (Georgis 173). Using the combined theories and arguments put forward by Spivak and

Georgis, I argue that the Harr indeed gives the subaltern women a voice through its portable nature and its travelling narratives, that move across location and times. To emphasize, once again, I propose that the gap that separates language and object is memory, and my analysis of the Harr will dwell in that space of memories.



Rani Harr (2013)

This particular Rani Haar is one filled with personal, familial, and gendered histories. It is a necklace worn and adorned typically by Indian women as a marker of being married. As a non-

human entity, this necklace stands as an example of an object that is shaped by human activities and customs—the piece is made, worn, and cherished as part of a broader cultural tradition. This specific Rani Haar was made using the historical technique "Meenakari." Meenakari is the art of coloring and ornamenting the surface of metals, in this case gold, by fusing brilliant colors over it that are decorated in intricate designs. The Mughals introduced the art of enamel or meenawork metal-craft to India from Persia. Gold has been used traditionally for Meenakari jewellery as it holds the enamel better, lasts longer, and its luster brings out the colors of the enamels (whereas silver and copper have been used for artefacts like boxes, bowls, and art pieces). Enamel colors are metal oxides mixed with a tint of finely powdered glass or gems where the oxide content controls the shade obtained. In the case of this Rani Haar, precious stones such as sapphires, rubies, and turquoise were crushed into the powdered mix and painted into the metal peacock design.



Rani Harr detail (2013)

This Rani Haar has a name engraved in its center—which reads "Bhag Singh"—my great grandfather's name, who had this Haar made for my grandmother, Hardev Kaur, on her wedding day as a part of her dowry. It is an heirloom that represents a special object-human relationship in its inalienability. With the inscription of her father's name, the Harr inscribed my grandmother with the family name, dubbing her as a representative of her family within her new union. To wear this necklace, in its material of gold and jewels, was not only a gendered act, but a classed and racialized act. This is to say that in the act of giving dowries for marriage was a cultural necessity and that the treasures given to Hardev's future in-laws, in exchange for her marriage to their son, marked her value in their family. By marking her with the family name through the Harr, Hardev's body became a site of surveillance—in the sense that she had to preserve the *izzat* of her family—for it is through the woman's body that borders and boundaries of her family's collective identities were framed. I note that this idea of supervised bodies continues to be significant as the necklace is passed down from generation to generation and, if worn in the diaspora, marks the diasporic woman's body is symbolic of "nationalist morality" and the "past," wherein the home country is understood as frozen in idyllic time through her body (Gopinath 18). This, once again, points to how memory and nation engulf such heirlooms and how the representational value of the necklace is guarded and treasured through familial knowledge.

In tracing the narratives that speaks to the Rani Harr being laden with memory and emotion, I turn to the personal narrative of Hardev Kaur, my paternal grandmother, and her experience as a subaltern women through the Harr, as told to me by family. Hardev was married at the age of sixteen to my grandfather, Kishan Singh, in pre-Partition India. After the wedding, she was taken from her family and her home, Bhag's home, in Rawalpindi to her husband's house in Gujarkhan. Kishan's father, Sunder Singh, a man who was notoriously known within my

family as someone who did not treat his wives well, ran the home. Sunder Singh had been married three times with all his marriages ending in his wives' deaths. His first wife, and my great-grandmother, had his first two sons—including Kishan Singh (Hardev's husband and my grandfather)—before she passed away. How she actually died remains in speculation amongst family members, but it was often spoken about how Sunder was uncaring to his wife and mistreated her. When Sunder remarried, his new wife lived for about six months before she, too, passed away—once again leading to further conjecture by family members as to his treatment of his wives. His third marriage was to a woman my family described as being “mute”; she never spoke and it was once again assumed that her disability and death—after having three more of Sunder's children (two sons and a daughter)—was because of his abuse of his wives. Sunder's story of the three wives is one often told through family gossip, however, I only retell it now to illuminate the environment in which a newly married Hardev moved into.

Sixteen-year-old Hardev arrived as a young bride to Sunder's home with nothing to her name but the dowry that was given to her by Bhag; this included household items such as utensils and bedding, although the primary dowry was jewellery—including the Rani Harr. As soon as she moved into Sunder's home with Kishan, all of her dowry possessions were taken from her by Sunder. The ways in which the system of marriage functioned disallowed Hardev from disobeying her in-laws and she was forced to hand surrender her possessions. They were taken under the premise of “protection” and that they would be stored away in safety, but Hardev began to learn over a period of time that she was never getting her cherished things back. Sunder had one daughter of his own and his intentions were that when his daughter would marry, he would use Hardev's dowry for his daughter in an attempt to spare himself the “expenses of having a daughter.” Hardev, as a young girl recently separated from her family, was distraught

over her loss of things as they were the last connections she had to her family, comfort, and home. Over time she began to resent her husband, Kishan, over this loss and would ask him repeatedly to return her things. Hardev could not directly approach Sunder for she wore a *Ghungat* (a scarf worn over the head that prohibited a married woman from speaking or making eye contact to any other man than her husband, other women, minors, or children). Her only knowledge of where her things were was based on any information she was given by her husband. After constantly persisting, she was finally returned a few items—the Rani Harr included. The rest of her things were never returned.

Upon having the Rani Harr restored to her possession, Hardev became very protective and guarded of it, and hid it away. She asked her parents to store her remaining dowry jewelry for her, in a safe that Bhag had buried underground in one of the rooms in his house. A few years before Partition, Bhag was advised by Kishan—a bank manager—to open a locker at the bank where he worked located in modern-day Lahore, where these valuables could be stored. In agreeing to do so, Bhag unknowingly saved these items from being lost forever in the upheaval of Partition. Hardev and her family would flee to India as the violence of Partition grew, leaving everything behind—homes, possessions, valuables, and the Harr that Hardev had fought so hard to win back. Most things owned by the refugees of Partition were lost or ruined in the violence of their upheaval. As discussed in Chapter One, many refugees of Partition did not know the permanence of their displacement and had left everything they owned behind. After the dust of Partition began to settle, the reality of their new residences became apparent and led to a longing for their past lives.

In the aftermath of Partition, India and Pakistan agreed on a treaty that would allow the military to escort people to their banks on the each other's side to retrieve their money and

valuables if it still existed. Bhag's wife went on the military-escorted trip to retrieve their banked valuables in Lahore on behalf of Bhag, because as a visible Sikh (who wore a turban), he had determined it was too dangerous to go back to Pakistan. After months of struggle and a difficult trip back to a newly created Pakistan, Bhag's wife managed to bring a few of the family's valuables—including the Harr—home. Having almost lost her Harr twice and having a piece of her old life returned to her, what became apparent is what the Rani Harr's thingness was to Hardev: its ability to connect her to her family and to a sense of belonging.

My father had once asked his mother how many times she actually worn the Harr, to which she said twice. The Rani Harr was one of her very few precious valuables that she did not wear often. She had worn it once to her younger brother's wedding and the second, and final time, had been to my father's wedding to my mother. In wearing the Harr to my father's wedding, indicated to him that for Hardev, her son's wedding was an occasion worthy of wearing the Harr. Despite the fact that she was oftentimes voiceless in her marriage to Kishan, the Harr had been something Hardev had fought for during the early years of her marriage and had succeeded in getting back. Through witnessing her relationship with the Harr, my father would forevermore find it to have a direct connection to his mother. Thus, for my father, the Rani Harr's thingness was in its ability to connect him to his mother.

