



The Exiled Female Vision in Shauna Baldwin's What the Body Remembers

Sawssen Ahmadi

► To cite this version:

Sawssen Ahmadi. The Exiled Female Vision in Shauna Baldwin's What the Body Remembers. International Journal of Sciences: Basic and applied research, 2022, 62 (2), pp.413-423. hal-03693934

HAL Id: hal-03693934

<https://univ-avignon.hal.science/hal-03693934>

Submitted on 13 Jun 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



The Exiled Female Vision in Shauna Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*

Sawssen Ahmadi*

Dr. Sawssen Ahmadi, University of Avignon, 74 Louis Pasteur, 84029 Avignon, France

Email: sawssen.ahmadi@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper is a critical inquiry into Shauna Baldwin's postfeminist literary work, *What the Body Remembers*. How is the exiled female vision represented in this exilic novel? Does this diasporic vision reflect what the [Indian] body remembers? This short overview highlights the "unhomely" sense of belonging of the female body in her homeland, India. Through an exiled vision, the Indo-Canadian writer, Baldwin conveys the voice of the silenced Indian woman and depicts the internal exile within which Indian women live as a third-space. This vision reveals that exile does not mean necessarily that the person is elsewhere outside her homeland. The sense of elsewhere and exile can happen to a person or a group of persons even at their homeland.

Keywords: Diasporic literature; exiled vision; female body.

1. Introduction

Baldwin's postfeminist novel, *What the Body Remembers*, talks about strict Indian norms, governed by patriarchy, which marginalizes the Indian woman as if she were a stranger, or an immigrant minority, within her homeland. This novel, according to the critic Pragti Sobti, is a "revolt against the muffled silences of women at the triple level of dream, body and soul" [1:133]. Sobti's claim can be explained as an implicit reference to the complicity between the metaphoric and the real worlds of the Indian woman in an attempt to locate her dislocated identity.

* Corresponding author.

The critic Susan Friedman describes Baldwin's work as a "historical novel set in the Punjab between the 1920s and 1940s. Its narrative is all about borders that both join and separate, borders that form the shifting national imaginary and frontiers of touch that are both tender and violent" [2:13]. By referring to Friedman's argument, one might agree with her about the novel's historicity, but one might underline the fact that it is a borderless narrative. According to the critic, Satpal Singh, "[a]s a feminist writer, Shauna Singh aims to explore woman's inner psyche, [her] inner or outer conflicts, and search for identity, identity of womanhood, national identity, cultural identity area and religious identity" [3:288]. Thus, Satpal Singh's argument underlines our identification of Shauna Bladwin's novel as a borderless novel; a narrative which seeks to cross the borders in order to address womanhood through the Indian stereotype. For the critic, Axelle Girard, "What the Body Remembers exposes woman as the paradigmatic incarnation of the post-colonial subject, a self divided between past/present, tradition/modernity, here/there" [4:49]. Girard's statement, however, restricts the scope of this novel by attributing a postcolonial identification to the female stereotype represented. Baldwin centralizes her focus on what happened in India during that period and oscillates between patriarchal and patriotic issues in tie with feminism. Through this paper, we seek to explore how, in Homi Bhabha's terms, "the encounter with identity occurs at the point at which something exceeds the frame of the image, it eludes the eye, evacuates the self as site of identity and autonomy and—most important—leaves a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance" [5:49-50]. In other words, this paper aims to discuss the exiled metaphoric vision of the Indian woman who is struggling to locate her dislocated identity.

