CHAPTER FOUR

‘HE NEVER WENT OUT AGAIN’: THE PRECARIAT OTHERIZED AT ‘HOME’

I

The terms ‘other’ and ‘home’ in essence stand in juxtaposition. In the wake of 9/11, various channels contributed in erasing the distinction between the two for select populations. The aim of this chapter is to examine the precarity that emanates when one is rendered as the other in their own home by determinants posed by 9/11. Here, homes that allude to both material and metaphorical, conceptual, and concrete constructs are plagued by sundry agencies.

The objectives of this chapter are

i) To examine precarity in relation to the interplay of domestic and foreign entities at one’s home;
ii) To interpret the dynamic of the self and the other with home and outside;
iii) To explore potentialities of being the other within more than one framework of home; and
iv) To establish precarity as homelessness and homelessness as precarity.

The chapter is guided by the following hypotheses

i) The sustenance of home does not lie on the individual alone but is dependent on variables beyond one’s control; and
ii) A blow to one’s home translates to their struggles with identity.

The chapter will address the following research questions

i) How does precarity create conditions for loss of ‘home’ and how do embattled homes precipitate precarity?
ii) How does post-9/11 precarity affect pre-existing precarities?

Literature Review

September 11, 2001 was perceived as an assault on the home as the American territories were infiltrated, its icons destroyed, and people hurt. Despite the targets being specific concrete establishments, it destabilized the overall sense of being at home for its people. This analysis locates individuals reduced to the figure of the other in one's own home beyond the US borders due to varied factors orchestrated by 9/11. This enables us to map the expanse and expense that a temporally and spatially removed event can harness.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines home as "house," "abode," "one's own place or country," "collection of dwellings, village, estate, house," and so on. This chapter considers home as a construct that corresponds to micro and macro levels, with material and metaphorical bearings. Verlyn Klinkenborg in "The Definition of Home" (2012) defines home beyond the confines of "just a place" as "home is home, and everything else in not-home." Shelley Mallet in her comprehensive account on home, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature" (2004), based on the scholarship on home offers how the term, among many connotations, pertain to "a dwelling place or a lived space of interaction between people, places and things; or perhaps both," "singular and/or plural," "alienable and/or inalienable," "given and/or made," "fixed and stable and/or mobile and changing," "familiar and/or strange," with "permeable and/or impermeable" boundaries, "fundamental and/or extraneous to existence," "an expression of one's (possible fluid) identity and sense of self and/or one's body might be home to the self," "can constitute belonging and/or create a sense of marginalization/ estrangement," "associated with feelings of comfort, ease intimacy, relaxation and security and/or oppression, tyranny and persecution," "an ideological construct and/or an experience of being in the world," "a crucial site for examining relations of production and consumption, globalisation and nationalism, citizenship and human rights, and the role of government and governmentality," and can "provide a context" concerning "intimacy, family, kinship, gender, ethnicity, class, age and sexuality" (84). These possibilities and potentialities very much encompass the frame(s) of home to be engaged with in the chapter.

Post-9/11 novels deal with precarity cast over different sets of population. By referring to the home countries as a larger framework of othering, the individuals then lay at risk in their own homes. Here, they suffer from the lack of conventional sentiments

associated with home, such as safety, ownership, comfort, security, refuge, warmth, and above all a sense of well-being, identity, and belonging. These now lie under threat due to the interplay of disruptive forces post 9/11. Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006), exhibits the infringement of privacy and sanctity of a Bedouin home of the narrator-protagonist by the American forces. This results in his exit from his home and village to escape the humiliation and seek revenge by becoming a part of a radical insurgent group. In Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* (2011), Naema and her family are compelled to leave their house in the post-9/11 Iraq war and seek refuge at her grandmother's home in Baghdad due to war chaos. The unhomely atmosphere is evident in her grandmother's death from the war-driven healthcare crisis and the wrongful detention of her father and brother at the US camp. In *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019), Antoon captures the ruthlessness of the Iraq war through Wadood's catalogue that lists the destruction of living or non-living entities leaving no trace of 'home.'

Again, the post-9/11 period shows how in addition to the material and influential role of foreign entities, the participation of domestic elements—reactionary and existing—such as the state, non-state actors, and other groups contribute to the quagmire. In *The Baghdad Eucharist* (2017), Antoon limns the disquieting lives of Iraqi Christians in the sectarian tension wrought by post-9/11 Iraq war. They grapple with the contested idea of home despite being "here for centuries" (136). Maha's miscarriage after an explosion nearby exhibits the unhomely atmosphere that incites her to leave her home; the loss can be symbolically interpreted in terms of the unborn entity's severed relation with its first home, that is, the womb: "How awful it is when death precedes birth itself" (104). Megha Majumdar's *A Burning* (2020), does not refer to the 9/11 attacks but captures the implications of the global narrative in strengthening the domestic Indian setting. Here, the 22-year Muslim woman Jivan in Kolkata, India is charged with sedition and is wrongfully linked with a terrorist attack on a train. It upholds the rising surveillance, religious polarization, heightened nationalism, and corruption.

Arjun Appadurai's *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006), discusses the threatened position of the minority and links it to the phenomenon of globalization. He elucidates how despite the relatively small number of minority/minorities in a nation, their presence unease the majority as they embody obstacles in achieving the "total purity" (53), and conceiving the nation as a collective identity. He shows how the minority then provoke

fear and violence against themselves. He observes how post-9/11 "geography of anger" brings together "long-standing regional and local histories, national and transnational political tensions, and global and international pressures and coalitions" (99). After 9/11, he notes how South Asia allows for exploring the "geography of anger" and to understand the ways the global, regional, and local spaces interact with each other in terms of "replication and repercussion" (93).

Moreover, the post-9/11 texts depict how individuals at home are bodily vulnerable in adjunct to the lack of visibility of their losses. In *The Blind Man's Garden*, the American forces ask their Afghan allies to quickly dispose of the Taliban casualties to escape accountability from being captured by a passing satellite. Lalami in *Conditional Citizens* meditates on the inequality faced by 'the other' despite being citizens in the US in contrast to their white counterparts. In this sense, the chapter engages with the 'insiders' who in spite of sharing the same country of origin as their fellow-citizens or being a part of the same body politic encounter precarity. Butler views how precarity also designates that "politically induced condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection" (*Frames* 26). Again, given an unhomely atmosphere abroad, one may possess the choice or possibility to return home. However, the same may not be possible for those othered at home as it may be the only home they know and an escape would be determined by their resources, familial ties, and immigrant policies of the host countries.

This uneven relationship between the state and its select citizens materializes in their second-class treatment, wrongful incrimination, corporeal violence, surveillance, inadequate resources and opportunities, loss of home, etc. The feelings of exclusion or non-belonging apart from corporeal and immaterial aspects may heighten to result in obliteration from their very existence, which at times parallels an exclusion from humanity. These conditions culminate to foster precarity for select lives, and in light of this chapter, attends to their eroding relation with home. The precarity in question is explored in two relational aspects: first, it refers to precarious circumstances that result in voluntary or coerced exit of individual/group from their homes; second, it refers to precarious circumstances that offshoot post one's loss/exit from their homes. Precarity then can operate either as a condition or a consequence or/and both.

The four primary texts analysed in this chapter are: Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's *The Watch* (2012), Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013), Karan Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016), and Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017). The three landscapes in these texts—Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan—project lives impinged by precarity with respect to the varied edifices of home such as house, family, neighbourhood, town or country of one's origins.

II

Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's *The Watch* (2012)

In Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's novel, the precarity of the individuals emerges from being a part of a topography that has been othered after 9/11. The narrative set in the post-9/11 war-affected Afghan terrain is a revisitation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 441 BCE). Akin to Antigone's defiance of state law, Roy-Bhattacharya's Pashtun character Nizam strives against a US military base in Kandahar Province for a rightful burial of her brother Yusuf who is killed while avenging his family's death by the Americans. The precarity here can be examined in terms of sudden extermination of lives, strategic management of identities, and contested presences in spaces within the homeland.

The novel has been read concerning its intersection of classical mythology with recent feminist theory (Eastman 211-23); retelling of classical (tragical) mythology in the contemporary globalized world (Georgiadi 1-66); presence of multiple voices (Haytock 336-54); non-linear narrative (Zeacharias 367-72); ambivalence of the interpreter (Johnson 1-10); the participation of interpreter in warzone (Tipton 537-55). The chapter analyses Roy-Bhattacharya's novel to examine how in the light of a global episode, one's existence turns uncertain in one's country mostly with a lack of alternate shelter.

Negligent Deaths of Negligible Lives

The novel foregrounds precarity characterized by vulnerability in terms of corporeal violence at one's home. In warzones civilians end up as victims of direct targets or as 'collateral damage.' The post-9/11 war on terror has gained notoriety particularly for the use of drone technology that has caused an immense death toll over the years. Hilal traces the severity of post-9/11 US operations to the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force

(AUMF), that permitted the American president to employ "any and all necessary and appropriate force" (*Innocent* 71) against anyone or anything to have been associated with causing 9/11, including those harbouring them as preventive measures. The lack of specificities and the enormous latitude entrusted to conduct the war are seen to have expanded in its course.

In relation to post-9/11 drone warfare, the likeliness and the unpreparedness of an attack pushes its population to be "in a state of constant fear" (Hilal 71). Moreover, she observes that here civilians end up as targets based on misidentification and miscommunication. The idea of normal lives in their habitats exposed to such militarization then contests the very essence of home. In Roy-Bhattacharya's novel, precarity assumes the role of corporeal vulnerability at one's home as both its starting and end points. Nizam loses her family members (except Yusuf) and her legs to an American drone strike based on misinformation by local intelligence that is allegedly driven by vested interests. The negligence towards the other is exhibited in the lack of verification of this report already privy to the Americans prior to the attack. This negligence is further accentuated as the Captain of the American outpost resorts to stereotypes rather than accept accountability: "…they're always fighting each other. They're all as crazy as fuck" (*Watch* 297). If family constitutes a dimension of home based on the sense of belongingness evoked by its members, Nizam is severed of this fundamental tie.

This disregard for lives of the other generally corresponds to America's injustice in its disproportionate response to 9/11. This is captured by Nizam's reply to the American lieutenant who justifies their presence by the devastation caused to his country and its people on September 11: "I can assure you that my family had nothing to do with it! I protest. We're simple farmers and shepherds. I don't even know where exactly your country is" (*Watch* 16). Georgiadi in her discussion of *The Watch* observes how rather than being agents of democracy and freedom as the Americans consider themselves are in fact agents of "death, destruction and unlivability" (*Specters* 39). The narcissistic preoccupation of America is represented by the soldier who credits their intervention for facilitating an environment that enables Nizam to play her lute:

> They say: It's good that you're able to play music again in this country. Under the Taliban, it was forbidden, but we've made it possible. That's what freedom means.

> I say: Under the Taliban, my family was alive. Now they are all dead. What is better? Freedom or life? (*Watch* 15)

Moreover, this supposition is opposed by photographic evidence of Nizam playing her lute in presence of Yusuf that evinces their belonging to an anti-Taliban group. Moreover, such messianic outlook fails to take cognizance of the large-scale damages wrought by them in the name of security. It underlines how despite being unacquainted with global developments, the ordinary mass is susceptible to be entangled with larger forces and subjected to repercussions of an event that has transcended boundaries. It also highlights how inadvertently it greases the chain of revenge, starting with 9/11 to the drone strike that wipes out Yusuf's family, from his launching a revenge attack on the American base to Nizam's death in the process.

Concerning negligence, Nizam's death is driven by presumptions reserved for the other. The distance of the West with the rest or the idea of "the other" beyond its territories makes the latter unfamiliar and not trustworthy. In this case, in addition to the cultural distance between Nizam and the soldiers, it is also the physical distance that attributes her with sinister motives. For instance, her gender remains dubious for them from afar for a long time. She is treated as an outsider in her own land as she is asked to retreat by firing bullets close to her: "She got no business being in a war zone. If she gets hosed, it's collateral damage" (205). Hilal observes how civilian casualties in the war on terror owes to their Muslim identities, deemed an "existential threat" in the security interest of US and hence, are simply classified as "collateral damage" or clubbed under the tag of "terrorists" and "as not so much human beings" (*Innocent* 76). Here, despite undergoing security checks and ensuring her authenticity of her demand, Nizam is eventually killed. The act of her drawing out a knife to cut off the plaited wire attached to a dead lamb that would have been offered to the camp simultaneously to the sudden movement made by the camp's dog causes the shooter to give in to the existing doubt and distrust.