After Hardev's death in 1989 and Kishan's death in 1998, all of her jewelry and possessions had been left to her two living children. In dividing the property of their deceased parents, my father and his sister sat down to discuss who would inherit the valuables and heirlooms. My father explained to his sister that if he could have the Rani Harr, she could take the rest of the valuables. He wanted the Harr because it was his last connection to his mother and was an object that also engendered a connection to his children. The necklace has now been

passed on to my sister and I, Hardev's grand-daughters. Its portability through time and location has brought it into the possession of an Indian global nomad three generations later. Worn against the skin, this object embodies more than just a time and a place, but that of thing power, agency, and history. Yet, it still holds the ghost (or memory) of my grandmother—for the stories that are passed on within her family are of *her* experiences. Her ghost acts as a sign that tells us a haunting is taking place (a haunting that describes what is not there) and in that sense proving a loss of representation. In recognizing memories surrounding the Harr as ghostly, we can identify that something was lost to us (Gordon 8). To translate in terms of the Harr, if the way of the ghost is haunting then the Harr is my grandmother's memories narrating. As put by Gordon, "being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure or feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (8). It is this transformative recognition that becomes the crux of this object being identity-making for postcolonial subjects.

To elaborate, and borrowing from Toni Morrison, my grandmother's memories that are transmitted from the Harr are my entrance to my own "interior life." These memories are my own access to my identity. My grandmother lived through experiences I cannot know, but through the unspoken narratives of memory, I can try to understand. As Morrison powerfully articulates,

And I have suspected, more often than not, that *I know* more than she did, that *I know* more than my grandfather and my great-grandmother did, but I also know that I'm no wiser than they were. And whenever I have tried earnestly to diminish their vision and prove to myself that I know more, and when I have tried to speculate on their interior life and match it up with my own, I have been overwhelmed every time by the richness of theirs compared to my own (Morrison 95).

Through those otherwise incommunicable memories the Harr provides, an exploration of an unwritten "interior life" and exposure to a new reality can occur (95). To elucidate, when I say "new reality" I refer to the clarified knowledge of what histories are written and what histories happened. In creating an access to an interior life, this heirloom allows for us to *recognize* experiences separate from narratives that are conjured from sites of power. As an object that is dense with a remembering of a traumatic colonial past, the Harr is able to travel through space and time, being passed down from generation to generation, to allow us to dwell in a space of memory as an unwritten narrative.

Objects have an ability to foster powers that induce sadness, create hope, fear, and happiness and have an active ability to modify a course of events. In our need to interpret the cultural meanings of things, we look to objects to tell us about ourselves. In this sense, I, too, look to the Rani Harr to reveal something about my own identity. The thingness of the Harr has a capacity to explore ways in which certain voices are ignored in history, in favour of the perception of the powerful. To sum, the Rani Harr's thingness can also be recognized as my grandmother's ghost, her memories, and her narrative. The memories incited by the Haar's thingness create a space for the voice of my grandmother to be passed on. For myself, the Harr's thingness similarly takes the shape of what it was for my father—a connection to family. For my father it was a connection to his mother and for myself, it is a connection to my father and subsequently, my subaltern grandmother and her experiences in colonial and postcolonial India. Using the combined theories and arguments put forward by Spivak, Brown, Latour, and Georgis, I argue here that the necklace indeed gives the subaltern women a voice through its portable nature and its attendant migratory narratives that, like the Rani Harr, travel across locations and times. This object has transmittable memories and contributes to identification processes for my

generation—and allows us to access the colonial narratives we did not live. The narratives held within the necklace travel down generations and this object creates a space for the subaltern's story to be passed on.

Chapter 4

The Gun and its Affective Capacity for Survival

The members of the South Asian diaspora that were displaced by Partition have a relationship with moveable objects and family heirlooms that are connected to colonial exile. These objects, wherein affective memories are being circulated, play an essential role in the forming of postcolonial identities. The objects—some left behind, some kept, some passed on—impact upon how migratory peoples negotiated their sense of belonging, nationally and community-wise, after Partition. As I look to objects that have been passed down within family members of the South Asian diaspora, I also question the ways in which the affective meanings within and around the object alter through space and time. How do affective qualities of objects alter in the environments in which they are used, passed on, and left behind? How do these qualities change depending on the “owner” of such objects and how do those qualities inform their identities? In this chapter, these are the central questions I ask in relation to heirlooms that are not considered “happy objects” (Ahmed 45) or objects that project an optimistic future. More specifically, in this chapter I look at an object that is used as a tool for survival—a gun—and think about it as an object of sadness. I argue that objects of survival are objects of sadness because the act of survival demands that we take into consideration a moment where someone fought for their life and used a weapon to survive. These life-threatening events leave a sense of trauma and melancholy in their wake. Furthermore, this type of survival is a reoccurring motif in Indian diasporic subjects’ lives: the rupture of Partition and moving onwards, through the instability of post-Partition India, was bound up in acts of survival. I say this is in reference to Chapter One where I engaged houses, dwellings, and memories to demonstrate how displacement impacts how we tell our stories about the strangeness and limits of home. Building

on this idea and connecting back to the ways in which colonialism is process of becoming attached to portable objects, I turn to objects of survival as having affective qualities that inform postcolonial identities. Referring to a particular moment of violent undoing, I follow the narrative of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi and how the object of a gun—Bhag Singh's gun that was discussed in Chapter One—became an object of survival. Once again utilizing the method of storytelling, this narrative follows my father Surinder Singh, the new owner of the gun, and tracks his experience of displacement and survival during the riots. This story is explicitly one-sided and retold through the eyes and experiences of my Sikh father—this is my only connection to the riots and therefore the only way I know how to speak about what happened. Although the narrative will be constructed as an “unbalanced” story, I will draw attention to how this narrative, one that is passed on from my family, works alongside the idea of objects being able to illuminate the politics of harm *and* survival *within* the context of conflict. Returning to Dina Georgis and her work on hearing narratives, I want to emphasize that in retelling my father's story with the riots from his Sikh perspective is not to deny the experiences of other groups during that time or to construct Sikhs as blameless victims. Georgis explains that narrated stories of struggle allow us to enter a "space of woundedness" (170) where we can work through loss. This is to say that through my father's personal narrative, a dialogue between "what is inside the self and what is inside the work" (170) is being attempted. Through this story, I discuss the ways in which affect becomes the unspeakability of the gun while untangling affect as a force that ultimately resulted in my life, as an Indian nomad, being removed from India altogether. Thus, this chapter revolves around the idea of colonialism as a process of displacement that engenders an emotive desire for things, for return, for and belonging.