2. Exilic Memories

Baldwin condemns the Indian patriarchal system which allows men the right to marry more than one wife at the same time and to force them to be obedient. *What the Body Remembers* starts with the introduction of two female bodies/characters. Through these characters, the novelist reflects an exiled vision of what the Indian body remembers. The two women are married to the same man called, Sardarji. At the arrival of the new bride, Roop, at her husband's house, the first wife, Satya, invites her to spend the afternoon with her, in Satya's "side of the house" [6:4]. It might be called an implicit investigation more than an invitation. Satya's analysis of Roop's character, or let us call it an exiled vision, turns from the internal study of the latter to the external appearance and at this moment she discovers that her necklace is worn by this new wife. This is how she is described: "She wore it last to a party full of Europeans. Its brilliance and its weight had comforted her, compensation for her tongue-tied state; the European ladies ignored her once they found she spoke no English" [6:4]. Satya feels that the second wife has stolen a lot of things, such as her necklace, earrings and, most importantly, her husband. In this visual examination, there are two attacks directed at the patriarchal and the colonizing systems. The Indian patriarchal system is criticized for its hypocrisy towards women. This system compensates the wife for her "tongue-tied state", i.e., there is a possibility that if this wife breaks her verbal ties, she would be punished or deprived of these gifts and even her life. Concerning the criticism of the colonial system, it is manifested in the party full of European ladies who ignored Satya "once they found she spoke no English" in her home country, India. This Indian lady is ignored by foreigners who want her to speak their western language in her homeland. Thus, one can notice, through this exiled vision that this female character suffers from "unhomely" paradoxical feelings. This Indian woman is silenced in her homeland by Indian patriarchy and the Western colonizer; a double silence/an internal exile.

The Indian patriarchy puts Satya in a jealous state. She invites Roop to spend the afternoon with her despite her hatred towards this new bride. Satya seems to be a rebellious wise woman, conversely to Roop. The problem is that this kind of woman finds herself obeying, reluctantly, the illogical patriarchal norms. For example, she accepts to look for a bride for her husband under the pressure of Sardarji's sister, Toshi, described as a "churnail" and "witch" [6:6]. In such a patriarchal society, the father is the best protector of his daughter [6:7]. Unfortunately, the luckless Satya's father lost his power because:

When the British turned land rights to paper, he could prove nothing. [...] He lost the land [...]. In the end he locked himself in a room with all the British-supplied gin he could muster and drank himself to death. [...] When he was gone, Satya's only brother sold the last of the land to buy a lorry and sent their mother, [...], to live with a cousin [...]. What a way to die: young, and for no reason. Not even a martyr's death, or a soldier's. [6:7]

Subsequently, Satya is a victim of her fate as an Indian woman as long as she is unable to bear children. She is the victim of some fake social values, claiming that a man has to be a father so that his children carry on the family's name. Furthermore, Satya's father and brother are victims of the colonizer's policies in exploiting the ignorance of this community at the time. Consequently, Satya finds herself without protection after her father's death and she has to accept Roop as the second wife of her husband, Sardarji.

Undoubtedly, Sardarji "chooses Roop over Satya, chooses to take Roop to Lahore. Roop will listen to him admiringly, carefully, her eyes upon his mouth [...], while Satya has never lowered her eyes before him and carries herself far too confidently" [6:286-87]. This man selects the silent, obedient wife and gets rid of the trouble-maker, Satya. This is a stereotypical image of Indian patriarchy which prefers the subordinate woman. This exiled vision was the transition from the expository part of the novel about these two female characters to more details about Roop's life before her marriage and her coming to this house.

The introduction of Roop's family members takes the reader from 1937 back to 1928, when Roop was still a child and her mother still alive. The reader travels through Roop's past memories and exiled vision to learn about the treatment of Indian female body. Inside this family, one can discover a lot of shocking truths about the Indian mentality/patriarchy. The following quotation is about the attitude of Nani, Roop's grandmother, to Papaji who is her son-in-law, when he decided to take Roop's mother to see what they call "hakim":

Papaji says, he is going to take Mama to Lahore to see an English-medicine doctor at Mayo Hospital because all the local hakims are unable to help her. [...] But Nani stands rigid in the doorway. [...], she has heard Papaji. Covering her head respectfully but firmly, she tells Papaji right to his face, "No, she will not go. Am I dead that you have to take her to the hospital and show her body to strange men? Is it not bad enough that my granddaughter [...] is nine years old and still goes about unveiled so every sweeper knows the colour of her skin? You are not a small man, you are the lambardar. You must set a

good example. My daughter will stay here and bring this house another son.” [6:28]