The novel highlights how negligence moves beyond the living to encompass the dead. For instance, the corpses of Yusuf and his companions are treated with contempt by the soldiers. They adopt a clumsy attitude in their handling – flinging one body over another and even spitting next to them. This echoes Creon's views on the unchanged attitude towards the other: "enemy is always enemy alive or dead" (*Antigone* 29). The views of the medic counters such degrading treatment: "they fought honorably and deserve

our respect" (*Watch* 65). This othering that surpasses basic human civility is contradicted by Nizam whose behaviour, otherwise deemed as "barbaric," buries three corpses lying in the field in her physically incapacitated state.

Strategic Identities and After-Deaths

The novel engages with the paradoxical treatment of lives. While some lives are handled with negligence or conspiracy, the after-deaths of some underline a tactical affair. Here, Yusuf's corpse rests with the American soldiers for his alleged identity as a Taliban leader who attacked a US army base and is to be transported to Kabul. His body assumes political substance as it is to be televised by the Afghan government in order to fix its image and earn credibility over their former untrue claims about deaths of insurgents: "The government is weak and, they'll use anything they can to project their strength" (*Watch* 223). Even if Yusuf is later revealed to be anti-Taliban and in fact a "Pashtun hero, a Mujahid, and a freedom fighter" (8-9), the politics prevents Nizam's claim over his body: "It doesn't fucking matter…for the regime to cancel at this stage would mean a loss of face. The details are irrelevant to them" (299). This highlights the deception and lack of transparency of the Afghan government towards its people, which as the narrative suggests is associated with other forms of corruption. While collateral casualties involve secrecy/limited visibility, select (dead)bodies serve to fulfil opportunistic representations. Here, the locals are estranged from the notion of home at the behest of the government as it does not ensure safety and protection to their lives or to their identities after their deaths.

The narrative shows the implications concerning lack of cultural knowledge in the other's homeland. While some soldiers attempt to understand the language or culture of Afghanistan, its nuances are lost to them. For example, Yusuf is branded as a Taliban insurgent based on the black turbans worn by him and his companions. However, they are revealed to be anti-Taliban tribesmen: "Not all black turbans are the same. The Taliban loop theirs differently" (70). Roy-Bhattacharya in an interview, comments on the religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity of Afghanistan and especially the intricacies of the Pashtun tribe and that this idea is lost on the average American. Even Masood, the native Tajik interpreter of the camp considers Nizam to be a man based on her name for which she might have been treated differently. Despite being a native, Masood's ignorance highlights the rich diversity of Afghan society and the risks associated with mistaken status.

The narrative also indicates the imposition of identities that proves detrimental for the subject. For instance, the Captain strips Nizam of her subjectivity and views her as a potential source of information: "If we play this right, it could be an amazing opportunity to gather intelligence…We can fucking grill her for intelligence on her brother, on their tribe, on the mountains—on everything!" (144). He also disregards the empathetic feelings of his subordinates and questions its validity in the warfront: "We gotta stay at the top of the food chain. It's the law of the jungle…" (279). Even the blood-soaked shirt of Yusuf or the medical assistance offered to Nizam is premised on extracting information on her people. Nizam apparently assumes the form of a potential political capital that would benefit the US. The Captain who sees her behaviour as 'unusual' prepares an itinerary for her without her consent. She is planned to be evaluated at Kandahar, undergo a medical examination at Bagram and then sent to Landstuhl, Germany. "We're going to make her a textbook example of trauma rehabilitation. She's going to be fitted with the latest state-of-the-art prostheses. By the time they're done with her, she'll be able to compete in the fucking Olympics" (302). The propagandist agenda of the Captain is evident in his insouciance:

> Never jump to conclusions where the US Army is concerned. We do have a sense of honor, we respect courage, and we do things right.
>
> …What's more, we're going to get a whole of feel-good PR from this story. It's just the kind of thing that gets written up—heroes with hearts, or something along those lines…Who knows—we may even make it to the front page of *Stars and Stripes*. Or maybe we'll get lucky and they'll put her on the cover of the Time magazine like that gal who got her nose cut off. (*Watch* 303-4)

The othering of Nizam at home occurs as she is forced to the rules of the foreigner. While the loss of home is already palpable in her family tragedy and her exit from the house, she is also at risk of being uprooted from the country. Moreover, the plan to send her off in the same aircraft that would carry her brother without her knowledge shows the apathy reserved for the other. Faludi deliberates on the post-9/11 media and entertainment industry's fixation on the John Wayne-like figure popularising the role of an avenger and rescuer (*Terror Dreams* 4). Her discussions expose that the American missions were driven more to establish themselves as rescuers rather than doing the actual rescuing.

The novel shows if Nizam's home Afghanistan is a battleground and the outpost manifests as the obvious oppositional force to her, there is a network that ushers in creating this precarity. Helen Eastman observes that there exist no foreign characters or no "other" in *Antigone* as it depicts a "civil conflict, taking place within one insular community" ("Young" 214). By structuring into the template of Antigone, Roy-Bhattacharya's text further problematizes Nizam's case by making her challenge the familiar but also deal with a foreign entity. Moreover, as the Lieutenant observes, Creon is "here, there, and everywhere" (*Watch* 287) such as the government, the corporations, etc. of which the troops are only a part. This also taps precarity heralded by the globalised world that has engulfed all. Here, Masood believes in the "democracy, freedom, and the rule of law" (122) embodied by the US: "Don't abandon us prematurely. You hold the responsibility for an entire people in your hands" (122). However, Nick Frobenius' disillusionment with the war and Duggal's motive of joining it as a source of livelihood exposes the shams of the campaign. Though most soldiers are sympathetic towards Nizam evident in offering food, medical assistance or driving away hyenas from her at night and even grow in favour of returning Yusuf's body, however, their liability to the higher authorities make them complicit in their government's propaganda.

Place of One's Own, Rules of the Other

The novel exhibits the contested presences of the native in spaces within the homeland. The post-9/11 Afghanistan features as a treacherous war space owing to interplay of multiple participants. These include both foreign and domestic elements, such as the US-led coalition forces, the newly set up Afghan government and their local representatives, tribal groups, the Taliban insurgents, and other rebels. These groups do not necessarily function independently and may coordinate to tackle mutual opponents. For instance, in the novel, the American forces apparently cooperate with the Afghan government against Taliban insurgents. Due to such power dynamics that transpire in both conspicuous and covert ways, the air is saturated with constant suspicion regarding one's actions and intention: "Will someone please tell me who the good guys are?" (*Watch* 298). For instance, the death of Nizam's family indicates a foul play in the "dystopic, conflict-ridden world" ("Young" 211). For the native then, home is mired in political powerplay that complicates the autonomy of civilians.

Precarity as a consequence transpires in the turn of events that shifts one beyond the familiar to the alien and uncertain. According to Freud, the uncanny refers to "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" ("The "Uncanny"" 1). In this context, he sees the German term "unheimlich" not corresponding to the exact opposite of what "heimlich" - that is, "familiar," "native," and "belonging to the home," embodies. He is of the view that the "uncanny" then does not necessarily imply that anything new and unfamiliar is frightening, but something added to it makes it so. In Nizam's case, home connotes Afghanistan at large and the spaces within it resemble the uncanny. For instance, the drone attack on her family occurs in a seemingly non-combatant zone evident in their return from their wedding in a defenseless and unexpected state. Again, the outpost is not just a signifier of the foreign taking over the homeland but operates as a visibly volatile space with any unexpected presence deemed as threat. Given the unanticipated and unalarmed attack by Yusuf's team, the volatility of the area is exacerbated. The heightened vigilance of the Americans in anticipation of another attack or the coming of Yusuf's companions to retrieve their bodies thus makes Nizam's presence doubtful and precarious. This indicates the othering of the individual at home in spatial terms. The departure from home does not necessitate a return as circumstances beyond its threshold usually signifies the strange. In Nizam's case, this materializes both in the drone attack as well as later in her death at the camp's premises.

The novel advances how apart from direct threats to life, warzones also cause the individual to inhabit spaces despite their will. For instance, Nizam's wish to be at her home is countered by her sense of duty: "I would like nothing better than to go home now, but I recognize that sometimes there is no going back" (*Watch* 28). Her state is an output of political play that redefines the concept of home: "This is where I'm staying. This is now my final home. How strange life is. I used to have so many wishes, so many dreams" (31). Even her travel from "too far away" (16) is both physically and psychologically gruelling as she propels a cart solely with her hands and amputated legs over uneven hilly roads and streams and stretches filled with mines. She is now reduced to a cart with limited water and food supplies and exposed to extreme weather conditions, scavenging birds and hyenas besides the obvious risk of death by armed soldiers who constantly monitor her. The contrast is visible as Nizam who is illiterate, loses her sister to a bombardment, has never spent a night outdoors on her own and now exposed to an uncertain future is juxtaposed

against the lieutenant's sister who aspires to be a doctor with the possibility/agency of working in the Kandahar province in future.

The othering at home materializes in the lack of agency. For instance, Nizam is denied funerary rites over her brother's corpse. Her apparent grief is generalized, construed as a deception for revenge which is considered as "natural to these people as the air they breathe" (*Watch* 151), or how "all these people have the same poison running through their veins" (282). However, the role of the war on terror premised on rooting out terrorism by intruding into other countries and destabilising entire communities indicate a motive of revenge by the Americans. The advent of American forces and their shaping of the country's politics after 9/11 echoes forms of imperialism. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), draws on the psyche of the colonizer and their role in projecting a Manichean worldview of the colonized. According to Fanon, in the colonial world, the settler not just delimits the place of a native physically but also paints them "as a sort of quintessence of evil" (39). Furthermore, it dehumanizes the natives and even depicts them as animals, using zoological terms (40). In the novel, this reifies in context of the American forces who perceive the Afghan natives as characteristically villainous in general. For instance, Nizam is seen as a "creature" (*Watch* 220), which hinders in empathising with her victimhood. The textual references to foreign invaders in the past in the region and in context to Alexander draws on the probability of "very European" (87) or Indo-Aryan features of some Afghans. This history of invasions challenges the element of otherness as populations are far from isolated and their advancements have materialized only by coming into contact with one another.

The idea of home is disputed as the body undergoes different forms of violation apart from death. In post-9/11 America, the episodes of interrogation and search of one's body and belongings of "suspect communities" turned into a common scene. If it targeted 'outsiders,' in the novel it operates on the body of 'insiders.' Nizam's body and her cart are inspected by the Americans to ensure her innocence: "Is this the foreigners' sense of honor?" (*Watch* 18). Furthermore, the search on her body is made by a male soldier causing her humiliation and rendering her "rigid and imagine I've turned into a pillar of stone" (20). Georgiadi notes how the veil, embodies "modesty, self-respect, and "dignity"" for Nizam contrary to the Western eye that materializes it as a "tool of coercion, both corporeal and psychic violation" (*Specters* 21) lent to it by the Americans. This act cannot be seen

only in terms of a violation but as a corollary of warfare that generates a mutual mistrust between groups. In this case, the camp is already affected by the night's battle and hence their actions display their shoring up on security. It is ironic that while she presents a security concern for the American base, it is the Americans that bring her in contact with insecurity at her home.

While Nizam's fate of getting killed can be linked as a voluntary act on her part, it indicates that the exercising of her autonomy is driven by her motive to evade another kind of precarity based in her traditional knowledge. Georgiadi on discussing Nizam's persistence on her brother's corpse observes the significance of funerary rites and its steps rooted in their religion and: "Not performing, attending or participating in it is a sin and a sin that befalls not the individual, but the entire community that has collectively refused this last rite of the deceased (*Specters* 53). She notes how it is a "duty" that becomes a "responsibility" towards the dead, and "hospitality" that involves "offering and forgiveness that puts on trial the souls not of the "dead other," but of the living, and measures the inhumanity of the self and not the other" (53). Nizam's relief at realizing that she is not killed instantly "which might easily have happened" (*Watch* 11) highlights this risk-taking. If in Sophocles' *Antigone*, the titular character becomes an other for going against the decree of Creon, Nizam is already an other owing to geopolitics. Even if in her 'visibility' or otherwise, the otherness is only accentuated by her act.