To discuss affect as the unspeakability of the object in this chapter, I turn to Steve Pile and his detailed explanation of affect as a pre-discursive force that is, oftentimes because of its ambiguous nature, conflated with the concept of emotion. Affect is non-cognitive and non-representational and, as a result, remains an elusive concept and feeling. Pile describes affect as "a transpersonal *capacity* which a body has to be affected (through affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)" (Pile 8). Pile's explanation includes several distinctive features of affect that separates it from more cognitive notions like emotions. He gives a list of nine characteristics of affect in this account:

1. Affect refers to the production of a capacity of a body, a capacity that is described by its radical openness to other bodies.
2. Affect is not simply personal or inter-personal (along the lines of emotional geography's conception emotion); it is transpersonal, drawing in many bodies. Affect, then, is both within and between bodies.
3. Affect is non- or pre-cognitive, -reflexive, -conscious, and -human. This means two things:
 - 3a. Affect is temporally *prior to* the representational translation of an affect into a knowable emotion.
 - 3b. Affect is spatially located *below* cognition and consciousness and *beyond* reflectivity and humanness.
4. Affect is defined in opposition to: cognition, reflexivity, consciousness, and humanness.
5. Affect connects bodies, and make them proximate, by flowing between them.
6. Affect has potential.
7. Affect's radical openness necessarily implicates bodies in ethical relations.
8. Representations of affect can only ever fail to represent affect itself- that is, it is necessary to be suspicious of, and if possible to avoid, representations of emotions.
9. All that said, affects can be manipulated (8).

Pile's definition of affect allows me to think about it as a *capacity* for violence, survival, and a potential better future. Related, Yael Navaro-Yashin's work also explores affect as it emits from spaces, places, and home. Her research dwells on affect and emotions as ways of reading sites of ruin, which I use in this chapter to reference the ruined communities of 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Navaro-Yashin argues that affect refers to an emotive domain, generally, but its extent goes beyond that of subjectivity or the self (Navaro-Yashin 15) and the main difference that lies between emotional and affectual geography is the divide of "the thought and affect" (otherwise known as cognitive and non-cognitive) (Pile 12). This understanding of affect is what I apply to Bhag Singh's gun, as it travels through space and time, in order to demonstrate its fluidity and capacity for survival.

I want to emphasize that in this chapter, affect as a *capacity* or *potential* is key. I analyse a militant object of a gun, which is primarily used for its ability to harm. In investigating the ways in which the *potential* of an object can change, just as Pile explains the affect of an object is fluid (through its environment, time, location), I read Bhag's gun as an object can provide a *potential* for survival through its ability to harm. This is to say that the gun's affective *potential and capacity to harm as survival* that uncovers its prediscursive qualities.

Narratives of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots

On October 31st, 1984, Indira Gandhi, India's prime minister, was shot dead by two or more of her Sikh bodyguards. What followed was a brutal and horrific violence against Sikh residents of the resettlement colonies in Delhi (Das 12). The outcome of these events came from

an unfolding of previous political moments that resulted in a growing hostility between the Hindu and Sikh population in India. Many connected the assassination to Operation Blue Star, a military manoeuvre by the Indian army, on the orders of Indira Gandhi, to supposedly flush out Sikh militants from the Golden Temple (a sacred Sikh temple or *gurudwara*).

The 1980s brought the emergence of the Sikh militant movement, which Veena Das argues was a result of leftover tensions from Partition. New anxieties surrounding Sikh masculinities and the recovery of abducted women from Partition, alongside the community finding their "place" as minorities in India, led to a series of mass civil disobedience campaigns against the Indian government (111). Operation Blue Star saw the death of Sikh militant leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale alongside the Indian army's storming of the sacred gates of the *gurudwara*. Most Sikhs viewed the attack on the *gurudwara* as a deliberately hurtful act instigated by the Indian government—one that attacked their honour or *izzat*. In her analysis of the events leading up to the 1984 riots, Das explains that Operation Blue Star left a sense of incompleteness. Das writes that the story did not end with the death of Bhindranwale and that these events would inevitably result in a "sequel" that would take the shape of a cataclysmic national incident (110). This "sequel" began with Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards, acting upon the rage of the events of Operation Blue Star, shooting the Hindu prime minister dead. Although the deaths of Bhindranwale and Gandhi were the result of similar acts of violence, the two figures were cast as antithetical: Bhindranwale was viewed as the terrorist that threatened the nation and Gandhi was viewed as the pure and protective mother of India (Chopra 19). The crisis born out of Gandhi's assassination became the grounds through which certain groups of Hindus designated themselves revenge seekers on behalf of the larger Hindu community. The violence began as Gandhi was taken to the hospital following the assassination shots; there, a crowd

began to gather as rumours of her death circulated. Her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, was sworn in as the new Prime Minister when her death was announced later that day. The first incidences of violence began shortly the announcement of her death, as a crowds of young men began separating themselves from the crowd and began shouting, disrupting traffic, and attacking Sikhs that were gathered outside the hospital (Das 137). From there, the violence and arson became widespread. Sikhs were beaten, set on fire, and their vehicles set on fire. Shops and homes were also set on fire and the violent crowd (predominately made up of youths) wielded iron rods and sticks to use upon Sikhs that crossed their paths (138). By the third day of this massacre, Delhi was burning, rioting had spilled to the streets, and Sikhs were being pulled from cars and trains to face ghastly murders.

On the evening of October 31, 1984, my father and airline pilot, Surinder Jit Singh, was returning to Delhi on a routine flight. He had some idea of the violence spreading in the city from news over the radio, but it was not until the plane began descending on the city he could see, from the night's sky, that Delhi was on fire. He got into an airline car that was to drive him, and another Hindu pilot, home. As they left the airport, the extent of the riots started to become apparent to my father—he witnessed abandoned cars and buses on fire and normally busy streets were empty. As well, a local Sikh high school was on fire. It was at that point he realized the urgency of the situation and decided to take his turban off. My father had short hair, which was a conscious and controversial decision he had made a few years earlier. As part of the Sikh diaspora that were relocated into Delhi after Partition, my father's Sikh family and community had become increasingly fundamental in their beliefs as a way of reclaiming an identity that had been lost to them. My father saw the behaviour of the Sikh diaspora as directly linked to false promises made by Nehru at the time of Partition—a promise that Sikhs would be given a

separate state within India on the basis of religion. The state of Punjab was, eventually, granted to the Sikh population but not until many years after the promises had been made, leaving strong political and religious tensions in its wake.

My father, perhaps having been raised in post-Partition India that was fraught with religious tensions, always rejected the idea of separate states based on religion. With this mindset, he also rejected the way his family enforced fundamentalist Sikh traditions that allowed no exceptions. From this, and in being a minority in a Hindu majority setting, my father always resented his long hair and longed to blend into his surroundings and adorn himself in ways similar to his shorthaired Hindu peers. Sikhs in post-Partition India were oftentimes ridiculed and bullied as a way to remind them that they did not belong in the Hindu-majority environment; fighting back was difficult, for they were completely outnumbered. Long hair was a lasting symbol of the “warriors of India,” which posited that Sikhs were the perpetual protectors of India. Within the Indian caste system—which can be described as a four-tiered hierarchy that Indian society differently categorized the *Brahmans* (priests, holy men), the *Kshatriyans* (kings, warriors, soldier), the *Vaishyas* (business men, commercial class), and the *Shudras* (farmers and peasants who were/are also known as the untouchables)—Sikhs predominantly fell into the category of the *Kshatriyans* (Sengar 3).⁹ Upon migrating to India during Partition, the once warriors of India were minorities that were treated, by their Hindu majority community, as “different.” The once revered masculine trait of long hair swiftly became synonymous with the longhaired Hindu girls. Without a reason for protecting the nation, the symbolically longhaired Sikh warriors were suddenly viewed as simply men with long hair. My father, growing up with

⁹ Despite the caste system being prohibited within Sikhism, Sikh communities still practiced and referred to the caste system, colloquially, in describing one another. As well, Hindus would predominately refer and categorize Sikhs as *Kshatriyans* despite it being restricted by the holy leader of Sikhism—Guru Nanak.

this tension as child, rejected the idea of his long hair and as soon as he was old enough, he cut his hair off.