In a stubborn manner, the grandmother refused the idea of taking her daughter to “an English-medicine doctor” so that her body would not be shown to “strange men”. Nani’s words and mentality reveals what the critic, Axelle Girard calls a “sexual partition of space”:

The sexual partition of space one may decipher in *What the Body Remembers* reveals some sort of trans-cultural reality: Aristotle’s polis–public space–was already revolving around a sexually divided space, separating men from women. Thus one may easily understand that: “The freedom achieved outside the domestic enclosure was purchased at the risk of ostracism, or at best marginalisation while paradoxically a central position in society—as a wife or mother—could be granted to only those who submitted to the collective feminine code of conformity which erased the individual self”. [4:9]

By referring to Girard, one can observe that it is not a question of “sexual partition of space, it is rather an attempt to erase the individual self of Indian women. Roop’s mother is not only submitting to the collective Indian feminine code, which is imposed on her, but also, she has never been represented as an active woman. She is an Indian woman who is deprived not only of her freedom, but also her individual identity. She is introduced as a pregnant woman who dies before giving birth to her baby, metaphorically, she carries the burden of strict Indian norms which cause her death then. She represents the Indian woman struggling with an erased exiled self. In Nani’s words stated above, she observes that her granddaughter, called Madani, was still unveiled and this was not good at all for her son-in-law’s reputation as a “lambardar”^a. Unluckily, this old woman considers that “setting a good example” in their society is more important than her daughter’s life and her granddaughter’s freedom as a child of only nine years. She was also expecting the birth of a “son” confidently and not a daughter. This grandmother is an icon of the obstinate and severe Indian who is tied to his/her customs. She convinced the father, not to take Roop’s mother to the hospital. This is an indication of the triumph of such marginalizing norms of this patriarchal community. Roop remembers that when her sister Madani “begins to bleed”, women in their house started claiming the following: “ ‘The child is a woman and is no longer to be kept in our trust. Find a family, find a boy’ ” [6:83]. According to these women, every grown up little girl must get married as soon as possible. This is exactly what happened, the girl was married at an early age. In other words, they search for suitable husbands for their girls who are still children, not even adolescents, and once they marry, they will be treated in a similar way to the dead mother of Roop. Even before her death, the grandmother advised Roop and Madani in the following way, “Listen and obey your father” [6:63]. She calls for the obedience of women to men encouraging them to behave like any Indian domestic angel in the house. Through an exiled vision, Baldwin shows that Indian women help the Indian patriarchal system to dominate them and to make them invisible angels in their husbands’ houses. The Indian mentality that privileges a patriarchal hegemony, which is supported by Indian women, teaches Indian girls about the significance of marriage over education. This is the case of Roop who “puts her book away; reading is for defeated girls, girls who can’t be married” [6:105]. The following quotation depicts Roop’s happiness when she learns that she is

^a “Lambardar” is a Hindi word that refers to a “village head or a peasant registered on the tax collector’s roll” [4:65].

going to get married:

to have a family ask for her before she turns seventeen and people in the village start their chattering. And to Sardar Kushal Singh's brother-in-law! Sardarji, a jagirdar, lord of any number of villages the size of Pari Darvaza. She is saved, saved from living the rest of her days in Pari Darvaza like her mama, saved from being a guest like Revati Bhua in Papaji's home forever. [6:110]

Roop's monologue as a young girl reflects the ambition of many young Indian girls who think that marriage will save them from others' criticism. They are trapped by such exilic visions and rituals that lead to their treatment as slaves by patriarchy. As a new bride, Roop is convinced that her husband "is a man of power, a man in control, a man who can make a woman's life easy" [6:125]. Later on she finds out the brutal truth of the institution of marriage in India.

