

After September 11, many Americans had a difficult time differentiating between a person of Arabic descent and anyone who remotely resembled them. Some people eyed any person wearing a turban or traditional eastern clothing suspiciously and derisively. Some Sikh men in Philadelphia were punched in the face and spat upon and one Sikh man was even shot to death somewhere in the Midwest. The Sikh men were singled out because they wore turbans resembling Arab head coverings. The most menacing people in America at the time were not the terrorists. They were the incognizant bigots like the man driving in front of me that week, who wrote “Death to all ragheads” on the back window of his pickup truck. I was fearful of driving and even appearing in public in that section of Northeast Philadelphia owing to such reactions. I even had a few of my students facetiously ask me “ Ms. Chacko, where is Osama Bin Laden?”

The efficacy of this silent persecution of racial profiling was felt keenly by people of Indian and Pakistani ancestry. As a result, I recall that many of my friends and family started displaying the American flag on their cars and houses. When in reality, I believe many did this more in fear of reprisals than in patriotic spirit. I did not choose to display any American flag on my car or my house because I didn’t wish to use the American flag as a shield like the others. If I was going to publicize the American flag, I want to do it to express my patriotism, not use it as an aegis.

For the most part of my life, I remember telling people that my nationality was Indian even after becoming a naturalized citizen at age twenty-one, just like the Japanese man who appeared in the film *Color of Fear*. I had a difficult time accepting my dual identity as an Asian American. How can I be both Indian and American simultaneously? This resistance and quandary was partially due to my parents’ endeavor to instill and affirm Christian beliefs and Indian culture in me while living in America. My parents’ upbringing in both religious and cultural matters has firmly shaped my character and conscience. It was not until the last few years that I have begun to identify myself as an Asian American. The September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy progressively forced me to think about my dual identity and my “double consciousness” more than ever before. I do not think I have ever felt more patriotic than I had at that calamitous time. It provided me the affirmation that I needed to validate my individualism as an Asian American — I can still be an American while retaining my Christian upbringing and Indian heritage in this “land of freedom” called America.

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