Contrary to Nizam's literal and figurative distance from the camp, Masood despite being an official part of it undergoes the sense of exclusion: "they seem to be keeping watch over the interpreter as much as over me" (*Watch* 32). He is called a "raghead" (112) by one of the soldiers, mostly confronts rude behaviour and is made fun of his demeanour. Steven K. Johnson (2019) shows how despite attempts of Masood to "connect and identify" ("Translating" 9) with the Americans, the latter's creation and extension of boundaries cancel out in the formation of hybridity. He shows how Masood's arrival meets him with "invisibility" in the American camp and later his visibility only reduces him as "only and always sub-human, an object of derision and suspicion" (7). Masood aligns with the apparent motives of Americans, particularly for fighting the Taliban that wiped out his family. However, the othering causes him to briefly feel "a kind of reluctant kinship" (*Watch* 116) with the alleged Taliban corpses which he cannot help but "contrast to the way I've been made to feel inside the base" (116). Moreover, as Johnson observes, the

interpreter is also at a position of contempt by their own community, viewed as "traitors and pawns of the occupiers to their countrymen" ("Translating" 2). This is evident in Nizam who calls him out for his allegiance to the Americans. Thus, the position of Masood too remains precarious both for the internal and external entities in his home country.

Gendered Othering

Gender constitutes a site to examine the precarity that surfaces from one's challenged presence. According to Eastman, Roy-Bhattacharya's scenario supports both the aspects in the essays of Mee and Foley (2011), about how Antigone by Sophocles is received, namely how her gender is sometimes highlighted in rebelling in a patriarchal set-up, and other times it is her individuality that challenges the state ("Young" 213). Warfare has always been a domain predominantly associated with men. While a man partaking in war may be simply deemed a fighter/warrior, a female is referred to with her gendered identity, such as a "female hero/ female freedom fighter/ female warrior," as common to other milieus. The former's valour is taken for granted while the latter's act is treated as something extraordinary. Prior to the inclusion of other voices which provide significant perspectives to the war waged, Jennifer Haytock draws on the American war story tradition, which traditionally focussed on the experiences of the individual white male heterosexual soldier and the war the that upheld "American masculine selfhood and nationhood" ("Reframing" 336). In the context of Roy-Bhattacharya's narrative, Nizam's precarity at home is also tied to her gendered identity.

While Nizam's appearance as an individual in the combat zone is in itself seen as a threat, the treatment that follows is largely shaped by her gender. Firstly, Afghanistan has been a palimpsest of violence, a site of proxy wars, in which life, particularly that of women, is relatively not at par with other nations. It is noticed that her presence disconcerts both the American forces as well as for Masood: "I am a dilemma for them. I am a woman in their man's world, and they do not know how to proceed" (*Watch* 10). The conventional invisibility of women in the battlefield pertaining to most social set-ups, and particularly in Afghanistan makes her to be viewed as "some strange animal, potentially interesting, yet dangerous enough to maintain a guarded distance" (18). Her appearance as a "mirage" (138) at first can also be linked to her unexpectedness in the scene.

Secondly, apart from the patriarchal set-up common to most societies, Nizam's presence due to the misogynistic environment fuelled by the Taliban remains dubious. Given the Taliban's history of using women and children as distractions or as human shields to enter enemy territory, this offers the soldiers a ground to see her as a possible deceit (*Watch* 122). She is speculated to be a woman, a man, or a man in disguise. Again, by considering her as a woman, she is speculated to be a black widow, a WMD (Weapon of Mass Destruction), a suicide or kinetic operative, or a Trojan horse set up by the Taliban to attack the camp. If the transgression by asserting autonomy in the political domain leads to Antigone's tragic end, Nizam's mere physical presence creates an "unprecedented situation" (10) as she has "no place here" (9). The atmosphere is aroused by her being "outside the conventional template" (270) with "no SOP" (148), thus initiating her precarity. Again, the camp is reluctant to acknowledge her physical prowess after learning that she propelled the cart solely with her arms and shoulders, with stumps wrapped in goatskins bound by puttees and rags in place of legs, traversing taxing lengths and then burying three corpses in her injured state.

Thirdly, Nizam's demand of taking over the funerary rites lies in contradiction with the knowledge that the camp has of the traditional Afghan set-up. These three factors culminate to put her in a precarious position:

> … but does it make sense that, in this country, a single, unaccompanied woman – and one who claims to be the sister of a tribal leader, what's more – would no one show up in a fucking go-kart to demand the return of his body? It seems culturally way off the mark. Too much freedom of movement and direct movement for a woman. Somehow it's asking for an inordinate suspense of belief. (*Watch* 145)

Here, Nizam's act and its reception can be understood by Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. According to Butler in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988), gender is a social construct and one's gender identity is created by repetition of their acts. Here, Nizam appears suspicious in the combat zone and therefore occupies a precarious state as her performance does not fit into the conventional model of the Afghan women envisioned by the Americans. The gendered dimension also corresponds to the portrayal of Masood and his relations with the soldiers. Johnson, while discussing interpreters in fictional representations in contemporary Afghan war, depicts how

heteronormative masculinity champions in the homosocial space of the all-male camp, and hence other possibilities or performance of masculinity are not seen at par. This is evident in the derision and marginalization faced by Masood for the "signified femininity" and "exhibiting effeminacy" (Johnson 5). Both Masood and Nizam then confront othering for their respective unexpected performances.

Faludi observes the post-9/11 US infused with gender-oriented rhetoric and representations while dealing with the event or its aftermath. She questions the media's inorganic fixation on the 9/11 social fabric by responding to the attack as "heralding feminism's demise" (*Terror Dreams* 20), and associating women solely with the domestic. There were sexist takes on the liberal and feminist female voices and the overall treatment meted out to them as if they were "witches" (32). Moreover, there were calls to reclaim manly virtues and rekindle the lost manhood. J. Ann Tickner in "Feminist Perspectives on 9/11" (2002), draws on the dominant role of men and the hyper-masculine winds engulfing the US after 9/11 that relegated women to inaction regarding policy making and world politics. Tickner shows how let alone Osama Bin Laden mocking the West for becoming feminized, thinkers like Francis Fukuyama too were concerned about it. For instance, Fukuyama voiced against women's participation in US foreign policy and military affairs as their inability to counter "unspecified dangers" (334) posed by "those [non-democratic] parts of the world administered by young, ambitious, unconstrained men" (qtd. in Tickner 334). This brings to the fore the subjugation of the narratives of women and their voices.

Again, the Western lens has always been critical and condemning of the status of women in the East. The Western imagination and Oriental representation of the Muslim women have been preoccupied with the burqa-clad figure, evocative of both literal and symbolic marginalization. The Afghan woman has been represented as a victim of an oppressive patriarchal system heightened by elements like the Taliban. Ironically, these rigid frames of their passivity, submissiveness, and disenfranchisement operated as one of the key factors in launching the post-9/11 war campaign by the Bush administration. For instance, Georgiadi discusses the significance of veil in the Islamic world and questions the established reductive perceptions bound with it particularly in the novel: "it is not the veil itself, but the speculations, conjectures and presuppositions attached to it by the Americans that engender violence and oppression" (*Specters* 21). In the novel, the perspectives of the soldiers and Masood uphold how they are based on the restrictive

Afghan socio-cultural set-up. The lieutenant Nick Frobenius' journal entry informs about the "misogyny" (*Watch* 252) in Pashtun society. Nizam offers contradictory views by claiming that they are "neither locked nor separated from our men-folk" (24) as they are Pashtuns who do not adhere to the Taliban. However, it is evident as she lacks agency in contrast to her brother, which is supported by the fact that she is illiterate or does not participate in the discussions of the men-folk.

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ismene sees the impossibility of Antigone's resolve to bury their brother that defies the state and the patriarchal Theban society: "moreover we're girls/ girls cannot force their way against men" (14). Ironically, in *The Watch* in order to effectuate Nizam's retreat, the Americans resort to those very patriarchal frames based on Islamic codes of conduct suggested by Masood: "You are a woman. You have no role in a Muslim burial. We are many men here. We'll take care of it" (9). This is countered by Nizam as the Americans have decimated everyone in her family and leaves her with no alternative. Her gender identity intensifies the suspicion and unsettles the camp which is otherwise a place oozing omnipotence, competence and influence: "I'm a single, unarmed woman, I tell them, and you're an armed garrison bristling with guns. How can you be concerned for your safety?" (17). While the existing state of Nizam already indicates a state of precarity, her presence in the camp premises maximizes her vulnerability. Ironically, the agency that she asserts is an indirect outcome of the war, however it also furthers her precarity.

The theme of associating rebellious and non-confirming women with insanity is captured in literature. While Nizam's 'transgression' of socio-cultural expectations is initially viewed as odd and inconceivable for the camp or operates as a ruse to cause her retreat, her grief is questioned and her demand is likened to "women's hysterics": "you've exaggerated your status and you must leave" (*Watch* 10). The enactment of grief after learning about the way Yusuf died occurs in her sudden sharp cries followed by beating her head and laughing as a way of crying. Moreover, her actions indicate how "there's much about grief that can't be put into words" (81). The 'abnormality' in Nizam's actions including her "wailing like a banshee" (282), impels the Captain to forcibly send her off to a hospital for "people whose minds have been damaged by the war" (32). However, the novel overthrows this link because her thought process implies the otherwise, particularly her realization that she should not act in haste to avert any misinterpretation by the soldiers,

which could result in her death and prevent her from fulfilling her duty: “I have no choice: “my anger and despair must yield to patience, resolution” (25). The state of Nizam then evokes a restrictive environment as she neither has any control over the loss of her family members nor the latitude to express her grief.

The othering of Nizam is also facilitated by cultural hegemony and lack of respect for the other. For instance, the Americans deem her act of slaughtering a lamb as a gift in return for the food offered by the camp as “barbaric”: “civilized women do not slaughter animals” (31). This is ironic on many levels: firstly, the failure to acknowledge the cultural diversity of how Nizam’s act is rooted in the Pashtun tradition of hospitality. According to Georgiadi, the sacrifice of the lamb bears significance concerning hospitality in general and Islamic hospitality in particular. She observes how in so doing, Nizam seems to have performed it as “if forgiving the unforgivable and seeking pardon” (*Specters* 54-55) for not just for her dead brother’s sake but his killers as well. Akin to *Antigone*, this novel shows how it is not just the corpse that is denied a “burial,” or Nizam’s right to bury, and therefore her own right to mourning (*Specters* 46). Secondly, the emphasis on women and the established notion that their behaviour is meant to solely display gentleness and domesticity; thirdly, the hypocrisy of the camp is evident in dealing with the corpses of their enemy in inhuman ways; and lastly, in contrast to an animal killed for a meal, ironically the text foregrounds atrocities that human beings unleash on each other based on differentness: “some people don’t care for others who may be different from them” (*Watch* 121). Such arguments counter the civilizational role adopted by the West over the other.

Nizam challenges the peripheral position endowed to women in the Afghan society and the collective consciousness by pronouncing her presence in a gender-based othered space. If she is monitored by the soldiers, Nizam’s stay too creates a reverse gaze for the camp. If Sophocles’ Antigone is “a tragedy of sight” (10), and her greatest offense is perpetrating “against the retinas” (13) by exposing with her “monstrosity” (*Specters* 13) to the recovering polis, this analysis construes the title of the book as corresponding to sight, wherein the watch is maintained on both ends. In the novel, Pratt, a soldier, sees through the TWS “a giant eye, and she’s in the middle of it” (*Watch* 289), which can be alluded to her symbolic watch against the watch of the camp. Precarity here then operates as a condition as well as a consequence. If Nizam is modelled after Antigone, she then

embodies Antigone-like "monstrosity" (6), in being a foreign body (for the soldiers), a potential link with the "enemy," and just as the latter makes her presence prominent at a time and space that has just begun to move ahead by leaving behind the past (*Specters* 14). According to Georgiadi, a "true rebel" (55) is not who engages in violence and creates lifelong enemies but who "gives the place a face," which she bases on Levinas' context of the face, that is, one that "humanizes what is alien and foreign to oneself, that returns the gaze of the beholder" and gives the commandment, as "thou shall not kill" (55). Moreover, Nizam stirs the camp with empathy and compassion. Her act compels the soldiers to question the brutal realities of war and even protest in her favour. Thus, Nizam's role challenges the celebrated valour for wars and deflates the highlighted gap rooted on civilizational or religious differences. For instance, the camp's medic exposes the repercussions of war, particularly the one they are fighting that is fundamentally problematic:

> if she turns out to be a suicide bomber, it won't be because she hates our religion…It'll be because we whacked her brother and we're in this country…When you kill people and wipe out their families, strafe their homes and burn down their villages, litter their fields with fragmentation bombs and gun down their livestock, you've lost the whole fucking battle for hearts and minds…Is it any wonder they're fighting back? We're not winning this war; we're creating lifelong enemies. It's time to admit that our own leadership has ring-fenced us with lies. (*Watch* 213)

This illustrates the loss of human life and relationships premised on the civilizational differences. It brings to the fore basic human nature irrespective of one's religion or nationality. Precarity here denotes a situation when one loses the identities determined by one's home.