Roop's father is a Sikh^b and is called Bachan Singh. Baldwin mentions frequently the physical signs of Sikhism such as "turbans", "daggers" and "long hair," that are understood by Sikh families to be signs of cultural and religious purity. About these physical signs of Sikhism, the critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, state that "they mark the Sikh male body as visibly 'different,' whether in India or in North America as the markers of Sikh masculinity, and essential elements of their identities" [7:36]. As a matter of fact, *What the Body Remembers* approaches the significance of Sikhism in further detail through the male character of Bachan Singh. In the following quotation, Bachan Singh tells his family how his father made him a Sikh:

I was made a Sikh by my father. [...] My papaji, your dada, had taken three wives and still found himself without a son. So he went to a very wise holy man, a sant [...]. The sant told him he must take a bachan before the Guru Granth Sahib, and so my Papaji gave his word in the presence of the Guru, that if he was blessed with a son, he would make me a Sikh and call me Bachan. [6:42]

One can observe the importance of religion in Indians' lives. Religion determines their identities as individuals. This man's last name, "Singh", which is a Sikh name strengthens the fact, indicating that their religious belief identifies and determines their personal-social-cultural identities. The next quotation reveals Bachan Singh's orders directed to all the people living in his house to practice Sikhism:

"No more Hindu superstitions and ceremonies—you study Guru Granth Sahib's^c words [...], no Hindu ceremonies, no Aarti, no Sandhya, no offerings to that tulsi^d tree on the

^b "Sikh" is another Hindi word. It refers to "a follower of the Sikh religion. Sikhism is a strict monotheism, opposed to the worship of icons and rejecting the caste system. Its main temple is the Gold Temple in Amritsar. It was founded in Punjab in the 16th century by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), who had nine successors, the last one, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), founded a military fraternity, the Khalsa, to resist Mughal persecutions" [4:72].

^c "Guru Granth Sahib" is a Hindi word. It refers to a "holy book of the Sikh religion, also called Adi Granth. Written in Punjabi and *Gurmukhi* script, it is a collection of hymns in praise of God" [4:61].

^d "Tulsi" is a Hindi term. It refers to a "holy basil of Hinduism, *Ocimum sanctus*, worshipped as a symbol of Goddess *Tulsi Mata*. As sacred as Ganges water, it sanctifies food and is used in medicine" [4:74].

terrace. I don't want to hear a single bell—understand? Gujri, no more Muslim meat is to enter this house, not even if Abu Ibrahim sends goat meat he slaughters for our labourers at Sadqa, the Guru forbids killing animals slowly and painfully. [...] Three days of reading the Guru's words should purify this house and bring us back to mindfulness.” [6:42-43]

Bachan Singh imposes Sikhism on his family members and even on their female servant, called Gujri. In an extremist manner, he forbids the practice of other religions. Through the exiled vision of the female characters, one can observe a dramatic alteration from the discrimination between genders to religious segregation between Indians.

Indian identity could be identified through the religious belief of every individual. It seems that what unites the Indian people might be the feature of extremism in their religious practices. This religious extremism causes the violent partition of India as a country and the partition of many female bodies at the time. Roop takes the reader through her exiled vision to an incident that happened in the past to give an example of such religious extremism. The protagonist of this episode is a young Muslim girl called Huma:

When Huma asked for water once before, Roop remembers, Gujri placed it before Huma on the ground [...] Huma picked it up, but Gujri's hand and Huma's never touched. [...]

“Don't you tell Nani,” Madani orders Roop. “She'll say it's my fault because I didn't keep Huma outside”. [...]

“Bring cow's urine,” suggests Revati Bhua [...] “It has great power. Just one drop can purify the whole rasoi.” So sacred is a cow. [6:60]

Huma, who is a Muslim girl, came to play with the Sikh, Madani, who is Roop's sister. When Huma asked for water, the female servant Gujri and Madani were reluctant to allow her to enter the house. Gujri placed the water before Huma on the ground to avoid touching her hand, while Madani was ordering Roop to keep this secret untold. The critic, Susan Friedman explains this “untouchability” as follows:

Touch, physical contact of body to body, is central to this migration narrative. For example, Baldwin highlights the complex play of touch with caste, religion, and migration in foregrounding the story of Roop's friendship with Huma in the village before the girls leave their families, where they are considered mere “guests”, to migrate into their “real homes” of their future husbands. Roop is a Sikh, and her best friend Huma is a Muslim. The girls are inseparable until one day, in the heat of their game, Huma unthinkingly follows Roop into her house, only to be met by shrieks from Roop's aunt: “You shameless girl Chi! Dirty girl. Don't you let your shadow come near!” (59). As a combination of Islam and Hinduism, Sikhism does not officially recognize caste, but in reality, the narrator informs us, Sikhs shared with Hindus the belief that the ancestors of Muslims in India were Untouchable converts who opted for Islam with the invasion of the Moguls in the sixteenth century as a way of escaping their outcast status. After Huma's expulsion from the house

of her friend, the house must be purified from the results of her touch. Never again do the girls play together. Their migration from their childhood homes into the faraway families of their husbands reinforces a separation that began in the village with the laws of pollution and touch. Their fleeting reunion just before and during the bloody events of Partition emphasizes the borders that sever connections between individuals and communities. [2:14]

According to Friedman's reading of the female characters in *What the Body Remembers*, Indian women are considered as diasporic migrants who migrate from the father's home to the husband's. The religious segregation exercised against Huma, manifested through the expulsion of this girl from her friend's house, reveals an intra-national Indian racism and separatism based on "untouchability". After having expelled Huma, the cousin of Roop's father, Revati Bhua, found "an effective" solution to clean up and purify their house from this Muslim girl's traces with the sacred "cow's urine". This attitude and such agitation signal an uncanny extremism. How could it be possible to believe that an animal's urine is sacred and is suitable to clean up a house. How could people having the same identity disdain one another just because of their religious belonging. Baldwin's exiled vision shows, thus, that racism and segregation can exist within the same nation between people sharing the same national identity. The religious division of these people leads them to practice an intra-national racism and discrimination. The reaction of Roop's father concerning what his family members did with the girl, Huma, appears to be surprising. He blames Gujri for her gesture against Huma when she avoided touching her hand. He reminds her of the Indian activist and leader of the Indian independence movement against British rule, Mahatma Gandhi's^e speech:

Papaji says there is "no need" for the cow's urine or Ganga water or any purification ceremony [...]. Sikhs must not practice untouchability [...]. Gandhiji says people of no caste are just as clean as higher-ups. [...] Even Roop knows Papaji is stretching the truth, for Jeevan said once that Mahatma Gandhi only began preaching against untouchability once he found out how it felt to be treated like an untouchable [6:61] .

The extremist practices of this ethno-religious group have a name, which is "purification ceremony". Even their religious segregation is called the practice of "untouchability". Roop is an attentive girl, who listens very well to her family tales, and repeats them in her exiled vision/memory and this is exactly "what the body remembers". The father's telling of historical facts from his point of view about Gandhi and untouchability proves that their history is told by men.

3. Identification of an Erased Self

Satya's exiled vision and memories have been awakened during her attempt to study her husband's second wife, Roop, just after her first arrival at their shared house. She asks herself about the reason behind this young girl's

^e Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (1869-1948), "known as Mahatma Gandhi, leader of India's struggle for independence. A lawyer, he developed the theory of ahimsa, non-violence, and preached for secularism. Although he pleaded for the harmonious coexistence of different castes, classes and religious communities, he was unable to prevent the Partition of British India and the founding of a separate Muslim state wanted by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League." [4:59]

marriage to “a man so much her senior? Twenty-five years. There must be something wrong with her—or wrong with her family [...] Roop has no mother—that must be why she is so trusting. A mother would have taught her to beware of other women, especially of first wives” [6:13-14]. Satya’s exiled vision supposes that there is something missing in this girl’s education to be unafraid of her as an antagonist. Then, she learns that Roop is a mother-less girl, in other words, she is without protection. One can suppose that the image of the mother is a metaphorical reference to the sense of belonging and homeland, Roop’s case makes her appear as a stateless orphan without protection and this is exactly the situation of the Indian-female body because of Indian patriarchy.

