A Queer Canadian Affair: The Diasporic Indian Woman Negotiating Queerness in Farzana Doctor's *Stealing Nasreen*

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Given increasing sociopolitical concerns regarding diasporic movements and queer activism across transnational spaces,[1] academic inquiries into the identity politics of the queer diaspora have become more timely, relevant, and necessary. In recent years, the academic study of literature dealing with the queer diaspora has provided literary studies with multifarious insights into the interconnections between race, gender, sexuality, and migration. Critical focus has been accorded to texts emerging out of transnational dislocations and displacements with accompanying tropes of conflicts, accommodations, and negotiations, especially in the North American context. To this end, a considerable amount of critical work has been done on Asian American queer narratives by scholars such as Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana, Martin F. Manalansan IV, Dai Kojima, and contributors to collections of essays edited by Russell Leong and by David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom. Research on queer South Asian topics in the North American context includes the critical insights of Gayatri Gopinath, Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma, Roksana Badruddoja, and Geoffrey Burkhart. However, very little research has investigated the dual dilemma inherent in occupying a queer and diasporic position in the Indian North American context vis-à-vis negotiating temporal and spatial displacement. This paper is an attempt to interrogate the intersectional problematic of being an Indian queer diasporic subject in North America.

Recent fiction dealing with the complicated identities, experiences, and negotiations of queer South Asian diasporic and/or immigrant subjects in North America has portrayed the multiple facets of queer lives that were not represented adequately in earlier literary texts in English. Many of these texts focus on narratives of homosexual men and their attempts to locate themselves in diasporic settings. Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* (1994) portrays queer sexual identity in a context of home, bringing to the

fore a complex relationship between displaced subjectivity, spatial dislocation, and the related ideas of identity and nation in the diasporic Canadian context. This trope has been revisited in his later novel *The Hungry Ghosts* (2013), in which the protagonist must retrace history in order to arrive at the queer diasporic present. Similarly, in Rakesh Satyal's novel *Blue Boy* (2009), the protagonist retraces ideas of queerness in the Indian religious imaginary of otherness and conflates the two in order to construct a sustainable reaffirmation of his diasporic queerness, encompassing the knotty politics of queer identity, desires, and relations in a transnational context. Rahul Mehta's novel, *No Other World* (2017), like Kunal Mukherjee's *My Magical Palace* (2012), complicates discursive intersectionality through the gay Indian American subject's state of in-betweenness and disruptive belonging in the context of contemporary transnationalism, in which diasporic queerness renders the Indian diasporic individual perpetually othered and thus rewrites itself like a dynamic palimpsest of (homo)sexual and (trans)national otherness. Furthermore, a text such as Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's novel *The Exiles* (2011) portrays another important aspect of the queer diasporic subject in the United States — non-normative heterosexual relations between immigrant Indian individuals in which the husband, a closeted homosexual, jeopardizes his marital relationship due to his realization and self-acceptance of being queer in a diasporic setting.

However, few texts provide narratives of the experiences of queer Indian women within the diasporic contexts of North American space. While Abha Dawesar's *Babyji* (2005) and Thrity Umrigar's *The World We Found* (2012) in the United States have received the Lambda Literary Award in the Lesbian General Fiction category for their queer characters, who are neither Indian American nor located in the U.S., Mala Kumar's *The Paths of Marriage* (2014), which is set in the United States, focuses on the lives of two generations of queer diasporic, Hindu, Indian women who have to make North America their home and portrays the vexed relations that lesbian immigrant and diasporic subjects must negotiate in terms of sociocultural, familial, and personal implications. Two key examples of similar fiction set in Canada are the novels *Stealing Nasreen* (2007) and *Six Metres of Pavement* (2011) by South Asian Canadian writer Farzana Doctor. These novels portray lives that are rarely represented or made accessible in fiction — those of queer Muslim South Asian diasporic and immigrant women in North America, particularly in Canada. Furthermore, substantial critical investment in the reading, analysis, and discussion of

such texts and cultural representations in the context of contemporary transnational experiences and lives of queer diasporic Muslim subjects is rare. This essay attempts to provide critical insight into these contexts.