III

Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013)

The precarity in Fatima Bhutto's novel stems from the instability issued from existing and post-9/11 developments in Pakistan. It foregrounds the conflict between the central government and the frontier town of Mir Ali over its secessionist ideologies. More frames

of othering of its own citizens are supplemented by the nation's collaboration with America's post-9/11 war operations within its territories. Additionally, the violence perpetrated by different rebel groups augment the underlying tension. The narrative set in a morning's timeframe centers primarily on five characters: three brothers – Aman Erum, Sikandar and Hayat, Sikandar's wife Mina, and Samarra. Precarity here can be discussed in terms of the violent system, lack of opportunities, and the price of evading precarity.

Systemic Violence and Violent System

Violence functions as a tangible aspect of precarity. The novel entails embattled homes as a result of violence by the state, domestic radical groups, and foreign forces. The coalescence of the different agents fosters a vicious system that is difficult for individuals to escape. Here, violence marks as an existing feature of Mir Ali and the contemporary developments have witnessed its varied manifestations.

State violence represents political corruption that abuses state power against its citizens. The repressive environment of Mir Ali is created by the state due to its demand for autonomy in the past. The atrocities endured by its people is emphasized in the counteraction in the form of army violence that lasts till present day. For instance, in the past, the state used army violence against the community in an effort to curb the demands for autonomy:

> Doors were broken down in the dead of night, men were kidnapped from their streets, women were widowed and children were orphaned to teach the town its most important lesson: there was no match for the ruthlessness of the state. Another generation of male warriors would not grow in Mir Ali. (*Crescent Moon* 18)

The narrative highlights how the state's use of repressive apparatus transmutes into a form of systemic othering. This is reinforced by the post-9/11 dynamics of power.

The consequences of the state's association with foreign forces shows the destructive potential for its own citizens. Here, Pakistan's assistance to America's post-9/11 war on terror operations within its territories depict how citizens lack security in their own homes. If the civilians in the border areas are already marginalized, such actions further the sense of exclusion. Through the use of tanks on streets and snipers atop

buildings, curfews on large gatherings, direct and indirect surveillance, and other measures, the country along with the American forces continue to impose violent repression on the citizens. Although the state's treatment of its citizens has been already problematic, their compliance with an external agent renders them defenceless within their own country:

> First, they allowed the foreigners to come in and choose who would be arrested with papers and who would be transported over the country's borders. Young men from isolated frontier towns were taken to cells in nearby Afghan airbases and interrogated by young boys from Oklahoma. There was no need for the army to get involved then; it would only complicate matters.
>
> Then the Americans took elderly bearded men, the fellows who recited the prayers from the mosque's minarets. But they weren't dangerous in the way their captors had been hoping for. (*Crescent Moon* 63)

The novel highlights the active participation of the Pakistani army by providing local intelligence to the Americans. While the Americans conducted its operations from the sky, the Pakistani government "kept going on the ground" (64). The civil wars in different places indicate the resultant incongruous relation between the state and its citizens. This signals how citizens with internal discord are entrapped in the larger networks of power.

While the subjugation of the citizens is enforced through the outright deployment of the military, violence here assumes a covert tactic as a part of the state's "secret war." The state creates a reign of terror by engaging in forced disappearances of citizens—"Askari disappearances": "a service…like termite extermination or pest control" (63). This disciplining of bodies by extrajudicial methods depicts the futility of even non-violent dissent against the state which has complete control over everything, including the authority to suspend liberties. For instance, Samarra's father and an active fighter of Mir Ali, Ghazan Afridi remains missing for years. In the present times, Balach, a junior professor who compiles the state's crimes against its people, especially minorities, suddenly goes missing after being abducted in an "official-looking car" (64). The fact that it is done in the broad daylight in the presence of witnesses highlights the unchecked state power. The enforced submission of the citizens is observed in the passivity of the witnesses present during Balach's abduction: "Life would be easier for those who had seen nothing"

(64). The frequentness of such "un-dead" (66) entities is highlighted in the weekly vigils. Moreover, it also highlights extreme forms of othering against the revelation of the secrecy maintained by the state in perpetuating such activities. For instance, the media visibility gained by Balach's student-brother for opposing the former's disappearance leads to his death:

> His gut was bloated. His left arm, broken in five different places, was twisted above his shoulder. His right arm…lay several feet away from the place where Azmaray's body was found. His teeth had all been removed from his jawbone. (*Crescent Moon* 67)

While Balach remains missing, the gruesomeness of his brother's death also appears exemplary to demonstrate the consequences to any form of criticism. Such performative forms of violence orchestrate for its people a life "living like corpses" (45).

The novel demonstrates that the outcome of precarity again contributes to the violent system. In addition to the state-sponsored violence, the groups that fight the state and outside forces turn to extreme means. The presence of militants such as the Taliban further escalates the volatility of the land. Their strife against the government and motivations of sectarianism results in endangering the lives of ordinary citizens. For instance, Sikandar and Mina are asked to prove their sect at gunpoint by the Taliban and their presence in their homeland is questioned: "'What are you doing here?'... "Who allowed you to come into this area?'" (142). Again, since the hospital is a government facility, the Taliban bomb it, killing innocents including Sikandar's child Zalan. Moreover, the precarity of the people rendered homeless by the war on terror are susceptible to be recruited for these activities. Besides, the "underground" insurgency of Mir Ali's youth in the present is a rekindling of its struggle for autonomy. This group engages in insurgent activities against the injustice of its land and people: "There was no greater cause in Mir Ali than justice" (2). It is evident how othering has rendered the population to adopt violent methods thus blurring their distinction with the Taliban. For instance, the actions of the underground separatists have gradually turned them into "fanatics" whose destructive actions also add to the precarity of the ordinary population: "'We're no better than they are'" (196). This volatility attributed to the population connotes a violent system that is both a condition and consequence of precarity.

The coexistence of heterogeneous forces complicates everyday lives pushing them to a disorderly state. For instance, the decision of the three brothers Aman Erum, Sikandar, and Hayat to pray at different mosques on Eid is driven by their lowering the probability of being attacked: "It is too dangerous, too risky, to place all the family together in one mosque that could easily be hit. They no longer know by whom" (3). The idea of home is rebutted due to a constant lookout for safety for random acts of bombing: "No one prays together, travels in pairs, or eats out in groups. It is how they live now, alone" (21). Thus, the sustained violence on the population depicts the state approach to be ineffective and is proved detrimental to them and the country as a whole.

Systemic Exclusion

The systemic othering can be understood here in the form of exclusion in terms of their national belonging. The population of Mir Ali is deprived of opportunities by the delimitation set by the government. The individuals of Mir Ali were not recruited in the defense forces. For instance, the army had reservations regarding the attempts made by the "separatists" and "untrustworthy," considered their motives as "not to assimilate, but to infiltrate and so they closed the door to them" (*Crescent Moon* 147). There was an official ban on joining any state institutions and the current efforts by the center to recruit Mir Ali's youth to army, along with other initiatives, as a sign of "greater inclusion" (149) is revealed to be strategic in order to "neutralize their disruptions" (148). The hitherto neglect of the local administration particularly the Chief Minister who is a political appointee is palpable as the event marks his first ever visit to the region.

The novel provides an account of people who have worked with the state as "collaborators" (129) who end up occupying precarious positions themselves. Since they possess no security regarding their job terms or its benefits, their return to society is met with othering from the community for their participation is considered a betrayal. This echoes a form of Faustian bargain. The narrative cites the isolation of a man who returns to his hometown following such a predicament which ultimately culminates in his suicide. The narrative suggests that the creation of unofficial posts like that of the informant goes beyond the surface level of just collecting inside information for it destroys the fundamental tie, that is, the creation of a rift with the home itself that would benefit the state: "They want you to ask the very people who would, once you had been betrayed as

working for the state, denounce you. They want to isolate you from your natural protectors, your allies" (84). For instance, Aman Erum was the son of Inayat, "a sentinel of Mir Ali's history" (18), and by positing him as the antithesis of the latter's values or Mir Ali's sense of justice, the ties between them be dislodged in its passage.

Again, it is witnessed how the dominant narrative relegates the people and their lived realities to the periphery: "Most Pakistanis thought of Mir Ali with the same hostility they reserved for India or Bangladesh; insiders – traitors – who fought out of the body and somehow made it on their own without the glory of the crescent moon and star shining overhead" (19). Thus, opportunities to work in other parts of the country remain equally difficult. If there exist literal "wild borders" (12) on the one edge of the town, the other side is restrictive in the form of their strained relationship with the mainland. Moreover, since the state plays a major role in determining access to the outside world, the individual's relationship with it governs their prospects abroad. In this case, the resentment and doubt towards the people of Mir Ali makes it difficult for its people to avail a visa to study or work abroad.

The corruption works in tandem with the delimiting of potentials and opportunities in the region also constitute a part of the systemic violence. For instance, because the army in charge of trade routes is corrupt and demands a share of profit in exchange for logistics, the family business of Inayat suffers. The serious issues concerning health and healing are gambled upon by the use of expired medicines in the government hospital. Again, the inadequate funding for the region makes educational institutes like the university accessible mainly for the rich. Apart from inherent corruption, the state's cooperation with America against its people insinuates a likely financial transaction. Samarra's questions expose the contemporary scenario:

> 'I know that you are the ones who have sold everything in this country you defend so urgently. You sold its gold, its oil, its coal, its harbours. I know you are the first in these sixty-six years of your great country's history to have sold its skies. What have you left untouched?' (*Crescent Moon* 166)

The citizens suffer from the misgivings of their own government that hinders any kind of progress. In context to the center, the population of Mir Ali thrive physically, symbolically, and materially on the margins.

The novel shows how the assault on lives and livelihood corners them from the contemporary advancements perceived in the other parts of the country and the global front:

> They wanted phones, computers, access to the world. Struggle would be redefined; it would come to mean the length of time you waited for fibre optic cables to be buried in the ground so that dial-up Internet could be replaced by something much, much smoother. This generation wanted scholarships, they wanted to travel for business degrees and seminars, to work at petrol pumps wearing bright orange jumpsuits in Eurozone countries…not ruled by checkpoints and national identity cards and suspicion. (*Crescent Moon* 194)

Here, Hayat who is associated with the "underground" gradually drifts from its ideologies concerning justice by insurgency towards the idea of globalisation: "Ideas, trade, goods – the world and everything in it was in flux, travelling and shifting" (219). The stagnation and corruption mar the existing opportunities and projects their helplessness in the "unwinnable fight" (128). The political limbo makes it difficult to access it and the connection with the outside world would happen only by establishing a relationship with the state.

Othering of Individuals and Individualizing the Other

In the already otherized population, the novel depicts how precarity cultivates conditions for a different form of other at home. Here, home refers to the family in particular and the town in general. In the family headed by Inayat Mahsud, a fighter of Mir Ali's autonomy, the figure of the other can be attributed to his oldest son Aman Erum who does not subscribe to his ideals or the ethos of his town. He chooses to act as a secret informant for the state against his people in exchange for an expedited US visa. The satire is evident in the narrator presenting the inner voice of him that attempts to justify his actions as how he "couldn't really be called an informer" but "a modern necessity," a "passer-on of news," particularly "a function of the days and times we live in" delivering information "professionally" which is already known by the army (*Crescent Moon* 130). However, though in denial concerning his participation against his people, towards the end, Aman Erum indulges fully in his role: "Eventually, when he was back in Mir Ali, it would seem that he no longer cared. But that was later" (127).

The disconnect with Mir Ali for Aman Erum corresponds to destabilization of the idea of home owing to systemic othering. His detachment from home is perceived from a young age as he would be in constant lookout for a different place to relocate. For instance, he would consider building a home in Chitral, a site that he visited annually. The notion of home is distorted by violence and repression and the regular humiliation, contempt, and abuse from state representatives other than the army, including the police, the national media, school teachers, and so on. For instance, a bus driver publicly shames Aman Erum and other passengers from Mir Ali as traitors and terrorists. The desperation to overcome this suffocating atmosphere also eventuates in Aman Erum's "secret" (15) attempts to enlist in the army as a medium to escape despite being a victim of the army violence.