In cutting his hair, my father defied his parents, which resulted in him being cast out from his family. However, it was this very detail—the fact that he had short hair—that allowed him to remove his turban in the car that night, and pass as being Hindu. Shortly after placing his turban under the car seat, the car was stopped by a group of young arsonists that, upon briefly glancing into the car, determined that it had no Sikhs and let them go. That is not to say that there was not an anxiety-filled moment when this happened, for suddenly, as the car was stopped, my father's life laid in the hands of his fellow Hindu passenger and whether he wanted to expose my father or not. The man eventually ended up keeping quiet, but whether it was to protect my father, or himself (to avoid being in the middle of angry mob), we do not know.

Upon arriving home, my father's next worry was my mother, his young Hindu wife who, as an airhostess, was also coming home that evening on a flight. As an inter-ethnic couple, my parents faced another series of barriers in this violently charged moment. Individually they represented the polar ends of India: he, the masculine, constructed violent Sikh, and she, the Hindu woman who lay at the center of India as a representable "feminized space" (Daiya 41). Their relationship already represented the uncertainty and impurity of ethnic national identities through the ways in which their offspring, my sister and I, would displace the purity of ethnic identities in our hybridity (53). Their inter-ethnic romance suggested a potential threat to the "ideological family purity upon which ethnic communities are built" (53). My mother's ethnic community embodied all that was "pure" about the nation and my father's symbolized the fallen, displaced warriors of India. To both communities, their relationship stood as a risk to maintaining the honour of what each respective group stood for. While waiting for my mother to

arrive home from her flight, my father's contention was this: despite her being Hindu, and because these arsonist attacks seemingly targeted Sikh men, it still was a very real possibility that she could be attacked given that she was romantically and legally linked, through her husband, to the arsonist's "enemy." Furthermore, as he went to pick up the phone to call the airport to inquire about her arrival, he found the phone to be dead, which he felt to be an instant red flag. He knew from this detail that his home was targeted and that someone in his neighbourhood must have exposed him as being Sikh. It was at this point that he sought out his only weapon of protection: Bhag Singh's gun, along with the fifteen year old ammunition that he was not sure would work. Regardless, he sat at home with the gun out and loaded, waiting for my mother to arrive home. When my mother eventually reached home, unharmed, my father's next task was to convince my mother to leave him and to find shelter with other Hindu friends because if he was targeted and a group of arsonists found him, they would surely not spare her at that moment either.

My father knew that they could not stay in their targeted home for much longer and that he would have to venture out into the dangerous night. He wanted to go to his elderly Sikh parent's house to make sure they were safe. He tried explaining to my mother that this was a risk for Sikhs, not Hindus, and that she should not come with him when he went to find his parents. Despite his argument, she was very adamant not to leave him, which to this day, he describes as being an act of true bravery. They stayed in their home for the night but rose at five in the morning and went on the roof of their home to evaluate the state of the city—only to find that it was still burning. The bulk of the violence and riots were committed in the night hours; because it was just before sunrise, they decided to go to his parents' house.

My father wanted to get to his parent's home before seven in the morning because his elderly turban-wearing father used to go for walk from his home to the local *gurudwara*, a Sikh

temple, every morning at this time. They had arrived just in time to stop him from leaving his house to walk to the temple (surely a target for local rioters). Upon arriving to his parents' house it became apparent that they were quite oblivious to what was happening in the city. His father argued with him vehemently about taking his walk to the temple. His parents thoughts on the matter was bewilderment and they tried reasoning with my father, explaining that they had not done anything to any Hindus and asking why the rioters would harm an innocent elderly couple? Both his parents did not realize the extent of the riots; they felt incredulous and believed my father was being over-dramatic. After convincing everyone to stay indoors, my father gathered everyone who lived in the house, including a Hindu family and a Muslim family that were tenants and lived upstairs, and devised a protection plan in case the house was attacked. Both the Hindu and Muslim tenants were equally terrified of the events that were unfolding in the city, but for very different reasons. The Hindu tenant was afraid for the potential rebuttal that might occur by the Sikh community after the Hindu riots were over, and feared living in a house owned by Sikh landlords that could potentially be set on fire. The Muslim tenant feared for his life, for he felt that in an unsettled post-Partition India, any time of conflict could be a potential threat to Muslim minorities.

After the first day of the riots, the local men in my grandparent's neighbourhood, *Kalkagi*, gathered together to make a neighbourhood security group for all those who lived in their square. There were only three Sikh families that lived in this square, compared to the dozens of other Hindu families. My father was invited to join this security group by one of the neighbours (an old acquaintance who was a Hindu retired Air force wing commander). Joining this group, my father stood as one of two Sikh men from the neighbourhood who came to discuss banding together in case any arsonist came through their square. He quickly learned that the real purpose

of this “security” group was to discuss the fact that most of the rioting and violence that was being committed was by Hindus and that this Hindu-majority neighbourhood wanted to prepare for a Sikh rebuttal. As my father stood—without his turban and with Bhag's gun in his back pocket—amongst his neighbours he realized that they were openly planning to kill, if it be needed, any Sikh family in *Kalkagi*. They were ready to hand over the three Sikh families that lived in the square if Hindu rioters came by and, too, were thinking of them as threats in case there was a Sikh retaliation. When they asked who had weapons it also became apparent that, besides my father and the retired commander, no one else owned arms (although my father did not disclose that he had a gun when they asked). Another Hindu neighbour, who was identified as being a part of the Hindu fundamentalist organization RSS (the same fundamentalist group that was responsible for the death of Mahatma Gandhi), explained that he had sticks, spears, and other weapons in his home. After seeing this man's enthusiasm for violence against Sikhs, my father became increasingly confused as to who or what political group was actually behind the riots.

There had been no police intervention to the violence. Rajiv Gandhi had stepped in as Prime Minister, but in the chaos of those four days, my father, along with most other Sikhs, were unaware of who was actually promoting the violence in the city. For my father, this was an especially and particularly complex moment due to his personal ties: Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son and successor as prime minister, had been a friend of my father during flying school. They had both trained as pilots together before Rajiv Gandhi left the airlines for politics, and it did not occur to my father during the riots that Rajiv was actually at the head of a government that was allowing this massacre to happen to Sikhs. Add to this, on the third day of the riot, my father had gone to see Rajiv to give his condolences for the death of his mother. He

had risked his life in the middle of the riots and bloodshed to pay his respects to the very man who was allowing the violence to continue. It would be in the upcoming years, after the riots, that he would learn the truth of who was behind the lack of police intervention—but during the moment, it was unclear whether the RSS, Congress, or some other Hindu fundamentalist group were responsible.