In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gopinath contends that the term "queer diaspora" refers to the discursive networks of affiliation and negotiation that are constantly being produced and reproduced along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, transnational space, and memory (11). Following Gopinath's notion that a queer diasporic framework "insists on the imbrication of nation and diaspora through the production of hetero- and homosexuality, particularly as they are mapped onto the bodies of women" (10) and implicates a "resignification of 'home' within a queer diasporic imaginary" (15), this essay investigates the ways in which Doctor's female characters negotiate their queer identities within the diasporic space of multicultural Canada.

The negotiations that immigrant and diasporic Muslim identities have undergone in the past and, more critically, undergo in the present are always already located within a discourse of confrontation in which the othered *Ummah*[2] attempts to accommodate itself in the Canadian mosaic of sociocultural, religious, political, and sexual expectations of a modern multicultural society (see Omar 25; Yousif 542). In the case of queer Muslim women of the diaspora in Canada, their identity politics are always embroiled in a contentious praxis of morality — a discursive politics of negotiation that can be understood through what Charles Taylor calls the "essential self/identity" (82). Cultural critics have commented on the problems of multiple and multi-layered identities of diasporic Muslim subjects in Canadian multiculturalism (see Rahnema 32). In negotiating this queer diasporic Muslim identity, Ibrahim Abraham focuses on "the complex question of competing, closeted and performed sexual identities of queer Muslims" and challenges "both the notion of the universality of contemporary Western sexual categories, and the notion of Western sexual exceptionalism" (140). Critical discussions of queer Muslim cultures in the diaspora have emphasized the need to interrogate, revise, and move beyond Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of cultures" theory of transnational relations (Rahman 945; Abraham 138) and to aim for a more intersectional understanding of queer Muslim cultures, especially in diasporic spaces (Rahman 946, 948-51; Abraham 144).

I consider sexuality and sexual diversity as a key area of negotiation — what Tariq Modood and Fauzia Ahmad, who interrogate perspectives on

queer Muslims in the West, call a point of "contention between secular liberals and 'mainstream,' practising Muslims within Western multicultural societies, and among Muslims themselves" (199). Subsequently, I understand that what Abraham calls the "sexual hybridity" (144) of the queer diasporic Muslim woman has crucial implications in locating and reassessing how the queer subject in the diaspora refashions social, cultural, and familial identity politics. While being invested in the reading and understanding of queer diasporic narratives through Gopinath's contention regarding the same, I also look at the negotiations of queer diasporic Muslim women in Canada through a theoretical lens of what Momin Rahman calls "queer as intersectionality" (951). Rahman proposes that, "In many ways, queer intersectionality is simply the necessary tautology: intersectionality is inevitably disruptively queer, and queer must be analytically intersectional" (956). In the context of such an understanding of the queer diasporic Muslim, the notional idea of the impossible queer Muslim becomes problematic and in turn problematizes Western constructs of sexuality and belonging. I undertake a critical reading of the various contestations and negotiations in Doctor's *Stealing Nasreen*, toward an understanding of how and why, in the spatial and temporal dislocation inherent in the queer diaspora, queer intersectional Muslim women's literary narratives function as critical markers of contemporary sexual identity politics.

Doctor's novels deal primarily with the familial and sociocultural negotiations of queer Indian immigrant and diasporic women in Toronto's South Asian communities. *Stealing Nasreen*, her debut novel, narrates the dilemma and the negotiations that its immigrant Muslim protagonists, Salma and Shaffiq, grapple with in their newly adopted host land, wherein their notions about sexuality and queer identities are challenged, distorted, and refashioned by their experiences in Canada. Complicit in this conflict of sociocultural identity politics vis-à-vis the sexual is the character of Nasreen, who acts as the principal instigator of this need for negotiation and the propagator of change in the lives of Salma and Shaffiq. The two protagonists, who recently entered into an arranged marriage in India before immigrating to Canada, find it difficult to acclimatize and settle down in the diasporic milieu of multicultural Toronto. As Salma and Shaffiq struggle to balance a new life in a foreign land, their individual and familial ideals and constructs are plunged into crisis when Nasreen, a second-generation lesbian Indian Canadian Muslim woman, draws out

previously unaddressed and unresolved desires and longings in Salma and Shaffiq.