The novel underscores the increasingly globalized world and the urge to be involved with it. Here, Aman Erum aspires to be a "free man" (*Crescent Moon* 104) and achieve "everything – success, comfort, respect" (103). Aman wants to escape from Mir Ali's "checkpoints and military police poking their red berets into your car and asking for your papers" (12). The "death" (21) of the family carpet business also connotes his want to be part of the larger world outside, the "global system" (194):

> He could make a business anywhere, he told his mother, who knew nothing about free markets but often dreamed of the world. He could take a flight to Australia and set up an international travel agency marketing itself towards immigrants…He could go to Canada – there were immigrants there too, living in empty, undecorated homes – and import local handicrafts… He had heard of neighbours' sons who left for England and worked in corner stores and restaurants until they built neighbourhoods out of their enterprise. It would be easy…once he learned the international language of business. (*Crescent Moon* 20)

Hence, his academic endeavour to study commerce serves both as a basis to convince his family of its potential and a channel to escape the "strangled home" (19), a "quarantined" (103) life and chase "a living that could not be threatened away" (19). Despite the choice of Aman Erum appears voluntary, it is clear how it extrapolates to the precarious circumstances he and his people have been enduring that leave them with few alternatives. For instance, during his visa application meeting, the authorities supply information about his background and current family situation, including his father's name, his involvement

in the insurgency, and his illness that insinuates how Aman Erum "could stay here, in Mir Ali, they'd keep an eye on him" (105). This highlights the state politics that misuses its power to suit its needs.

The physical distance chosen by Aman Erum comes with necessary and self-imposed alienation from anything that resembles home. Ironically, however, here he emulates the oppressors or the agents of othering. His role as an agent of othering highlights the need to appear like them in order to gain their confidence or simply engage in a barter. Even though the post-9/11 US politics has influenced his country-people, he sides with them in the visa interview: "With you. We are with you" (40). The figure of Aman Erum echoes Gayatri Spivak's views as "a certain postcolonial subject" who has been "recoding the colonial subject and appropriating the native informant's position" (qtd. in Dabashi 13). Aman Erum's first encounter with the embassy's environment makes him work towards being "one of them": "He would not be kept outside. He would work harder to fit in, to remove what was alien about him – his accent, his badly imagined polyester suit, his awkwardness around those women in the high-heeled boots and hooded sweatshirts" (*Crescent Moon* 37). Furthermore, his life in the US displays its materialization:

> He abandoned his accent at immigration. He had been tweaking and amending it over the years, fine-tuning his vowels, sterilizing his inflections. Aman Erum had not come this far to carry Mir Ali with him. He dropped his country like weight off his back. (*Crescent Moon* 119-20)

The resultant alienation occurs in his status as an informant and the suspicion that others might be as well, he distances himself from his Pakistani peers even outside of Pakistan. While Samarra, despite all odds, believes that one can't choose or create a new home (13), Aman Erum's sense of freedom, safety and friendships, which typifies home, is realized only in the US.

Aman Erum's position as Mir Ali's other is exhibited in his relaying of its information to Colonel Tarik. He sees Mir Ali purely in terms of the potentialities: "He was of Mir Ali but decided very early on never to make his future here, only his fortune" (23). Despite having "never thought he would come back" (7), he returns for his father's illness and subsequent death, which he again uses as an opportunity to be resourceful by

focussing on his business operations with plans to return to America: “He bypassed the deaths that had fallen their family seeing only prospects for the opening of new doors and new ventures” (219). Thus, the irony is that, although becoming an “escapee” (120) by attaining physical distance from Mir Ali, it is sustained on maintaining a relationship with it.

The price of evading precarity is high in this context. For Aman Erum, the “freedom” without having to face othering as a collaborator in the society owes to his lineage and the relationships forged with those very people: “But Aman Erum left with his head held high; no one would suspect his sympathies. He was Inayat’s son. He was Hayat’s brother. He was Samarra Afridi’s” (148). However, precarity that traps individuals to be a participant in that exercise are offered with a semblance of relief in exchange underneath being a continued subject of it. Here, Aman Erum receives only a semblance of autonomy as he continues to be under the state’s scrutiny. Though he believes that his supplied information to be already known by Colonel Tarik, he considers its use as a means of assessing his loyalties: “This is one of his tests, one of the common checks they do on their local sources every once in a while – a test of loyalty, of sincerity” (84). This echoes the idea of the panoptic schema which “may even provide an apparatus for supervising its own mechanisms” (Foucault 204). This results in the pressure of appeasing the colonel to display his allegiance in Aman Erum’s pre-emptive calls to the Colonel to earn reliability and trust. In this case, the precarious position that is ascribed to his origins turns prescribed in his siding with the agent of that othering. The irony lies in the fact that Aman Erum’s aspirations to “to be free, to move without notice, to study, to learn, to expand his life” (*Crescent Moon* 103) however reduces him to be a “psychological slave of state” (Farhan et al 1263) making him more bound. Hence, the precarity is not alleviated for him rather his act furthers the othering of his people as well as himself.

The narrator also taps the psyche of Aman Erum suggesting how he considers his role without any serious implications: “He was far enough from Mir Ali that he could help the Colonel without being hurtful to anyone” (*Crescent Moon* 128). The indulgence of Aman Erum in his services pertains to the influence of American television shows that display mutual support between the police and informants. However, in this case, he betrays his own people while the Colonel is a representative of the state who uses people only to its advantage and acts on them at his whims. Aman Erum believes that his role is

negligible and the bargain with the state is not a "financial arrangement" but a "patriotic one, motivated by duty not profit" (106). In the act of seeking Colonel Tarik's appreciation his "reckless" (126) demeanour encompasses "not just the guilty, but the innocent who protected them" (126). For instance, his leads regarding a suspicious case implicates Samarra. Despite her "inconsequential" (180) role in the underground operations, who ran "intelligence errands" (180), Aman Erum's report endangers her life. Her exposure to Colonel Tarik posits her as an important part of it and as a result she undergoes brutalities at the hands of army that are suggestive of physical and sexual assault. This in turn drives her to be actively involved in the insurgency and in a plan to murder the Chief Minister.

Aman Erum's absence from home invites precarity for the family members. For instance, Hayat ends up as an instrumental member of the "underground." The physical distance from his family also ends up as an emotional disconnect. Even his phone calls to home are mostly driven by the need of information:

> It had been only his and then, without warning, it had infected his whole family. In his absence, the violence, the violence had grown. Upon his return, it had met him at home. (*Crescent Moon* 208)

He suffers from guilt and the widened gap of belonging for abandoning his family. Moreover, if home has been a contested concept for Samarra and Aman Erum, his role destroys the home imagined by them. Because he "interacted with the world through her" (154), his lack of friends in Mir Ali made him reliant on Samarra. As a result, his actions also sabotage one of the preliminary connections he forged with the world outside of his family. However, even if he wants to be exempted from his service, he expects to attain his freedom in exchange for a last piece of major information, indicative of the insurgents' plan to kill the Chief Minister and Samarra's participation in it. Aman Erum's role as an informant for the state in exchange for his escape from Mir Ali has its own demands: "belonging, especially to such ravaged soil, involves much sacrifice" (208). The role of informant as the other in the family is both a product and a producer of precarity.

The novel posits the idea of home in terms of family, community, town, and nation that are mired in domestic and international politics. To this end, precarity not only corresponds to the extreme forms of othering but also shows how the otherized becomes complicit with otherizing.

IV

Karan Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016)

The precarity in Mahajan's novel can be traced to the marginalization of Muslims in the Indian scenario which is fuelled by an event like 9/11. Set primarily in Delhi, and briefly in Kashmir, UP, Nepal, and the US, it draws on small-scale bombings that cast lasting impacts on the affected but do not garner much gravity in comparison to large-scale episodes like 9/11. The narrative begins with a bombing in Delhi in 1996 that causes the death of Deepa and Vikas Khurana's two boys and injures their friend Mansoor, the son of Afsheen and Sharif Ahmed. It also follows the lives of Shaukat "Shockie" Guru, a Kashmiri terrorist and Ayub Azmi who joins the former. Precarity here can be discussed in context to a sense of national belonging, biased institutional apparatus, and a shift in relationships.

The novel has been read in the lines of empathy in the neoliberal order and abjection (Sinha 292-302); in the light of realism in terms of immigration, exile and terrorism (Ray, "Literary Studies" 13-23); illustrative of realism and generic deviation from texts of post-9/11 terrorism (Ray, "Bomb" 20-35); reception of the text in the US media (Martin 70-84); terror, security, preemption and the postcolonial (Lagji 403-18); transcultural humanities (Hawley 68-80); terrorist figure (Herman 105-21); deviation from sustained terrorism narratives (Keeble 168-209). The chapter reads Mahajan's novel to show how domestic and international narratives of power precipitate precarity for individuals in their own country and attempts of resistance may result in precarious circumstances for all.

The Conundrum of National Belonging

The estranged relationship with one's home owes to socio-political forces at work. Home here alludes to a country that typically safeguards the wellbeing of its citizens. However, in the case of a postcolonial nation, the question of national belongingness remains complicated. The region of Jammu and Kashmir has remained a site of dispute with the center concerning its autonomy and rights, and continues to be a politicized affair between India and Pakistan. The presence of different forces such as the Indian army, separatists including armed militancy, and Pakistani influence engender an unstable landscape. The

prolonged militarization over the geography has created a rift between the Kashmiris and their fractured national identity can be seen as a condition of precarity.

The conflicting and unjust relationship of Kashmiris with the state pushes some to adopt extremism to counter their sense of othering. For instance, Malik has a limp as well as an electrocuted penis due to torture by military in Kashmir. Shockie and he typify victims of state-sponsored violence who resort to terrorism. The bombing in Lajpat Nagar Market in 1996 by the Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Force (JKIF) was directed towards sending a message to the government at the center regarding the upcoming elections in Kashmir. Such acts do not offer a resolution of their precarity rather intensifies the derogatory image of Muslims: "Kashmir, where he started, was as ravaged by violence as before, with little shift in the needle of negotiation. And in this country Muslims were still killed, detained, fired, disappeared" (*Association* 224).

Again, by referring to the "anti-Muslim" (139) Gujarat riots or the Hubli Faction, a terrorist outfit of Keralite Muslims, the narrative provides the overall othered position of Muslims in the country. This is demonstrated by Ayub's drift from a non-violent philosophy towards radicalism out of his sense of exclusion in both his personal and the contemporary national scenario:

> "I tried nonviolence…I was a big believer in Gandhi. You could say I was a self-hating Muslim…I wanted equality between Hindus and Muslims, brotherhood. I thought the majority could be persuaded with such action…Now I see it's a world where everything operates by force..." (*Association* 200)

This illustrates how the retaliation against precarity of select people in turn induces precarity for a larger audience. For instance, Shockie has killed dozens of Indians in the past four years as retribution for the military cruelty in Kashmir.

It is observed how members of a community are invariably subject to prejudice and injustice due to action and intent of a select few. The common attitude towards Kashmiri Muslim terrorists extends to all of Kashmiri Muslims and envelops the entire Muslim community across India and the world. This is evident in the scorn expressed by the relatives of Khuranas after learning about the involvement of Kashmiri terrorists in the 1996 bombing: "They can't live in peace, these Muslims. Anywhere they show up, they're

at war" (25). This is highlighted in the case of Mansoor whose Muslimness overshadows his Indianness. Despite being a victim of a blast himself, he is compelled to doubt his position in India. He undergoes the feeling of an outsider even before the 9/11 attacks. For instance, he becomes an object of ridicule at school for his Muslim identity being called a "mullah," "Paki," and "mosquito" (133). Despite his injuries, his presence in the school earns him "a sort of bland notoriety": "He felt like a freak. He was still the only Muslim in school and he wanted to hide" (120). In addition to attention, he encounters questions such as: "Bhainchod, did you set if off?" (119). Such casual forms of discrimination from a young age enables an individual's unbelonging in society.

It is seen that alienation and sense of inadequate security in the home-country prompts Mansoor's move to the US for further studies. However, 9/11 maximizes his sense of exclusion as a Muslim. While his account of the blast does not garner much gravity in his own country, it is ignored among his peers abroad in the face of 9/11: "People did not care about a small bomb in a foreign country that had injured a Muslim, and why should they? They were grieving. Three thousand of their countrymen had perished. Why would they look outward?" (126). His exit from the US is driven by his poor physical state and othering in the wake of 9/11: "To them I'm either a computer programmer or a terrorist" (126). He feels "uncomfortable" with others looking at him "in a new way" (125). The idea of home is then lost on him as neither location could instill a sense of belonging or offer him "a place free of pain and tragedy" (156). His return to India only exhibits the lack of alternatives for Mansoor.