The RSS neighbour in *Kalkagi* made a very poignant statement during the security group meeting that when translated to English, holds the essence of, "we do not have to fear from the Sikhs living here, these people are as easily killed as insects that are squashed between the fingers, it is not our Sikh neighbours who are to be feared, but the outsiders who may come in." My father is still unsure to this day if the man would have made this statement if he had been present with his turban on, but it became very apparent this "security group" found the Sikh families in the neighbourhood dispensable and they would have no problem killing them if they wanted to. My father tried reassuring a few of the neighbours that knew him as Sikh that if a Sikh retaliation riot did occur he would confront them; rather he would and ask them—Sikh to Sikh not to harm this neighbourhood. This was an honest attempt to display loyalty to his neighbours in the hopes that they would reciprocate the same promise of protection—which he was disappointed to find they did not. He knew that if *Kalkagi* did come under threat, the only thing that would protect him and his family was Bhag's gun.

The final days of the riots were spent hiding in an attic-type room in my grandparent's home. During this time there would be one false alarm in the middle of the night, where a group of rioters were thought to be coming into the square, but the residents of *Kalkagi* were much more fortunate than other centrally-located colonies of Delhi. My father spent this entire time sitting by the front door of the house with Bhag's gun, while his family, the Hindu tenants, and

the Muslim tenants hid in the attic upstairs. Although there was no threatening mob as the “security group” had thought, the false alarm proved many points: it was confirmed that he would, indeed, be left alone to fend for himself if a Hindu group were to come and attack the square; and he knew that his gun, his only hope for survival, with its out-dated ammunition would not be enough to ward off a mob of hundreds of Hindu rioters. The whole experience of the violent days of the anti-Sikh riots—where neighbours, friends, government, and nation all seemed to have betrayed him—led my father to realize one thing: that this was no longer his home. He felt a deep disappointment in his surroundings and neighbours who would so easily cast his life and his family's lives aside; it marked the beginning of the end of his life in India.

My father explained to me once that he had chosen a career of flying where he willingly took on the risks of dying (more so in his early days of flying), but felt that there was a purpose. He claimed that after the riots, what was felt was the futility of it all: meaningless death. The idea of dying a meaningless death bothered him endlessly, which led to paramount anger and bewilderment. It was at that point that he felt fed up with the country and wondered why the rioters committed those heinous acts. He also wondered if the extent of violence was due to was the lack of police intervention. This thinking also led him to wonder where his Hindu friends *were* during this ordeal and where was his extended Hindu family, on my mother's side, were during the bloodshed? No one had checked on them during the days of the riots. Yet after the riots were over his Hindu friends and family *then* expressed concern and carried on with their relationship as if nothing had happened—a recurring theme in the history of dealing with trauma with the Indian public.

It was from the moment of the riots and afterward, moving onwards, that my father decided that at some point in his future he would leave India. He also acknowledged that he

could not abandon his family and elderly parents and find a life elsewhere. My father felt that, by the default of his birth, he was a minority no matter where he was and being a minority always depended on the “generosity” of the majority. He felt that he would always be at the mercy of another, whether it be Hindus, or people of the West. However, when he looks back on this portion of his life and shares this story with me, his daughter, he explains that he just learned to cope with it and that there is no other choice—if he did not learn to cope, he shared, he would die of frustration. It is from these traumatic moments of the past that I look toward the ways in which stories can be translated through the generations of our family, in a way that preserves the experiences of those who suffered, in the form of Bhag's gun and the places and stories it carries forth.



Bhag Singh's Gun

The Gun and Militancy

Radhika Chopra traces the connection between social movements of migration and militancy by studying the ways in which the experiences of migration in the Sikh diasporas are shaped by the threat of violence from the State and militant groups. She asks what individual and family responses are to such threats and whether these responses are what results in their migration (Chopra 6). It is a question that applies strongly to my father's experience with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the ways in which violence seemed to be unleashed by the very State that was meant to protect him, leading to his ultimate migration to the West. How can I, as an Indian nomad a generation later, understand the experiences of survival of my parents, which was necessary in order for my own life to exist? How, then, does knowing these narratives inform our postcolonial identities? It is here that I return to objects and their ability to give us alternative ways of thinking about violence and displacement.

Throughout this project I have looked at specific objects and their ability to be “vibrant-things” that can communicate untold narratives of the South Asian diaspora. I examine the object's thingness, as its purpose, and outline how that purpose does not exist, or come to light, until we—as humans—recognize it (perhaps even in its absence). Therefore, the thingness of an object can be articulated though its unspeakability. In this chapter I look at my great-grandfather's gun and think about it in relation to the narrative above as well as the untold gaps in that story. I suggest that the gun's thingness is survival and that its unspeakability can be understood through affect. That is to say, the gun's thingness of survival is articulated through the unspeakable language of affect. Therefore narratives and stories that seek to recover lost voices of violence and trauma can be accessed from *this* gun and through its affective quality of survival. However, it is important to note that when I speak about Bhag's gun as survival I am

not referring to *all* guns having the thingness that is attached to his particular weapon. When we look at the function of guns (and here I am referring to guns in general, not just my great-grandfather's gun) in terms of Brown's thing theory, what becomes apparent is this: a gun is a gun because it can shoot, if it cannot shoot it remains as a piece of metal. Therefore, it could be argued that its thingness will become apparent if the gun were to stop working; its thingness would be its ability to kill or to harm.

Guns are technologies of security and are typically known as military or weaponized objects. Given my above discussion of the Sikh community in postcolonial India, as well as the struggles during the 1984 riots, militarized objects can easily come to mind. The Sikh diaspora, particularly, is a community that is politically charged with moments of militant politics (Chopra 5). Sarah Matthews reminds us, through her analysis of Judith Butler's work on war, that in times of peace or war one's life is always in the hands of another (Matthews 275). Here, she illustrates the damage that is created under conditions of violence in the ways in which we are all vulnerable to destruction by another (275). Keeping Matthews insights in mind, the army occupation of the Golden Temple in Amristar, which was one of the main events that led to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, underwrote a phase of migration for the Sikh diaspora. Preceding these events was a growing militancy of state propelled violence that was not overtly voiced, but became increasingly apparently leading up to the events of 1984 (Chopra 7). Chopra explains that "migration between transnational and homeland spaces alters the visceral sense of belonging and identity. Spaces inscribed by state or militant violence, on the other hand, produce heightened "feelings" of distance or assertion, of loss or entitlement."(8). Through this statement, Chopra illustrates the sadness of a militantly influenced life of the Sikh diaspora. She states, "when Punjabis talk about themselves, especially those who live in Punjab, they rhetorically say

'the laughter had gone out of our lives.'" (8) It is a demonstration of simple things lost where they remember the past before militancy overtook their lives.

Post-Partition India saw the development of Hindutva, otherwise known as Hindu nationalism, that created the image of the "peaceful Hindu Self" versus the "threatening minority Other" (Anand 1). This type of political representation of social relationships in the Indian media was also seen during the time of Partition. Sukeshi Kamra describes the ways in which India's relationship with the colonial government in 1947 grew volatile while the country itself was increasingly textualized as two nations, not one, by the nationalist press (Kamra 78). The nationalist press projected a perspective of Congress (Hindu nationalists) as a moral, rational organization that was being confronted by two problematic groups of the colonial government and the Muslim League (78). I am pointing to this reoccurring theme in India's history to illuminate the ways in which the violence against certain bodies was being cast as excusable violence (while these tensions are ultimately the results of colonial violence). Hindutva conjured a politics of fear as a response to the post-Partition "threats" to the Hindu collective by their newly separated Muslim counterparts. Hindu nationalism externalized the "dangerous other" through the "logic" of cultural differences and conflicting views of the neoliberal Indian nation (Eckert 323). This is to say that non-Hindu bodies were being constructed as damaging to the nation, which allowed a naturalization of violent conflicts by nationalist groups.