Shaffiq, the only key male character in the narrative, is constantly left unsettled by the plethora of new experiences that he comes across in the diasporic Canadian sociocultural space. Reading about the Western discourses of the evils of arranged marriages in audacious English-language magazines, Shaffiq initially is concerned about his own marital relations with Salma. This is complicated by his affinity toward Nasreen; with the passage of time, Shaffiq's curiosity is transformed into an interest in Nasreen's "strangeness." This seems to be a result of Nasreen being a Muslim woman with Indian roots born and raised in Canada. His unresolved desire for Nasreen manifests itself as a brewing problem that he is unable to understand. Furthermore, Shaffiq's ideas of how relationships and sexual possibilities are constructed in Canada are unsettled by a revelation that raises questions in his mind. While going through Nasreen's belongings at her office, Shaffiq discovers a photograph of Nasreen with a white woman. This photograph functions as one of the first instances of Shaffiq's gradual coming to terms with queer Muslim realities in the diasporic space.

Shaffiq's heteronormative gaze upon the photograph reveals this tension; his uneasy recognition and location of a queer dynamic between an Indian woman and a white woman introduces the reality of the queer diasporic Indian subject that later becomes a vexatious problem. More importantly, Nasreen's entry into the lives of Salma and Shaffiq entails a coming to terms with Salma's queer identity. Her openly queer Muslim lifestyle introduces a major shift in the understanding of Salma's character, evident from their first meeting: "Salma looks a little long at Nasreen's round eyes, her lipstick-stained lips and soft breasts and notices that Nasreen does not avert her eyes either" (82). This translates further into a "sudden peak of libidinal energy" (87) that makes Salma feel "a brief swell of contentment ride up her body" (88).

In portraying the desires of the immigrant Muslim woman from India and in narrating Salma's previously unarticulated queer subjectivity, Doctor invests the novel with what Sam Naidu terms a "transnational feminist literary aesthetic" through which "diasporic women have found eloquent voices to enunciate themes and concerns specific to their gender" (371). While the novel depicts the tensions between the identities in the Indian homeland of the past and the Canadian diasporic home of the present, Salma is presented as a character who finds herself with an agency made

accessible by cultural translocation and translation. Naidu claims that the recurring tropes in literary texts produced by women writers of the South Asian diaspora foreground underlying "themes of cultural continuation and perpetuation [that] are woven into narratives of change," where "References are made to deities, local legend, ancient myths, Hindu or Islamic scriptures or musical traditions" (382). However, Naidu also notes that the elements of cultural translation are "not mere backdrops to the main narrative but are embedded into the plot and into the narratives of the characters' lives" (382), something that Doctor's narrative references in Salma's coming to terms with her sexuality and same-sex desires in the Canadian milieu.

To this end, the narrative introduces and makes use of what can be termed transnational queer artifacts that embody the same-sex desires blooming within Salma, which she negotiates gradually. Besides the photograph of Nasreen and Connie that Shaffiq discovers, another artifact that serves as a symbolic trope is a painting that suggests in its artistic representation a sense of queer diasporic desires. Interestingly, this is an Indian painting of a queen and her female attendant that Salma has recently installed in her home to make it more "Indian." Though Shaffiq considers the painting to be "almost pornographic," Salma is quick to rebuke him, claiming that "it's art" (130). In fact, as a transnational queer artifact, the painting can be considered an important part of the text, as evidenced by it serving as the cover art for the first edition (published by Inanna Publications) of the novel. When Salma looks closely at the painting, she finds that "the servant's blouse seems translucent, her dark nipples showing through the sheer fabric"; she also notices that "the queen . . . appears to be leering in the servant's direction" (110). Salma's desires for Nasreen get translated into her queer interpretation of the two women and their gaze in the painting — one that reverts to her as a counter gaze that makes her conscious of her queerness, as the narrator reveals:

> She studies the rani's serene face, and notices . . . that the servant's gaze is not really averted away from her queen, but directed out at the viewer, at Salma. Salma views herself in the painting's glass reflection. . . . Then she shifts her gaze from her reflection back to the painting and it seems to her that now the rani, too, is glancing her way. The weight of both the stares makes Salma inexplicably self-conscious. (129)

Made conscious of her own queer gaze and same-sex desires through the reflection in the painting — both as a superimposed reflection of herself and as the reflective interpretation of the characters — Salma comes to acknowledge her own queer identity for the first time. This realization complements Salma's developing desires for Nasreen. The painting almost becomes a symbol of Salma's growing awareness and acceptance of her desires for the female sex. Just as the homoerotic context of the painting is revealed only to keen and informed observers, Salma's longings for Nasreen can be understood only by those who make an effort to see it.