Roop’s mother was totally silenced by the Indian patriarchal system. This character had been raised to be a voiceless woman allowing the Indian rituals to speak instead of her. This poor woman was very sick before her childbirth and as it was argued previously, the setting of a “good example” by not taking her to an English doctor, is more important than the health and life of this woman as well as thousands like her. The following paragraph describes the treatment given to this woman at home by sponging her down:

With cloths dipped in cold water from the Hindu well, trying to reduce her fever. By noon, she calls Papaji, who sends a field labourer running to nearby Sohawa, for that village’s best hakim. He comes, a gnarled bandy-legged man armed with the heirloom herbs his family has grafted and watered over centuries, spells against djinns, and juniper branches he places carefully in the centre of the courtyard and lights so Mama can inhale their healing smoke. He dances round the smouldering fire calling all the fairies around Pari Darvaza to take pity and make her well. But Mama grows hotter than the relentless afternoon. [6:34]

They brought to this woman a “hakim” who acts like a witch doctor more than a person able to save the life of a mother and her baby. Indian “doctors” inherit “herbs” over centuries. The fiery juniper branches and the dancing of this “hakim” with his uncanny manner of healing worsens the health of Roop’s mother. Also, he is a figure of patriarchy. This female victim of such rituals dies just a few days after giving birth to her new-born baby. The baby dies like his mother because he has been tortured enough in his mother’s womb, before coming to a community which exercises over its women such exotic practices. The death of Roop’s mother signifies the ending of her role in the plot development before it ever begins. The voiceless nature of this woman during her life will certainly influence the character of her daughter, Roop, who could become a silent and obedient wife in the future like her mother. This girl has lost her mother at an early age which means she has lost the opportunity to be educated by her first teacher. The motherhood of Roop’s mother is ended by patriarchy which deprives Roop, as well, of her feelings of motherhood.

Roop’s loss of her mother’s presence affects her greatly. From time to time she retreats into a circle of internal exile marked by her “thoughts that fill with other places today?” [6:54]. In spite of the internalized sorrowful memories and the endless questions, she wants to dream about a better future by marrying a good man. Poor Roop has experienced a childhood marked by the absence of her mother’s affection and during her adolescence she is married as a second wife. Once she becomes a mother, she is dispossessed of her motherhood because her

husband orders her to give her first baby to the childless Satya. Consequently, Roop “came to mean mother-ness without child-ness and yes-ness without no-ness, like a word reversing meaning as it passes from mouth to mouth” [6:190]. This patriarchal injustice does not only absorb her transgression but puts her in a pitiful situation.

Roop is no immigrant, yet she is invisible and her motherhood is raped by patriarchy in her homeland. In the following quotation Roop tries to make her daughter Pavan look at her:

Pavan looks away. “Please, baby, aa ja, ni, take a step in my direction. I am your mother, know me, love me.” [...]

Pavan must be taught a lesson only a blood mother can teach. She must be taught to lower her eyes and hide this weakness, this defect. Or all of them—Roop, Pavan and Timcu—all of them can be sent home to Papaji. [...] A lake of fear that will stretch and lengthen between Roop and little Pavan, the way it does with any woman who enlightens her daughter early, for-her-own-good. [6:228-32]

There is a lack of communication and distance between Roop and her daughter, who was given to Satya. It seems that Roop’s daughter, Pavan has a problem or defect in her eyes, so her mother Roop thinks that she will be sent away with her children. There is usually this fear of being sent back to her father’s home. Indian women are like some exiled immigrants, they live with a fear of being expelled from the house of the husband. They choose invisibility and silence by submitting to their husbands; so, they are doubly exiled. Later on, Roop goes to her cousin’s wedding and stays in her father’s home because of Sardarji’s decision to give her two children to his first wife. The following quotation shows the stance of Roop’s father regarding his daughter’s decision:

“Beti.” He assumes an explaining tone, calling her daughter. “You should go back to him [...], but you are staying too long; we will all be disgraced. Go back, before the eyes of the world are turned upon us, before men in the village council begin raising questions about you. No one in Pari Darvaza saw you married; if you return, they will say it was a lie, that you were some man’s concubine. People remember only what their eyes have seen [...], and everyone in Pari Darvaza will say you are here without Sardarji’s permission”. [6:260]

Roop’s father does not worry about his daughter’s health, happiness and what her body remembers/suffers. He rather worries about what people can see, say and remember. Roop is a victim of her husband, father and the dominant patriarchal system. Even when Indian women dare to go beyond the barriers of invisibility within the institution of marriage, they find themselves, like Roop, displaced at the borderlines of an internal exile imposed by patriarchy. Roop’s following monologue is one of the proofs of her exiled vision:

“No, no! Papaji loves me, he cares only for my reputation.” [...] “How can my own Papaji have any doubt that I have been wronged? Any question that I was in danger? [...] Can Papaji not see, see even from the corner of his eye, that I was pressed beyond endurance?”

[...] And Roop understands now, [...] Papaji will not protect her. His duty to Roop ended the day of her marriage, but his duty to Jeevan lasts [...]. Jeevan's inheritance is far, far more important to Papaji than Roop's life or children. And for that he stands within a circle inscribed by Sardarji. [6:260-262]

Being silenced by Indian patriarchal hegemony, Roop can neither convey her voice nor find someone able to listen to her inner suffering. This is why her words turn inward and appear in the shape of an inner, voiceless monologue within which she tries to convince herself of her father's love. Jeevan, who is Roop's brother, is under his father's endless protection, while Roop's rights as a daughter ended the day of her marriage. This marriage, which was her ultimate goal, deprives her of her woman-ness and mother-ness as well. Roop's case represents the situation of Indian women at the time.

4. Conclusion

It is not an easy task to read a historical, feminist, postcolonial and multilingual bildungsroman like *What the Body Remembers* due to the scarcity of critical sources dealing with it. What inspires this paper is the theme of exile that one cannot ignore. Through the exiled vision of some female characters, like Satya and Roop, *What the Body Remembers* depicts the image of the marginalized and silenced Indian woman. It is a narrative which sheds light on the issue of erasing the female identity or even objectifying woman as if she were a useless object. Since the female voice is silenced, the rebellious women find in their monologues the best shelter that can allow them to understand the amount of pressure put upon them. The Indo-Canadian novelist, Baldwin shows that the Indian woman is invisible because of the dominant patriarchy as if she were an alien immigrant within her homeland. This is what urges the Indian woman to retreat into an internal exile allowing her to see her third-space and to question her diasporic identity. This vision reveals that exile does not mean necessarily that the person is elsewhere outside her homeland. The sense of elsewhere and exile can happen to a person or a group of persons even at their homeland.

References

- [1]. P. Sobti. (2013). "[Re]-Remembering the Female Self in Shauna Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*." *Labyrinth*. [On-line]. 4 (3), pp. 133-38.
- [2]. S. Friedman. (2009). "The 'New Migration': Clashes, Connections, and Diasporic Women's Writing." *Contemporary Women's Writing*. [On-line]. 3 (1), pp. 06-27. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpp013>.
- [3]. S. Singh. (2019). "Feminine search for identity in Shauna Singh Baldwin's Novel *What the Body Remembers*." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*. [On-line]. 4 (2), pp. 287-290. Available: <https://ijels.com/detail/feminine-search-for-identity-in-shauna-singh-baldwin-s-novel-what-the-body-remembers/>.

- [4]. A. Girard. Where am I? Who am I? Displacement and Dislocation in What the Body Remembers. India: Tara Press, 2007.
- [5]. H. Bhabha. The Location of Culture. London. NY: Routledge, 1997.
- [6]. S. Baldwin. What The Body Remembers. NY: N. A. Talese, 1999.
- [7]. P. Cuder-Domínguez, L. Belén Martín and S. Villegas-López. Transnational Poetics: Asian Canadian Women's Fiction of the 1990s. Toronto, Ont: Coach House Printing, 2011.