As noted above, the 1980s in India saw a growing militant movement emerging from the Sikh community and was further fueled by their construction in the press as "dangerous" threats. In following the responses from each group, I am emphasizing the ways in which both Hindus and Sikhs circulated stereotypes about one another that were initially born *from* of their colonial governments, and that these conflicts are all part of lasting colonial legacies in India. These

militant movements came from both Sikhs in India and emigrant Sikhs who had relocated to post-Partition India (Das 111). What surfaced from this movement were new anxieties surrounding masculinity and the citizenship of Hindus and Sikhs. These anxieties, too, revolved around the recovery of the abducted women of Partition. During the Partition of India, thousands of women from both Pakistan and India, had been abducted by their respective “enemy” side. The abducted woman and her recovery to her family was a direct attempt to destroy each other's *izzat* by ruining the purity of the woman's body, and subsequently ruining the purity of the nation. The women became explicitly representative of the nation and honour or *izzat*.

This binary between Hindus and Sikhs is not an easy one and is actually a tangled assertion of various types of nationalism that is being enunciated across the post-Partition communities. Thus, from the literature that followed Hindutva came Sikh militant literature that demonstrated intolerance, militancy, and biased views and policies concerning all those who were not Hindu. These narratives painted the picture of a "weak" and "emasculated" Hindu man versus the Sikh who was the "martyr whose sacrifices had fed the community with its energy in the past" (112). This militant literature sought to reify stereotypes of the effeminate and cunning Hindu who had previously depended on the protection offered to the traditionally known “warriors of India” (Sikhs) but who were now ready to betray their once protectors. Thus, masculinity became the defining feature of Sikhs, while the Hindu community was characterized by an "emasculated femininity" that translated to the idea of the Indian nation (112). This also speaks to the ways in which “Mother India” was typically seen as being Hindu. These tensions are important to note in relation to the assassination of the Hindu Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards—the latter were viewed as the murderers of the “Mother of India” and reinforced the stereotype of the violent Sikh man. At the same time, and as noted above, these

tensions around gender also draw attention back to my father's predicament and his decision to cut his hair—a moment that was laden with discourses of gender, femininity, religion and family. Thus, the paradoxes of gender and femininity emerge differentially across ethnic groupings.

To return to the question of militancy and the events that lead to the 1984 riots, the constructed image of the "dangerous Other" by Hindu nationalist groups allowed for the indoctrination of discourses revolving around the *security* of India that were increasingly instilled amongst the Indian public. Security as a concept is about prevention, which relies on the possibility of potential threats. Security, for Hindu fundamentalist groups was about controlling potential threats and the (real or potential) dangerous intentions of the Other. Locating potential threats depended on assumptions made about specific dispositions of the Othered communities that would make them "militant" people in the eyes of Hindu nationalist groups (Eckert 322). From this came frequently organized "mob violence" (327) by Hindu nationalist organizations; they distributed weapons like bats and firebombs to the mobs, further reinforcing the "insider/outsider dichotomy" (329) between Hindus and all those who were seen as "threatening" to Hindus. This type of "security" of the self (India as a Hindu nation), engendered the need for the defense against "another" or outsider (first Muslims and then Sikhs) (329). This type of violence and externalization of the "the enemy" was excused because the Other's difference was grounded in their *cultural difference* and therefore having a fundamental "otherness." Hindu nationalist narratives created the "suspect subject," which complement and bolstered mainstream ideas about otherness and cultural difference (336).

In understanding the politics of security and prevention that was constructed by Hindu nationalist groups in keeping the "dangerous Sikh Other" as an outsider, I will think about the gun as a militant and patriarchal object. If we look at how violence was used by Hindu

nationalist groups as a form of “prevention” that would secure their place in a newly formed India and think about this alongside the ways in which guns are used as tools of “security” meant to protect an individual, what becomes apparent is this: guns are *affectively* violent in the ways in which they carry a *capacity or potential* for violence. In the act of possessing a gun, one creates a “suspect subject” amongst and between themselves and others. It is through this notion that I want to clarify that guns, as militant objects, have a thingness of harming and violence. Guns are affective in the ways in which they create a prediscursive feeling of a *potential* to harm and that emitted feeling cannot be narrated in words. This is, I argue, what makes a gun’s thingness its ability to harm, which is articulated through the unspeakable language of affect.

What, then, allows Bhag's gun to be an object of survival despite its history of militancy? Does militancy not necessarily incite harm? Guns that are used as arms for the military have a predisposed purpose that seeks violence in the ways it creates suspects amongst others. At the time of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, violence was being brought to the doorsteps of the Sikh community. Bhag's gun had lay dormant in storage with fifteen-year old ammunition that could potentially not work. Indeed, the gun’s only use was in its physical appearance of being an object that could defend the one who possessed it. In this way, the purpose of carrying Bhag's gun during the riots was to survive, which is not to say that it still did not have the *capacity* for violence, for one cannot survive without the potential of harm (the gun as an object of sadness), but it also had the *capacity* for survival. This is to say that if my father *was* put in a situation where he had to protect his family, the gun's potential for violence would become a reality—therefore the gun's purpose was revealed as survival *by* harming. Bhag's gun's thingness as survival only became apparent when my father left it behind in India, therefore rendering it useless. To phrase differently, the gun's affective *potential* was always to harm, as it is for all

guns, but it was in *not needing* the gun and leaving it behind in India that revealed the gun also had a *capacity* for survival.

After the riots, having experienced too much violence and disappointment in India as his home, my father decided to leave India and he left the gun behind. Leaving the gun behind was a conscious action that brought with it the hopes that moving to the West would lessen the potential for violence and that the gun would not be needed. This is to say that in the act of leaving the gun behind, my father was trying to give himself (and his family) a new future and the promise of a better life. Therefore, when I say the affective quality of the gun is survival what I'm implying is that is that the gun has potential to be in a situation that needs survival or defense. It is that potential or *capacity* for violence that allows *this* gun's thingness to be survival and I can only express that survival through its affectiveness.

As the daughter and great-granddaughter of the holders of the gun I should note that one of the *only* ways in which I can read it is as an object of survival. While the gun is an object that carries contradictions—survival through potential harm—the reason I read the gun like this is because of my genealogical connection to it. I lean toward reading the gun as an object of survival because my great-grandfather's life, and subsequently, my father's life (and therefore my own life) depended on it. This emphasizes the overlapping workings of narration and the affective ties of family—this is the only way I can tell this story: as one of displacement that incited survival.

Furthermore, the gun does not act as an heirloom, as the Rani Harr: it was not treated as an inalienable possession that is highly prized in its ability to draw family members across generations closer together in its sacredness. Rather this object, Bhag Singh's gun, is heavy with an ancestral history that is laden with violence, displacement, and melancholia. This is not to say

that the Rani Harr did not carry a painful history of silence of my subaltern grandmother, but rather that the gun was not "passed on" to family members in the same way as the necklace. As a necessary tool for survival during two particularly violent moments in India's history and my family's history, the gun was eventually left behind in India as my family moved West with the hope that a better future would mean never needing it again.