While giving in to fantasy, Salma closes her eyes and remembers how Nasreen made her feel erotically charged in terms of both anxiety and excitement. She experiences a sensuous and arousing yearning for Nasreen, as she recalls that "each time Nas leaned in close or held her gaze, the heat crept lower down into her belly, flowing all the way to her groin" (110). Salma repeats this fantasy until she experiences "an unnatural, vibrant, unholy sensation" (110). This drives Salma to confront her queer feelings, affections, and desires for Nasreen, but it also presents Salma with a conflict within her sensibility of Muslim womanhood in the diasporic setting. Evidently, Salma's sustained relationship with the implicit, artistic valency of the painting, which helps her understand her own sexuality further, speaks to the crucial albeit problematic role played by the queer diasporic artifact. This is aptly reflected in the way the text narrates how Salma desired to take the painting out of the closet and how later on, when the painting aids her in realizing her hidden desires for women, she contemplates putting it back in the closet.

However, the Indian painting also provides a way out of the problem that it has brought to the fore; it becomes a point of convergence for both Salma and Shaffiq's desires for Nasreen. Both Salma and Shaffiq use the painting to conceal an item belonging to Nasreen: her earring in Salma's case and her photograph in Shaffiq's. The queered painting, then, becomes a confidante — a space of confession and negotiation — wherein the secret desires of both Salma and Shaffiq for Nasreen fuse together and coexist. As such, the explorative and rearticulating agency of the safe space of this painting resides in a duality: it mirrors the problem between Salma and Shaffiq when they discover the secrets they have been hiding away in these objects of desire and allows eventually for a space of negotiation for them to come to terms with their desires for Nasreen, especially in relation to an accommodative understanding of Salma's queer identity.

Salma's newfound desire for Nasreen uncovers another aspect of Salma's queer identity: the queer life she lived in India. The knowledge of the life that Nasreen has led in Canada makes Salma acknowledge "her own longing, the longing she had been feeling all her life" (171). Subsequently, this longing also enables Salma to revisit her same-sex experiences and to reveal details about her romantic relationship in India with a woman named Raj. This journey takes the narrative from their physical intimacies in public spaces like parks to private spaces like Raj's room. Akin to Michel de Certeau's theorization of the agency of liminal spaces that cannot be seen but are "shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces" (93), Salma's recollection of her and Raj's utility of various such spaces of Bombay for the fulfilment of same-sex desires brings into the open the undeniable reality of Salma's queer identity, which further complicates her marital relationship with Shaffiq in Toronto.

In addition to the implications of the Indian painting relocated in Canadian space, the delayed arrival of Salma's old trunk from India provides her with yet another queer artifact. Salma's old photo album containing her photographs with Raj enters the Canadian household as an item of queer memorabilia that brings back into the lives of the diasporic characters a reality to acknowledge and negotiate, as depicted in its starkness: "There she stands beside Raj, her arm around her and holding her waist, while Raj's left hand grazes her shoulder. Her round, young face tilts toward Salma at an angle that obscures her expression" (201). Both the Indian painting and this photograph from India act as queer diasporic artifacts as they contain in themselves an agency of the queer diasporic body that "mobilizes questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia" through which "their legacies are imaginatively contested and transformed" (Gopinath 4).