The post-9/11 period intensifies Mansoor's sense of exclusion in the national imagination. The narrative dwells on the fluidity of global impressions. It is observed that the post-9/11 Islamophobia that saturated the West escalated the localized bias in India: "The internationalization of terror, the increased scrutiny in the press, had changed everything" (198). In *Fear of Small Numbers*, Appadurai observes how the then existing efforts against Muslim rights within India, Pakistan as an Islamic state and the global Islamic presence by Hindu political bodies assumed a new status after 9/11. They made use of the rhetoric of war on terror to embark on a "national campaign to reduce Muslims to a humiliated and ghettoized minority" (95). In the novel, Mansoor's wrongful incrimination for the 1996 blast for which he remains imprisoned for twelve years in spite of the lack of evidence is a result of the susceptibility of Muslim identity. The conversation

between Vikas and Mr. Gill, both members of a group of terror victims shows the generalization of Muslims as terrorists in the context of Mansoor:

> "He's pukka a terrorist; don't be fooled."
> "He's like my son."
> "He's a Muslim," Gill said.
> "He was injured in a blast."
> "Psychologically speaking that makes the most sense. You turn into what you hate," Gill said… (*Association* 273)

It is ironic that Mansoor who volunteered for those unjustly implicated in terror acts lands up in the same space: "He was living at the bottom of the ocean of society" (272). His imprisonment shows a tangible loss of home; the symbolic homelessness corresponds to the sense of elimination in the national narrative.

The conversation between Mansoor and his mother following his release from custody exhibits the trauma of being a victim of bombs:

> "Do you want to go out?" she asked finally.
> "No." Mansoor said. "I want to stay here with you."
> He never went out again. (*Association* 276)

If Mansoor's first experience with the blast fades in the public or political domain or is trivialized in relation to events like 9/11, the second experience offers him visibility and is invariably linked with the global. Furthermore, this scene finds a parallel in how he as a child walked to his house after the 1996 blast connoting the only protective environment he considers. His now desire to be with his parents and avoid leaving the house can be interpreted as he no longer connects to home in the larger context, such as the country or the society.

The two groups in the novel stand for solidarity. The NGO "Association of Terror Victims" founded by Vikas Khurana catered to the rights of terror victims, "lobbied" for hanging of terrorists, and functioned as a forum to "collectively remember the blasts" (238). Again, the NGO "Peace for All" provided legal aid for the Muslim undertrials for terrorism (224). It consists of "eminently reasonable people, students engrossed in careers, people who wanted to be Indians but had discovered themselves instead to be Muslims

and had started to embrace their identities" (144). The Muslim members of the "Peace for All" have a history of being targeted and harassed for their religion. For instance, they are asked to move to Pakistan which is considered as the 'enemy': "Why do they always tell us to go back to Pakistan? You're Hindu—go to Nepal! And why shouldn't I go to Malaysia?" (144). They encounter comments such as "'Oh, you don't look Muslim!" (144), as if being Muslim subscribes to a certain 'type.' For instance, Ayub, whose great-grandfather was a freedom-fighter is called a "terrorist" (184) by a policeman during the non-violent protest.

Mansoor who experiences alienation both in India and the US is drawn towards the NGO: "In their alienation, their desire to be included in the mainstream, Mansoor recognized himself" (144). The novel also exposes the change in ideology of individuals within the group that may subsume its members. For instance, Ayub realizes the futility of non-violent activism and expresses the need for radicalism. Here, Mansoor's religious rigidities are seen to be influenced by Ayub's ideologies. Hawley notes how "social alienation and anti-Muslim bias" draws him closer to Ayub that he comes to share his ideologies, "sympathise with radical Islam without becoming a terrorist himself" ("The Terrorist" 109). It is only during his imprisonment that Mansoor realizes about the changes he has acquired from Ayub. These groups, though contradictory in essence illustrate how they offer a semblance of community and belonging out of shared victimhood which remains amiss in terms of the larger society or country.

The novel taps societal inequality that widens the gap between groups. The disillusionment with national consciousness also appears in terms of one's socio-economic station. In Babli Sinha's study of the novel, we observe the connect between neoliberalism and unequal lives, wherein she sees how "everyone is in own their own and networks of family and friends are highly structured by wealth" that generates the "breakdowns among the characters" ("Collective" 4), and how "the breakdown in society leads to a collective experience of depression" (2), "trauma and loneliness" (3). Ayub's experiences with the Muslim community exposes him to "how difficult it was for educated Muslims to get jobs or even housing and this paranoia infected every future he could imagine for himself in Delhi" (*Association* 189). Tara, on the other hand, who represents the rich and the elite, has access to resources. For instance, she studied in the US and is now again prepared to pursue her further studies there. Her psychosocial incompatibility with Ayub, a son of

lower-middle class farmers is highlighted in her breaking up with him: “I don’t like your smell” (186). This show of classism is ironic as she expresses her aspiration of opening a communal harmony institute in future. As Mansoor observes, Ayub’s participation in the NGO is to get away from poverty by establishing a relationship with Tara. On the other hand, Mansoor believes Tara “likes having power over these desperate Muslim men” (179). The personal experience operates as a microcosm that makes Ayub realize his discordance with the nation’s ethos. The unheard and invisible position due to his marginalization both in the forms of community and class shifts his ideology. It is evident in his first thought after detonating the bomb: “Tara will hear me now” (234).

Failure of Institutional Apparatus

The novel exposes the machinery of the institutional apparatuses that otherizes individuals at home. It is seen that the socio-political underpinnings influence their operations. For instance, Mansoor’s arrest for the Sarojini Nagar bomb blast occurs for his alleged associations with its detonator, Ayub. While he had sheltered Ayub as a friend without the knowledge of his intentions, Mansoor is implicated for his Muslim identity in the absence of other evidence. The unfair system is supported by the pending cases of the accused of the 1996 blast. They, except Malik who is related to JKIF, are innocent victims of religious profiling: “here they arrest first and find evidence later. Now, that’s not to say that the people who they’ve captured aren’t guilty—these people are not any more competent than the police—but it depends on how they build the circumstantial case” (*Association* 69). The fact that some of them have been already in custody even before the incident makes the whole system questionable. It only indicates the possibility of the police with their “conflicting but confident storylines” (73) scapegoated a few to prove dexterity and accountability. This is evident in the prolonged time period required to catch the mastermind Shockie even if Malik had directed them years ago. Moreover, it exhibits the fact that their Muslim identities create convenient frames and inescapability for incrimination.

The othering materializes in the brutality meted out by the state apparatus. Mansoor confesses to the crime following his imprisonment based on Shockie’s statement of having caused the blast with Ayub. The fact that it occurs during his custody indicates the impact of physical torture that terrorist suspects face. With regards to the Muslim blast accused in

jail the horrors of torture are exhibited: one's anus has been pumped with petrol; another's sensitivity of hands is lost owing to prolonged suspension from the ceiling; Malik's genitals are electrocuted as well as parts of his tongue is scraped off with a blunt knife.

The inefficacy of the judicial system is exposed in the delay regarding trials of the terror accused. For instance, Mansoor is released only after twelve years on the grounds of lack of evidence. Similarly, the trial for the accused of the 1996 blast occurs after six years:

> The adjournments were ridiculous, they said. The government had let them down repeatedly. The prosecutor had been arrested for sexual assault. One session was called off because a stray dog wandered into the court and bit a policeman. Worst of all—"No word about the compensation". (*Association* 131)

The system of the country not only pushes individuals to precarity on account of wrongful imprisonment or inhumane torture during it, their families too experience loss of homes. This is evident in the relocation of the families of the accused to Delhi to fight for them. The lack of media's follow-up or societal pressure towards these cases also perpetuate the stereotypes in the global front. For instance, 9/11 reinforced the association of Muslim men to terrorism: ""But the issue is that after 9/11 and the Parliament attack, no one wants to help these people. 'They're bloody terrorists; let them rot,' they say. But, bhai, they haven't even been proven to be terrorists!"" (137). It is observed that those who fight for the cause of the blast-accused themselves undergo treatment of othering. For instance, K.R. Gill, who wants the terrorists "stripped of all rights" (251), and as a part of a group is in favour of their hanging (247), calls out Ayub as a representative of his NGO: "You people support terrorism" (250).

The novel exhibits the failure of the government in disproportionately shaping the national consciousness. In the wake of the socio-political tension concerning the Gujarat riots, the volunteers of "Peace for All" become fearful of their position: "the Indian government wouldn't protect them, that in fact it had an incentive to demonize and exterminate them" (144). It is seen that the volatile national climate created by "small bombs" are embodiments of the extreme friction between select citizens and the state: "…a blast was a political tragedy, an act of war, in which people perished not because of their own mistakes but because of the government" (238). The military brutality turns the

individual towards extremism which again endangers the life of defenseless ordinary citizens. While the apparent perpetrators are terrorists who act against the state, the novel offers views that question the government. According to Amanda Lagji, the novel reveals "the shared temporal logic of preemption and security across insurgent and state terror, and counter-terror measures" but at the same time, she observes how preemptive steps "defer" ("Terrorist" 416) the security they intend to manage.

Malik likens the Kashmiris to the victims of their bomb blasts "…what these victims go through is similar to what we all have gone through as Kashmiris. Something bad happens to them, they expect the government to help them and instead the government ignores them" (56). For instance, it is seen that the compensation promised for the 1996 blast victims is still not received by them. The scenario following a bombing is described below:

> the government would promise help but the Municipal Corporation of Delhi would harass the shopkeepers, advising them to lower their estimated losses; how compensation would be announced in the papers, never to be paid out; and how the injured and dying would linger for hours in the market and the hospital before being treated. (*Association* 237)

This highlights how along with dealing with the loss of closed ones, the citizens also have to further undergo the lack of appropriate support.

Shift in Relationships

The narrative unveils how relationships are contingent on socio-political dynamics. In this context, the political is personal Here, the religious background forms an intrinsic aspect of one's identity. Hence, new and existing relationships are shaped by the camaraderie between religious groups. In a society marked by differences, ordinary relationships between Muslims and Hindus are treated extraordinarily. For instance, the friendship of the Khuranas with a few Muslims is partly based on validating their "secular credentials" and stands as a matter of being "inordinately proud":

> The Khuranas were cut-and-dried secularists and liberals…took the left-wing position on everything. They read the Hindu, the Asian Age, and the Hindustan

> Times; subscribed to Outlook rather than the saffronized India Today; were among the special coterie of urbanites who counted the crusading P. Sainath as their favorite journalist; were partisans of DD-2's The News Tonight under NDTV…were opposed to globalization and the monstrous coming of McDonald's and KFC…were against the BJP…. (*Association* 72)

However, the shift in ideology is apparent in the Khuranas after they lost their sons to terrorist acts. For instance, they are no longer concerned with the wrongful treatment of the accused: "Of course, being victims, they'd had to suppress all that" (73). They find themselves "no longer liberals" (247) with their support for the Bush administration's post-9/11 policies and programs against terrorism. The precarity also shapes other personal and familial relationships. For instance, there emerges a distinct disconnect between the Khuranas and Ahmeds. Again, the marital relationship of Vikas and Deepa is destabilized in the aftermath of losing their sons: "their marriage could not recover. Nothing did from a bomb" (241).

In a similar manner, Mansoor is filled with "an odd pride" (122) that his name stands out because the 1996 blast occurred in a Hindu Punjabi society. However, the Ahmeds' encounter with precarity concerning Mansoor's case serves as a reminder of them being misfits in the society. For instance, Sharif considers it a "punishment for staying on in an obviously hostile country" (152). He regrets how "he ought to wash his hands of this country, this place he had fought so hard to make his own, enduring the jibes of his family members who claimed to lead happier lives in Dubai, Sharjah, Bahrain, Lahore" (23). The fact that Sharif's grandfather was a freedom fighter shows how despite such family contributions towards the nation, his own position is precarious. Hawley notes how the contrast between the Khuranas and the Ahmeds helps Mahajan "to display the alienation imposed on Muslims in Indian society" ("The Role" 71). It is evident that the Khuranas possess a network of support through their relatives or their association of terror victims that serves as "an alternative family" (*Association* 251), whereas the Ahmeds lack one, especially "having lost all their friends" (274) due to Mansoor's incrimination.