The Hope of a Better Future

In leaving the gun behind in India as he ventured to the West, my father did not foresee the ways in which the violence of the gun could be replaced with another type of violence of racism. Having to remove his turban to survive in that car during the anti-Sikh riots would not be an act of survival exclusive to India. Following the post-9/11 era of Islamophobia in the West, my father once again was subjected to a type of racial harm that would force him to physically and metaphorically keep his turban off forever. In a way, the gun being an object of survival was replaced, upon the move to Canada, with the narrative of the feared object of the turban and all that it stands for.

Jasbir Puar argues that the anxiety surrounding the impossibility of containment, and the fear of contagion, have led to a narrative of the feared turban/outsider. Borrowing from Michel Foucault's discussion of biopolitics, Puar outlines how security and terrorism, in contemporary western societies, manages life through disciplinary and regulatory tools. Her work thinks about the turban and its accompanying "terrorist" body. Analyzing the recurrent request for Sikh men to remove their turbans, Puar concludes that the turban has been allotted the status of a weapon. The turban becomes fused with the body of its wearer, therefore becomes like the bomb strapped

to the body of a suicide bomber. Furthermore, the turban, or “weapon,” becomes an assemblage instead of just an object worn upon the body. It becomes a potentially deadly part of "the terrorist body" (Puar 193).

Furthermore, Puar also looks at Sikh sexuality and misrecognition and discusses how these communities are viewed as racialized queer subjects. She explains that Sikh subjectivity has been contentious and has worried the stability of heteronormativity since the middle of the nineteenth century. Sikhs have been coded as “the violent patriarch,” on the one hand (in India), and as the “long haired, feminized sissy” and figure of failed masculinity (in the West), on the other. Sikh men in the United States, she writes, occupy a troubled space (181). More than 3,000 Sikhs were brutally killed during the 1984 arsonist riots in India and in response to the violence, many Sikh men cut their hair and beards to escape visual identification. These acts repeat themselves in the post 9/11 era: attacks on Sikhs put them at the center of violence that led some to cut their hair. If in 1984 the traumatic cutting of their hair was with the hope of passing as Hindu, the post 9/11 cutting of the hair was with the hope of escaping being identified as Muslim. However, the cutting of hair did not shield many from violence and death. As experienced by my father, there are real and violent consequences of failing to pass and survive acts of racial violence. The excesses of the body could not be cut or shaved off because, as stated by Puar, they were already endowed with a “queer perversity” (169). This is to say that the migrated Sikh male body stands as a disruption for all nations in which it encounters. To elucidate, the Sikh male figure is one that is saturated with threat that engenders fear for the British (the “warriors” against their colonizers), virility and loss for the Hindu (in the construction of the “effeminate Hindu man” versus the “Sikh warrior”), and is perpetually queered in the United States (with his long “sissy” hair). Each has affected violent spatial

arrangements with an effort to remove, seclude, barricade, and kill with the aim to contain the excesses. It is from this continual cordoning of Sikh bodies that the promise of a better future in the removal of India altogether, remains false.

It is with this understanding of the violence and containment of the Sikh community that I return to Bhag's gun. The 1984 riots left a mark on the community that was beyond words: the melancholy felt went past the violence itself and unravelled to expose that many lives had been lost for nothing. Amitav Ghosh explains the difference between the sorrow of grieving for the traumatic loss of life in World War II and the violence that occurred to the Sikh community in 1984. He explains that when we grieve for the loss of life in World War II, it does not involve the thought that the war changed nothing, that we know that the world changed in very significant ways and created a new era (Ghosh 317). However, the violence of 1984 did not see such changes—the suffering had not altered the trajectory of history of politics of the region in any significant way (317). The absence of such meaning leads to no other way of representing the series of events but in anger and sorrow. This begs the following questions: How do we talk about this trauma? How, as a family, community, and nation can we think about the violence that occurred to us, or our loved ones, without causing harm? This project and chapter has worked through the ways in which we can think of alternative ways of telling our stories, not through words and language, but through objects, thingness, emotions, memories, and affect. I refer, once again, to Ghosh when he explains the ways in which many who have written about these sorrowful events are forced to look back in sadness because they cannot look forward to the false promise of a better future (317). Ghosh states,

All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silences of a ruthless state—nothing like that: no barbed wire, no check-points to tell me where its boundaries lie. I know nothing of this silence except that it lies outside the reach of my intelligence,

beyond word—that is why this silence must win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are not words (317).

Through this discussion of silences that surround trauma it is understood that the “enemy” of silence is speech, and that speech requires words, but there can be no words without meanings—which is where I explore the gap between words and meanings. What exists in this gap is where the narratives of the gun lay—it is its affective *potential and capacity to harm as survival*, which uncover its prediscursive qualities. It is from this that I have referred to the “unspeakability” of each object to lay in the realm of this silence, in unspoken languages of memory, emotion, and affect. The gun and these objects are meaningful to my family and I, as are many other relics to survivors of trauma and violence, and they ultimately allow us to ask new questions about our pasts, presents, and futures.

To conclude, guns as militant objects, have an ability to shoot, kill, and defend. However, in looking at the history of events that led to my father's experience as a Sikh man during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots I have found that his gun had an affective quality that gave it a *capacity* for survival. By examining the ways in which militancy informs Sikh migration, we can understand this type of object as an identity-making object for the Sikh diaspora. This is to say that the one-sided perspective of my father's experience through the riots was not the point of this chapter; the purpose is in drawing attention to how we can work through displacement and traumatic stories that we have not directly experienced. Belonging, for the Sikh community, has always been a contentious issue, and it is in diasporic cultural narratives that we can begin to rethink identity and citizenship away from the binds of the nation (Hua 54). The combined theories and work by Pile, Das, Chopra, Puar, and Ghosh have illuminated how the history of violence during the anti-Sikh riots is part of greater narrative on Othering of the Sikh community and how affective

qualities of objects can potentially aid in the recovery of their lost stories. In utilizing the method of storytelling, and retelling my father's story during the 1984 riots, I drew attention to how the affective capacity to harm is, as I view it, enveloped by the affective workings of survival. I also pointed to the ways in which leaving the gun behind in India was an act that revealed the true purpose of its existence survival and a look toward a different life, elsewhere. My great-grandfather, father, and subsequently my mother and grandparents were all saved by the possession of the gun and therefore my existence, as an Indian global nomad living in the West, is also informed by the presence of the gun. It is through the familial affective ties of the gun that we, as a family, are able to share our stories.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Belonging, for many in the South Asian diaspora, is a contentious issue that is connected to feelings of colonial exile. Their narratives and histories of home, as well as their identities, are often rooted in displacement and violent ruptures. Through traumatic events that occurred to the Indian nation in during the twentieth century, including the Partition of India/Pakistan and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, voices of survivors and victims have oftentimes been undermined by the “official” histories of the South Asian diaspora (as seen in memorials, official documents, history books) or wilful erasures that seek recuperation in silence. In order to uncover these otherwise silenced stories, I have turned to objects and heirlooms and theorized the ways in which they provide us with alternative, “unspeakable,” languages of remembering. By attending to emotion, memory, and affect through the medium of material culture, I have drawn connections between objects and the human experience. In order to access the narratives that come from “unspeakable” things and their energies, I have argued that a genealogical link is engendered through moveable objects and their attendant affective and narrated memories, which can be found in objects that are passed down from generation to generation. This is to say that the importance of familial affective ties sits at the crux of this project, allowing us to think about how objects inform postcolonial identities.