This agential queer diasporic nostalgia acts as a base for the conflicted queer realization that Salma has in Canada as an immigrant, which gets complicated by her desires for Nasreen. This relates to Avtar Brah's concept of the viability of a "diaspora space" (178) that includes not only the immigrants and their descendants but also those who are constructed and represented as the local, forming an intersectionality that entails both multifaceted placidness and diasporan agency (see Brah 178, 205, 238). A similar portrayal of the agency of queer Muslim women's subjectivity can be seen in Doctor's *Six Metres of Pavement* (2011), in which Ismail, the male protagonist, has to grapple with and accommodate the

sexual identity of Fatima, the Canadian-born Muslim Indian Canadian lesbian character, in order to function effectively as an adoptive father to the young woman who has been displaced from her traditional Muslim home due to her sexuality. In this context, both novels problematize the heteronormative familial constructs of "Indian" and "Muslim" situated in diasporic Canadian space, where they get restructured within the multiple negotiations that reflect upon the multicultural and queer diasporic possibilities that Canada offers.

Rahman's theorization of "queer as intersectionality" in the context of the queer diasporic/immigrant Muslim provides another critical framework for analyzing Salma's subjectivity and experiences. It must be noted, as Rahman avers, that the queer diasporic Muslim is located "at an intersectional location in full measure, challenging both the category of Muslim . . . and the category of gay" and is "disruptive to established identity categories" (952). Doctor has foregrounded this intersectionality of the queer diasporic Muslim woman in her portrayals of Nasreen, Salma, and of their relationship. Nasreen seems to have grown up in a liberal environment in Canada, given that, as a Muslim girl, she had a Christmas tree in her house every year (58). Though Nasreen is not portrayed as a practising Muslim, the narrative makes use of implicit symbolism with respect to her relation with Islam: she has named her beloved companion and cat Id, for instance, a reference to both the Freudian concept of the unconscious and the important Islamic festival. Islam as an absent presence becomes more evident and problematic in the case of Salma, whose proclivity for her religion shifts through several contexts. She starts attending prayers at the local mosque upon the request of her devout and conservative Asima Aunty in the hope that she will find a community in the new Canadian landscape and, specifically, because of Asima's assurance that "theirs is a progressive mosque" where women are treated as equals to men (63). In fact, Shaffiq seems to be worried about Salma's new-found interest in Islam, something that he claims is "not normal for her" (116). What he presumes is an outcome of her not feeling at home in Canada surprises him further when she announces her decision to fast during Ramadan, making him accuse her of not "moving forward in Canada" (205). Salma is aware of this duality in being Muslim and diasporic in Canada — a duality that hinges on a presumption of progress devoid of restrictions in a liberal land. However, Salma's self-identity as a Muslim woman is defined by her being a queer woman in the diaspora; I infer that her seeking

out the Islamic space of worship needs to be understood through a lens of same-sex longings — not necessarily sexual but more on the level of interacting with women in a close-knit space of religious similarity. Does she give in to this longing just to be in the company of similar diasporic Muslim women or to seek solace in religion while negotiating her own sexuality? This is a question to which Doctor provides neither an answer nor closure. Nevertheless, it does allow Salma to become closer with one woman: Nasreen.

While confiding in Nasreen about her queer desires and identity in the past, Salma makes use of a queer vocabulary that the liberal space in Canada has made available to her and she comes out to Nasreen regarding her longings. During this intimate conversation, Nasreen reassures Salma about queer possibilities in Canada, and a proximity develops between them. It is in the heat of this moment that the first act of physical intimacy between them takes place. In a way, Salma's focus, in her quest for solace and acceptance, shifts from the space of the mosque to that of the home. In this context, the role played by the private space of the diasporic home must be considered in relation to same-sex intimacy. As Richard Phillips notes, the space of the home, "both as a place and an idea, is closely linked to normative constructions of gender and sexuality. As a gendered space, it is fundamental to ideas about femininity and masculinity" (273). Furthermore, Jean-Ulrick Désert reminds us that "queer homes do not necessarily negate these characteristics, but rather reinterpret and often (re)appropriate them, constructing new spaces as the occupants redefine the parameters for domesticity" (22). As such, while providing for the cloistered/clandestine same-sex interaction between Salma and Nasreen, the diasporic home gets implicated in a politics of transnational domestic space that enables the explorations of the desires of Salma.