The novel highlights how other societal equations are privy to socio-political changes. In this context, it is seen how societal polarities foster opportunities for exploitation of the marginalized. It is palpable in the case of the Ahmeds' attempt to

purchase a property wherein they are duped of their money. In view of the lack of homeowners who would engage with Muslims, Sharif chooses the Sahnis, a Hindu couple who exhibited a "liberal and friendly" attitude and shared about their Muslim friends "enthusiastically" (*Association* 148). In addition to having to pay more for the property than was originally agreed upon, the Ahmeds also deal with a long legal battle because it had a standing loan of twenty crores. This alludes to the opportunistic tactic used by the Sahnis in light of the social situation that is currently unfavourable for Muslims. Moreover, the news around Mansoor's involvement with terrorism is leveraged by the Sahnis in the court and "the judge had turned against them" (274). Though in indirect ways, the bias culminates to bankrupt the Ahmeds and cause their shift from their "palatial" (212) house to a tiny place in a predominantly Muslim locality close to Batla House. Given that Mansoor had previously visited the place to meet the women of the accused of the 1996 blast, it is ironic as he comes to inhabit the same space. Here, their disadvantaged state shows a loss of physical home and connotes othering at home with regards to the country at large.

By situating the narrative primarily in India, it shows the post-9/11 consequences in the not so conspicuous geography. The novel captures the issues that typify the transitional phase of a post-colonial nation. By placing the precariat in the domestic chaos, the narrative underscores the effects of a global crisis.

V

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017)

The precarity in Aslam's novel performs as both a condition in terms of its pre-existence and a consequence due to the post-9/11 American intervention. The novel revolves around multiple characters whose lives come under the sway of the post-9/11 socio-political and religious structures of Pakistan. Set in the city of Zamana, the narrative primarily tracks the lives of Nargis, an architect, and her Christian housekeeper Lily and his daughter Helen. It also follows the journey of Moscow/Imran, a Kashmiri youth and an escapee of Pakistan's guerilla training camp. The precarity here can be analysed with reference to societal exclusion, religious radicalization, and politicized state craft that blurs the connotation and stability of home.

The text has been approached by focusing on ideas of violence and hope (Sukheeja 351-62); literary and human networks (Miller 341-55); drone warfare (Shoaib 31-44), (Ifzal et al. 131-43); the subaltern in drone warfare (Liaqat 699-717); transcultural humanities (Hawley 68-80); Foucauldian interpretation of the Pakistani society (Zahoor et al 241-51); feminist politics (Arshad and Akram 1-16); place, identity, and home based on Derrida and Bhabha (Khoirunnisa et al. 82-94); cosmopolitanism (Rani et al. 1-14); hybrid identities (Batool et al. 23-38); violence and anarchy (Malik and Ahmad 1225-35); postcolonial spaces on empathy and solidarity supported by Butlerian precarity (Monaco 1-19); representational politics of religious minorities (Clements 854-68). The chapter examines Aslam's novel to study precarity in terms of one's deteriorating relationship with home after 9/11.

Societal Subtractions

The novel presents how religious affiliations take precedence over national identities. Here, the Christian minority in Pakistan is beset with a lack of belonging. The hierarchy in the socio-political sphere is conspicuous with Muslims occupying a dominant position with Christians subjected to systemic form of othering. The conversation among Lily and his friends reveals that they or their families have been abused in every street of the city for being Christians. It goes on to show how they are dehumanized, treated as "non-citizen – a half-citizen at best" (Aslam, *Golden* 70) in their own country. For instance, the abomination towards them is encapsulated in a politician's act of showering rose petals by hiring a plane in order to celebrate the "blessed deed" (154) of the deaths and devastation of Christians in Badami Bagh.

The post-9/11 period witnesses the escalation of the existing contempt due to America's war operations that implicates the terrorist entities in Pakistan and Muslims at large. It is seen that the Christian citizens of Pakistan are now associated with their Western counterparts that embody Christianity in the common imagination. For instance, in the novel, Shakeel warns his young nephew against his Christian friends seen as "infidel children" (305). He aligns them with the Americans who harmed his family members: "It was their kind that took away your legs, your father and grandmother" (305). Here, the othering of the Pakistani Christians exposes a precarious sense of national self at home sans support from their country or the West.

The novel demonstrates the stigma attached with Christians. This othering based on ideological framework transmutes to the corporeal domain. Here, they are regarded as polluted beings and any kind of physical contact is abhorred. In the narrative, a child attempts to draw Helen's blood by a knife to confirm its black colour as a Christian. Here, given that the child learns about the differentness of Christians from his mother suggests the kind of prevailing societal conditioning. While the exposure of the othered to their subservient status in the societal order starts from an early age, the conditioning of the agent of this othering also begins early. Hilal in her introduction in *Guilty Until Proven Muslim* reflects on how her young niece and nephew in the US would be familiar with being "antagonized and otherized probably before they learn simple division" (xiii). Here, the Christians who have been a part of the nation-building find their status contingent on the socio-political determinants. The novel outlines how the Christians carried their own utensils in public, were barred from common washrooms and water sources, or injected with different syringes for vaccination, and so on. The irony is apparent in the sexual harassment of Nargis' sister Seraphina at the hands of the police. The markings and inscriptions on her back indicating the number of harassers highlights not just the brutality towards the other but the violation of the Christian body also accentuates the power dynamics. The fact that this episode occurred decades ago shows little change in contemporary times. The societal subjugation taking on a bodily dimension operates as a tangible means to assert control over them.

The segregation of the body of the other manifests in spatial terms. For instance, the infrastructural layout of the neighbourhood of Badami Bagh comprising Christian and Muslim residents is modelled accordingly. The multiple lanes of the neighbourhood have been reduced to one in order to prevent the Christians from moving past Muslim homes. The unwanted presence of the Christians is highlighted in Shakeel who has surrendered to radical Islam:

> 'We need to drive out these Christians,'… 'Sometimes I find it hard to believe that this is Pakistan'… 'I am surrounded by Christians. Our mosque is a stone's throw from a place that openly sells alcohol, and there is no restriction on the noise they can make with their church bell on Sunday morning'. (Aslam, *Golden* 90-91)

In addition, the area becomes a zone where personal relationships are policed. The "sinful, immoral and criminal association" (135) of Lily and the jihadi widow Aysha and the former "blasphemously" entering the mosque create a pretext to drive away the Christians. The violence that targets Lily and his home extends to all the Christians causing severe damages to life and property. The scheming is evident as days ago the Muslim houses were marked to help distinguish them from the Christian houses in the chaos. If houses evoke the concept of home, their loss then creates a sense of homelessness. Here, Nargis, Lily, and Helen are compelled to flee their respective houses out of fear for their lives.

Badami Bagh that translates to an orchard of almond trees bears historical relevance as some mutineers of 1857 were hanged by the British from their branches that also served as their hideout. This represents the cost incurred while defending the homeland from foreign threats. In this context, the current massacre emphasizes the presence of Pakistani citizens on both sides. Furthermore, the legend of a hanged mutineer's ghost wandering in the neighbourhood is parallelled later on when Lily's ghost moves around in search of Helen. Thus, the depiction of the joyous times spent during Nargis, Helen, and Imran's brief refuge in the abandoned island indicate how the seclusion from the nexus of society, religion, and politics makes it possible.

The occupational profiles of the Christians in Badami Bagh reveal their marginalization. These "docile and obedient" (13) individuals mostly perform menial jobs such as servants, sweepers, and sewage cleaners in the city that highlights their prolonged subjection to othering. The deviation from this set standard is highlighted when Helen, the daughter of servants is asked by her high-school teacher to "'justify taking the place of a Muslim'" (23). They acclimatize with an environment that does not consider them at par which they are made to internalize through subtle and lurid forms: "They think we see fewer stars when we look at the sky…Or no stars at all" (74-75). Moreover, this population is capitalised for personal gains. For instance, Babur, a Muslim, hinders the establishment of a government school that would probably improve their conditions and disrupt his arrangement of renting out houses and finding them jobs. Again, his mobilization of the Muslim men to attack Lily and his property is driven by personal vendetta of having lost the deal of a phone tower to him. The sense of being outdone by a Christian rickshaw driver owes to the societal association of Christian with subpar work and impoverished life. As Babur mocks Lily: "'Sweeping and cleaning is too lowly a job for you. Mr Bigshot

Rickshaw Driver is leaving for work in the morning, with the smell of eggs and parathas spilling out of his house'" (47).

The discussion of one's othering at home is linked to the safety nets that support lives. Here, it is noticeable that the social fragility of bodies lack protection from the structures that are supposed to ensure their wellbeing. Hawley addresses the imbalance among citizens of a country wherein they resort to different means to "shored up their identities," and how some countries choose "piecemeal, layering citizenship," favouring some citizens over others in terms of more rights based on "they are seen to be more purely members of the nation" ("The Role" 68). Here, the apparatuses such as the police or judicial system are either powerless due to socio-political provocation or partakes in this othering influenced by societal prejudice. The narrative highlights institutional discrimination as justice remains elusive for Christians. For instance, the murderer of Lily's wife, Grace, is released from life imprisonment after just serving less than a year for memorizing the *Koran*: "the murderer was a Muslim and this was Pakistan" (Aslam, *Golden* 10). The justice system is further sabotaged as the judge who delivered the case's verdict is killed later and the lawyer is attacked along with his family. The Christian characters are beset with a lifelong struggle to assert their rights and claim over the homeland which are seen to be easily exercised by their Muslim counterparts. According to the novel, the white part in the Pakistani flag is to "acknowledge and celebrate the nation's non-Muslim citizens" (326). This is critiqued by the fact that apart from individual acts of support and care exhibited by Muslim individuals for the Christians, the overall environment contours a troubled association.

The novel shows precarity in the association of Christians with crime. This is facilitated by state apparatuses such as the police and the legal system. For instance, the delay in justice for Grace occurs due to the reluctance of the police to register the case in spite of witnesses and later by claiming to have allegedly lost the paperwork. Again, the anti-Christian sentiments render the victim Lily as the source of the conflict in Badami Bagh. Furthermore, the arrival of the police after the loss of lives and property is not driven by an inquiry but rather to arrest Helen for charges of blasphemy for her magazine write-up. The precarity aggravated by post-9/11 developments is seen how alongside placards denouncing the American political affairs, the blasphemous images of Muhammad made in the West and other slanderous incidents, suffering of Muslims in Kashmir, and so on,

the photos of Lily and Helen are on display in the demonstration against the pardoning of the American killer thus equating them with these issues.

The sustained othering of the Christians sees no change in position for them. In the past, Seraphina is wrongfully detained at the police station while her colleagues are released from a mistaken case that leads to her harassment and ultimately contributes to her suicide. In the present day, the blowing up of suicide bombers in the Charagar mausoleum is invariably linked to Christians. The genitalia of the men are checked for circumcision: "They were convinced that no Muslim could or would ever carry out such an attack on his fellow Muslims. So it had to be the work either of India or the CIA. Of non-Muslims" (295). Thus, the escape of Lily to avoid the inspection and potential arrest causes him to enter a manhole but eventually brought out and killed by the police: "He tried to think what his crime was, working his way back to earlier in the evening, earlier that day, earlier that week, the month, the year, his early childhood, his youth, his boyhood, his childhood" (346). This episode limns the state of law that mirrors societal ideals. The liminal position endowed to them manifests in their ostracization that is noticeable since one's childhood and their inferior station remains unchanged throughout. Lily who entered Zamana's sewers at the age of eight for work ultimately ends up there decades later despite improving his life by hard work: "He was exhausted, by being born" (349). The corruption of the police is also implied in the alleged arrests of Imran and Helen. While they are reported to have fled the police station, the absence of evidence and the history of police brutality only hint at their tragedy.

The existence of stringent blasphemy laws functions as an instrument of othering. In the case of the Christians, they are prone to be its victims under false accusation and manipulation for personal gains: "People think they have the support of the state, they feel emboldened' (116). The editor of *Tilla Jogian* notes how its abuse has resulted in the burning down of Christian neighbourhoods and the deaths of people. This also applies to Grace's murderer who threatens Lily with a false police case of swearing at the Prophet to protect himself from the latter's wrath. Moreover, if blasphemy is a punishable offense, the status attained by a blasphemer's killer serves as a driving force for them to commit the crime: "a hero to a vast number of Pakistani Muslims. His prison cell was said to smell of roses. The weapon with which he killed would be auctioned off as a holy instrument" (141). In the novel, the mysterious death of a man with a death sentence for blasphemy for

having ‘liked’ a disrespectful comment about Muhammad on Facebook suggests a similar motivation.