In exploring the meaning of home for the South Asian diaspora, memory, emotions, and space must be considered as they inform the ways in which postcolonial identities differently negotiate their sense of belonging, in terms of both nation and community, during and after the Partition of India and Pakistan. While examining the tensions between memory, forgetting, and

silence, as well the limitations of memorialization, I have looked at how the object—home—is a site of emotion and melancholy. In exploring the emotions that emerge for South Asian diasporas, I have argued that when we are uprooted from our houses what becomes apparent is its thingness, its ability to be a home. Once we realize that the thingness of being a home had been present all along, what becomes apparent are those emotions felt by the uprooted South Asian communities—melancholia in recognizing their sense of belonging has been lost. I followed the narrative of my great-grandfather, Bhag Singh, and his experience through Partition as a way of bringing the chapter back to familial ties to illustrate the ways in which my own family's identity—as well as our different relationships with home—has been formed by such events.

Upon solidifying the conversation of home as a place that incites feelings of colonial exile for the South Asian diaspora, I reflected upon the ways in which a specific type of object-subject relationship can be addressed in the form of heirlooms. I explored the ways in which my subaltern grandmother's wedding necklace—the Rani Harr—can create a space where memories dwell. The “denseness” of such objects is created through ancestral histories, which allows the objects to act as vessels that carry forth the subaltern's otherwise silenced narratives. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's work, I looked to my grandmother's Rani Harr as a way to illustrate how objects that connect to South Asian identities, in postcolonial contexts, are connected to colonial powers and discourses. More specifically, I argue that that the question of survival can be understood through discussing how some objects and artefacts are linked to trauma and displacement; it is specifically the memories surrounding the affective object that uncovers some of the unspoken complexities of displacement. While utilizing Avery Gordon's work on "fictions of the real" (Gordon 11), I addressed the importance of challenging the assumption of official histories being

a “secured reality” that we all experience as true. Through Gordon and Dina Georgis' work, I also discussed the ways in which official records use a rational discourse that allows us to forget that the facts about secured realities are also manufactured through the discarding "difficult content" (Georgis 170). It is this dismissal of "difficult" experiences that results in the silencing of victims of oppression. From this, I suggested that in order to access these silenced experiences, we must turn to narratives and the “right to narrate” through the “unspeakable” forces of memory that surround heirlooms. Through hearing individual and personal stories over institutional dialogues, there is a space created for the subaltern's voice to be heard.

Upon laying the historical foundation for India's Partition and the ways in which colonial histories exclude or shape narratives of the South Asian diaspora, I turned to another violent moment in India's history: the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. I argued that some objects that have an affective capacity for survival and can inform the ways in which postcolonial individuals identify with home. To think about this I followed the narrative of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi and traced how the object of a gun—my great-grandfather's gun that was passed on to my father—became an object of survival. Once again utilizing the method of storytelling, this narrative follows my father Surinder Singh, the new owner of the gun, and his experience of displacement and survival during the riots. Though this story only tells the Sikh perspective of the riots, and even more specifically my father's perspective of the riots, I use the narrative to demonstrate the ways in which affect becomes the unspeakability of the gun while untangling affect as a force that informed my family's migration from India in its *capacity* for survival.

As an Indian global nomad and the daughter and great-granddaughter of these stories, the only way in which I can read these things are as identity-making objects. From this, the research in this project was limited to narratives that were centered on my *own* ancestral history as it is

tied to colonial displacement. Yet this familial history is insightful, because it highlights the necessity of a genealogical link in bringing those stories forward and thinking about the thingness and emotions and affective ties that circulate and emanate from seemingly unspeakable objects. Put slightly differently, this project has focussed on my own familial stories of displacement as a way to centralize my analyses of each object's thingness in relation to belonging and personal narratives—a method that refuses to give dominating “legitimate” histories the only voice. Nonetheless, and in extending this research, where I used my own familial history as an example in this project to illustrate the ways in which ancestral histories of displacement can be unsilenced—generations later—I attempted to create a space where other families affected by colonial histories can use objects to talk about difficult content. I propose that postcolonial individuals that are disconnected from their homeland and colonial histories can also use this alternative way of engendering and telling stories as a way of recovering the lost voices of their ancestors. Ultimately, the importance of this project is not my family's specific story, but the *ways* in which those stories can be brought forward through alternative modes of understanding—through the “unspeakable” forces that surround objects—and that the significance of reviving such narratives is in the acknowledgment of past traumatic experiences.

Further research regarding the role of the Indian global nomad will be worth investigating in the future. Regarding their difficult ancestral history with homing and belonging, additional conversations around the nomad's definition of home—and how affective objects laden with colonial histories inform that idea of home—would be beneficial in regarding what effects the otherwise silenced stories of their family would have on their sense of belonging and citizenship. According to scholars such as Anh Hua, the nomad's notion of home is not necessarily based in roots of settlement, but in the security of a destination. This is to say that the journey itself

becomes the familiar and therefore becomes the home (Hua 50). The nomad is a new kind of international citizen where home is not a particular place, but must be reconsidered as not necessarily being rooted in their binding past to a place, but instead to a promise of a future (51). To borrow from Hua, the nomad's sense of home is based on the notion that "no one ever gets there, but is always getting there." (51).

In a further investigation, I would ask: if the Indian nomad is constant transition without being physically bound to a place from their past, how does their ancestor's histories with displacement inform their current identities? What are the lasting effects of colonial legacies generations later? In asking future questions about how nomads perform and invent themselves anew in unfamiliar politics of place and arrival, we can look back to these identity-making objects as vessels that can carry their familial histories forward in the hopes of creating a space where the stories will always be remembered (May 12). What I am attempting to illustrate through those future questions is that personal narratives, which are told after events of displacement, is how we can produce an alternative space to understand the making and meaning of home. It is through the memories of those experiences that the emotional work of objects can be illuminated.

In conclusion, to ruminate in the gap that separates language and object we can find "unspeakable" forces that highlight how material "things" are inflected with diasporic migrations and narrative for the South Asian diaspora. How these forces and subsequent silenced narratives are brought forward is dependent on the generations that follow the victims of displacement. In this project, the Indian global nomads are those who have ultimately come into possession of the objects of analysis and through the link of familial ties *to* the object or heirloom, the object's narrative reveals itself. Furthermore, and in investigating the importance of these familial ties, I

have suggested that these objects are identity-making for the Indian global nomad because it connects their identities back to their homeland. In this project and in future studies, I will continue to look to diasporic objects as they complicate language, and therefore, reveal that the politics of survival is articulated through the object's tangibility and materiality—its thingness—as well as language or storytelling. The affective feelings surrounding objects, and the desire to keep, discard, and share objects, will continue to aid in the production of diasporic identities while offering a new or different set of questions linked to embodied personhood and belonging.

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