However, Salma's home also involves her husband, Shaffiq, whose presence cannot be negated, and her past lover, Raj, whose absence cannot be forgotten. Despite its agential force, the kiss between Salma and Nasreen raises unforeseen questions within Salma's mind vis-à-vis her relationship with Shaffiq, and she decides never to reveal this experience to him. Contemplating the possible consequences of her act of intimacy with Nasreen, Salma realizes that her past with Raj continues to haunt her with unresolved queer longings and desires, even in Canada. Stuart Hall observes, in the context of the idea of home in the diaspora, that "people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language

and inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home" ("New Cultures" 206). This seems to be especially true and complicated for Salma, for whom the question of home is always already intersected with questions of womanhood, sexuality, and belonging. Unfortunately, upon Nasreen's clear implication about the impossibility of their relationship due to Salma's married status, Salma recedes back to the hauntings of the unresolved queer relationship with Raj in her past — a crucial problem that "exists in the country of origin [but] continues or perhaps increases as a result of dislocation and relocation" (Moghissi 98).

The new closeness and strange tension between Salma and Nasreen incites in Shaffiq's mind new questions regarding queer desires, relationships, and potentialities. Initially, Shaffiq discounts the possibility of Salma having a same-sex liaison, believing that it is a one-sided crush on Nasreen's part, reassuring himself that Salma will make it clear that she is not interested in Nasreen and imagining that he and Salma will laugh at such a prospect later on. However, Shaffiq's problem with the queer uncertainty between the two women is aggravated when Salma neither reciprocates his sexual advances nor confides in him the truth about her desires for and experiences with Nasreen. The diasporic familial structure that generally provides a sense of security thus is rendered deeply fractured due to the realization of queerness in the diasporic location. This seems to relate to the findings of a study conducted by Haideh Moghissi in the context of changing spousal relations within the Muslim diaspora in Canada, where the familial construct implicated itself as a site of negotiation and where "the negative impact on spousal relations of the day-to-day struggles of life in the new country" gets "compounded by the absence of the support network of extended family and friends, social isolation and a sense of loneliness" (93).

Salma's attempts to reassure herself that she is not a woman who desires another woman and that she is not in love with Nasreen do not help to resolve this looming problem in her marital life with Shaffiq. Moreover, memories of the lost home back in India come to haunt her, and she "must face not only ambivalent forms of knowledge about [herself] but also [her] own ambivalent response to that knowledge" (Khan 473). In this context, the socio-economic position of Salma in the diasporic Canadian home entails a problematic that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak places in the "homeworking" category of the "new diaspora" woman in a transnational framework (3), comprising women who "stay at home, often impervious

to organizational attempts through internalized gendering as a survival technique" (4). Salma's mourning of the loss of a past economic freedom in India — as an English teacher — gets translated into her longing for teaching Gujarati at home in Canada, providing her with the possibility of interacting with Nasreen. In this context, as opposed to Spivak's contention, the concept of diasporic multiculturalism is not irrelevant; the queer diasporic space does entail problems and negotiations, but it also provides access to and realization of a transnational queer feminist subjectivity.

What the tensions in the relationships also do is pave a way for subjective negotiations on multiple levels. Salma is able to review and to seriously reanalyze her past queer relationship in India. She also becomes aware that the tensions associated with this realization are the result of two actions: one, in confiding in and desiring Nasreen, and two, in coming to terms with her same-sex experiences in the past and the present. In this context, Salma's memories enable her to come to terms with her queer identity that manifested itself in her relationships with Raj and with Nasreen. The diasporic nature and the agency of her negotiation with her queer identity through her relationship with Nasreen is best described by a friend of Nasreen who compares them to the characters of Sita and Radha in the film *Fire* by Indian Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. This reference is especially curious as the connotations of the film's representation of same-sex desires and the relations between the Indian women entail a discursive correlation between queer diasporic politics and agency in postcolonial and transnational intersections, especially vis-à-vis sexualized female subjectivity.[3] This also, interestingly, reflects upon what Trinh T. Minh-Ha,[4] Homi K. Bhabha,[5] and Stuart Hall[6] have understood as a discursive move toward hybridized subjectivity, where, to use Shahnaz Khan's idea, diasporic Muslim women are located in a Bhabhaesque third space that "inhabit[s] the rim of an 'in-between reality' marked by shifting psychic, cultural, and territorial boundaries" (464). Similarly relevant is Sura P. Rath's formulation of the diasporic third space in the Indian American context that, though being a crossroads of contestations, provides an intersectional idea of home as constructed by superimpositions of place, time, and history. Though "remaining within the oppressive structures of the home — as domestic space, racialized community space, and national space" (Gopinath 14-15), the agency provided by and in the diasporic third space acts as an enabler, assisting a character like Salma in revisiting, reconstructing, and "remaking the space of home from within"