Since identities validate one’s existence, they hold great significance in shaping one’s life. In the post-9/11 West, discrimination became endemic towards “suspect communities” mostly based on physical appearances. Here, the novel presents an alternate case wherein differences between people are not so apparent due to similar physical features. For example, Lily receives kind treatment during his fugitive state until the discovery of his Christian identity. Here, feigning of one’s identity appears as a means to evade precarity. Nargis, originally a Christian, pretends to be a Muslim by adopting a different name in a different locality in order to avoid everyday prejudices and bigotry. The initial experience competing in the city as a replacement under the identity of her Muslim classmate Margaret garners positive treatment like “she had just arrived in a new country” (190). This prompts her to adopt not just the name but a Muslim life from college including marrying a Muslim man. While this appears to have improved her life, the emotional precarity is palpable as she feels the guilt of hiding it from Massud as well as being scared of its exposure lurks throughout. In context to the post-9/11 scene, this fraud materializes as a means to blackmail Nargis by the Pakistani army state to forgive her husband’s American killer in the Sharia court. This shows how avoiding one kind of precarity gives rise to another.

In exhibiting the dehumanization of the other, the novel subtly underlines the othering of histories of human civilization. It contains multiple references to intercontinental exchanges in the past that demonstrate the fluid nature of influence. Helen deduces that the meaning of “Pakistan” as “Land of the Pure” (173) is not valid, supported by the historical trade and movements via the route of the Silk Road that imbued a medley of diverse material and cultural influence and that materializes in “no absolute purity anywhere on the planet” (173). Again, Nargis discovers Arabic as an ornamental use on the Christian figures in important Western artworks: “That was how one continent poured itself into another” (188). Furthermore, references are made to people, episodes and origins that are common to Biblical and Koranic tales:

> ‘Imran is the name of Mary’s father in Islam,’ Nargis had said to him yesterday.
>
> ‘He is Joachim in Christianity,’ Helen had added. (Aslam, *Golden* 174)

Such associations help to demonstrate how precarity is created, managed, and perpetuated by the failure to apprehend and acknowledge the contributions and commonalities among different groups that forms a unifying force rather than a ground for separation. In contrast, Nargis' discovery in a book concerning the results of when one group "failed to value others, ignoring their right to dignity. The mistrust. The deceptions. The disregard…" (245) evokes the resultant post-9/11 environment.

Radicals at Play

The precarious environment in the novel is exhibited in the intolerance and hostility to differing religious and political ideologies. For instance, the city witnesses the flags of 'enemy' nations painted on the floor for customers to "walk on and defile" (Aslam, *Golden* 14). Again, the cold reception out of any deviation from any religious stance is visible in the everyday affair. For instance, Massud is denied purchase from a shop until he writes "Jihad is a duty" or "Implement Strict Sharia Law" (15) on the currency. The growing intolerance in the country also materializes in sectarianism. This is highlighted in the abandonment of the structures dedicated to different sects of Islam in the family-owned island of Massud due to violence among different groups. While Nargis and Massud envisioned a cosmopolitan space by accommodating different religions in the island, the "mistrust and resentment" (171) among the already housed sects only critiques the couple's utopian worldview. This illustrates how apart from Christians, the Muslim population also experience a precarious existence at home.

The narrative illustrates how the entire population lay indiscriminately exposed to scrutiny and frenzy of religious fundamentalism including militant groups that pursue jihad. For instance, a guerilla training camp has a history of attacks on an American professor working in Zamana, on co-educational schools, bank robberies to buy weapons and vehicles. Here, the Muslim lives are not insulated despite being a part of the majority. They are attacked for not subscribing to the ideals of respective radical entities: "Kill non-Muslims for not being Muslims. Kill Muslims for not being the right kind of Muslims" (299). For instance, a coffeehouse owner is attacked by extremists for allegedly disrespecting the minarets' call to prayer by hosting music performances on Valentine's Day. Moreover, the celebration is deemed incompatible with the city's clerics who deem it "a Western custom that promoted lewdness, debauchery and secularism among

Pakistanis" (129). The Muslim lives form a part of civilians whose lives are liquidated in the radicals' acts of countering the government stance particularly on the American intrusion and influence. The city is characterized by randomness of violence that owes to such extremists. The severity of the loss of innocent lives to suicide bombings in the past decade is highlighted in Aysha's emotional inability to go through its statistics. Moreover, the fragile judicial system also does not offer justice to the victims. For instance, the suicide bombings in the Charagar mausoleum are carried out by a militant party however, it is evident that justice shall remain elusive as the party's leader's court cases regarding prior killings still remain pending out of fear.

While bodies are at direct risk as discussed above, there also exists censorship in the charged socio-political environment. This is palpable in the assault of the armed men at the office of *Tilla Jogian* who are displeased with its published contents, which includes their views on Islam, Koran, blasphemy laws, and their prior refusal to publish a paid advertisement of condemning "blasphemous cartoons" (113) made in foreign countries. The consequences result in brutality with the decapitation of the security guard and shooting at other employees. Their actions delineate their self-proclaimed authority to determine the fitness of citizens in their vision of the state. The repercussions on Helen as a Christian writer in the magazine turns her into a fugitive to escape arrest and potential death penalty for blasphemy: "'You should go and live in a Christian country. This is a country for Muslims'" (122). They maintain how as Muslims they have always been mistreated by the West and hence have resorted to violent means to exact their 'dignity':

> There is only one place where Islam and the modern world can meet – and that's the battlefield. The modern world forces women to behave like prostitutes and forces men into avarice, into unreasonable acts. Look around you – there is no justice in Pakistan, no food for our people, no clean water, no medicine. Is it Islam's fault? No, it's the fault of the modern world, and the corrupt swine who preside over it, both here and in the West. Under Islam everyone will be fed, everyone will be provided for, everyone will have protection. So when Islam says thieves must have their hands cut off, Islam is right, because under Islam no one will have any real need to become a thief. Only the wicked will turn to theft – and they will be taught a lesson.' (Aslam 118-19)

Their experienced accounts of othering abroad however, does not stop them from being agents of violence towards fellow citizens. This defense emphasizes the cyclical nature of revenge as their acts have been endangering lives evident in the city's volatility due to the free movement of terrorist operatives. The radical agents are also seen to strategically shape the ideologies of the community by manipulation. For instance, while Shakeel is pleased with the suicide bombers at the Charagar mausoleum and deems the causalities as "not real Muslims" (304), but blames the Americans for it in public "'no longer content in just killing us with drones, but want to kill us openly on our streets…'" (304). Such distortion of truth helps exploit public sensibilities and mobilize them towards fulfilling their agendas.

State as an Actor of Precarity

The novel dwells on the role of state in enabling conditions of precarity. In view of the interests of the state, the wellbeing of its own citizens is perceived to have been overlooked. The Pakistani government's alliance with the US government has apparently made the former's citizens unsafe in their own homes. For instance, sudden drone strikes in Waziristan that target terrorist suspects also indiscriminately cause 'collateral damages.' While the drone attack kills Aysha's jihadi husband, it also kills her mother-in-law and maims her son. This collusion with the US forces in accepting the violence against its citizens indicates the vested interests of the state "in return for who knew what reward" (Aslam, *Golden* 95). Apart from the obvious precarious sites of war on terror, the city too remains a volatile space. For instance, Massud accidentally dies in a crossfire between a 'mysterious' American and two Pakistani men in a street of Zamana.

The state also ushers in secretive operations that apparently benefit the state. However, these actions have proved to affect the lives of citizens who are deprived of autonomy at home. For instance, the corpses of Aysha's husband and other jihadis are buried "in secret and in great hurry" (95) that strips them of public visibility. Moreover, she is instructed to cover up the cause of death by falsely claiming the house as an explosive factory that led to an accident. Again, it is seen how a news report features the drone assassination of a militant leader however, the information of casualties alongside it is unavailable. This upholds what Butler discusses pertaining to "regulating the visual modes of participating in the war" (*Frames* 65). These secret negotiations of the state with

the US strip the citizens of their humanity in their deaths and their autonomy to publicly grieve their loss.

The novel unveils the state's use of power, coercion, and fear to discipline its citizens. While the religious fundamentalists have conjured an atmosphere of censorship, here the state indulges in suppression against publicizing or criticizing its affairs. For instance, a journalist is murdered for publicizing the war on terror casualties while his wife and three children are killed in an explosion after the former made public her knowledge of her husband's murderer. The state also resorts to tactics to create obedient citizens and curb any form of dissent and noncompliance. Major Burhan, a representative of the Pakistani army, intimidates Nargis into forgiving her husband's American killer in the Sharia court to facilitate his freedom. On the one hand, while the local zealots want Nargis to deny this proposition set up by the state, Major Burhan threatens her physically and psychologically. While she is hit and dripped in oil to instill fear and show the gravity of the deal, the psychological bullying is seen in his blackmailing of her by revelation of her religious origins. The narrative also hints at the likely pressure put on the families of the two dead boys involved with the American killer, evident in the alleged suicide of one's mother. The overview of the failure of the state machinery to attend to its citizens finds expression in Imram who has crossed over the Indian border to attain guerilla training from Pakistan: "Pakistan claimed that it wished to help Kashmiris in their struggle against Indian injustices, but this was how Pakistan treated Pakistanis. What a joke. What a behenchod joke" (Aslam, *Golden* 158). His life in his country exhibits a similar predicament of being othered at home.

The novel highlights the inequal treatment of lives by the state. In contrast to the lack of concern and accountability concerning casualties in the war sites or within the city limits, the state politics is apparent in the handling of the accused American. Despite America's lies about the spy's identity as a diplomat the state strategically overlooks the evidence of his ties with the CIA: "many older facts and relationships have to be taken into consideration" (31). Moreover, despite America's confirmation of the man as a spy prompts the state to release him by orchestrating the Sharia Law that allows the kin of the dead to forgive the accused in exchange for compensation:

> ‘No one would dare object…We’ll have them hauled into court for blasphemy. The Islamists want this man hanged, but they also want Sharia Law. They have been asking for it since the inception of the country’. (Aslam, *Golden* 260)

This foregrounds not just the hegemonic status of the US with respect to the third world countries but also exhibits the failure of the Pakistani government to tend to their citizens. Here, instead of justice, Nargis is forced to forgive her husband’s murderer. As a representative of the country’s army, Burhan’s role shows the motives towards its benefit: “Pakistan could extract certain favours and advantages immediately, or it could be leverage for the future” (258). While some deaths are covered up or construed as ‘collateral damage,’ the American charged with triple murders is granted a separate space while in custody, free from armed guards and has his food tasted by dogs to ensure its safety. The power equations maintained by the state with the US thus hierarchize or politicize the actions of its citizens. For instance, Nargis’ assumed Christian identity to escape societal bias at a personal level becomes a tool of coercion opposed to the American spy’s impersonation as a diplomat that is apparently against the nation’s security interest. Furthermore, the corruption of the state is highlighted in Major Burhan’s negotiation with Nargis. Her forgiveness to the American is to be exacted in exchange for her share of compensation money to him and the safeguarding of her religious identity and the lives of Helen and Lily.

The impact of state’s overt and covert activities not only directly affect all citizens but also differently engenders select lives. For instance, the state’s cooperation with America ignites societal bias. Massud’s death becomes embroiled in international relations that affects not just Nargis but also implicates her uncle Bishop Solomon. His suicide indicates the culmination of lifelong othering and in particular steered by the pressure by Major Burhan to disclose Nargis’ “forgeries” of identity (321). In contrast to the Christians, the novel by positing Imran who has witnessed his country’s army violence as a Kashmiri Muslim indicates precarity based on prevalent politics.

By positioning the otherized and the other within the same society, the novel highlights everyday lived realities at home that become inescapable and resistance unimaginable. The text encapsulates the overarching impact of human activity: “Everything this land and others like it were going through was about power and influence.

All of it. And these struggles of Pakistanis were not just about Pakistan, they were about the survival of the entire human race. They were about the whole planet" (40). Here, the separation with one's home, dismissal from community, and overall intolerance in the country evokes an unhomely atmosphere. Moreover, the exit from their house does not guarantee safety as lives are bound by legal consequences.

VI

Conclusion

The chapter shows how homes get politically implicated. These novels particularly show how 9/11 not only produces new frames of precarity but also accentuates existing cracks within different countries. The loss of home is clear from the accounts of people's coerced exit from their houses. However, it assumes a symbolic form by foregrounding the conditions that show 'absences' of homes. In *The Watch*, precarity assumes the form of lack of terrible insecurity in one's home, caused by the intrusion of foreign forces after 9/11. In *The Shadow of Crescent Moon*, a select population within the country encounters precarity that has been in a dominant state but is reinforced after 9/11. In *The Association of Small Bombs*, a domestic conflict assumes a global magnitude in the wake of 9/11. In *The Golden Legend*, the entire population is plagued by precarity. It applies more intensely to a select group due to existing and imposed modes of othering. The discussion shows how precarity operates in unforeseen ways even in one's home country. By foregrounding the condition suggesting 'absent' homes and home ethos, the discussion shows the difficulties for people to escape it.