(14), and contributes to the voice of the novel in "imaginatively working to dislodge [the] heteronormative logic" of the home (15). However, it also renders Salma's queer diasporic Muslim identity in a flux of "contradictory experiences" that "implies a *fragmented subjectivity* . . . rather than an uncomplicated, unified, rational subjectivity" (Farahani 108).

Positive negotiation nevertheless takes place in a new sense of understanding between Salma and Shaffiq that manifests itself as their mutual respect for their desires: the two come to terms with their individual desires for Nasreen by reviewing their relationships with each other after this discovery. In particular, Salma negotiates her desires for Nasreen to arrive at an accommodation in her relationship with her husband. In their discussion about the many complex facets of their immigrant reality in Canada, among other things, and their relationship with each other as a couple sharing the Islamic faith, Salma and Shaffiq try to continue with their lives, despite the realities that her queer realization has brought to the fore. At the end of the novel, the photograph from India makes it possible for Shaffiq to view Salma and Raj's queer love affair in India vis-à-vis its counterpart in Nasreen and Connie's relationship. Similarly, the Indian painting of the women desiring each other acts as a facilitator for both the husband and the wife, helping them come to terms with Salma's desires for Nasreen and to live with the reality of Salma's queer identity.

However, the eventual outcomes of Salma's queer diasporic identity are not made available to the reader. Obviously, it is rendered multiply problematic, in that her queer identity not only gets located in a social discourse of restrictive Islam but also gets caught in a flux of a critical hybridity that empowers her to exist in a discourse of diasporic queerness. This negotiation with experiencing different cultures and values simultaneously causes queer diasporic Muslim women like Salma to be, as James Clifford puts it, "caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts and futures" where they "connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways" (259). Inevitably, Salma's subjectivity as a queer Muslim woman in the diasporic home gets informed and refashioned by the various problems that she has had to negotiate. However, in the context of the queer Canadian affair that Salma finds herself in, the denouement remains unfinished, leaving questions regarding the Canadian accommodation of the queer diasporic Muslim woman suspended in a world of subjective interpretations vis-à-vis queer intersectionality, something similar to the queer women in the painting. As such, the diasporic Indian woman must

eventually negotiate queerness through a hybridized but ambivalent and contested transnational subjectivity framed by palimpsestic negotiations.

Notes

[1] I consider the term queer to posit a heterogeneous idea of non-normative and non-conformist sexualities and their discourses and praxes.

[2] *Ummah* refers to the whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion.

[3] For critical discussions on the politics of representation and problematization of queer diasporic discourse in Mehta's *Fire*, see Gopinath 13, 131-44, 152-57; Bose 437, 443, 444, 445.

[4] Trinh notes that the dualities and fluidity in identity construction are based on a politics of difference — both between and within — resulting in a perpetual flux-cum-fix condition. In representing the "I" identity, she uses the analogy of multi-layered onion structure and emphasizes that plural interpretations of race and gender, in the case of women of colour, must react intersectionally in order to defeat the patriarchal discourse of female appropriation (90, 94, 106).

[5] Bhabha's much discussed idea of the third space entails the discursive bases of the relationship between subjectivity and hybridity in postcolonial contexts; the concept has special relevance in the problematic reconstruction and theorization of transnationalism and multi-axial diasporic otherness (55, 56).

[6] Hall, while focusing on the cultural politics of transnational identities and their representation, emphasizes the discursive relevance of subjectivity and the role of difference in it. In this context, he points out the strategic agency of hybridization and what he terms "cultural diaspora-ization" in problematizing and revisioning sexuality vis-à-vis the racial and the diasporic ("New Ethnicities" 443, 447).

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