



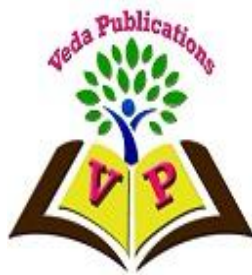
SOCIAL CHAOS ON WOMEN BY SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN *WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS*

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ABSTRACT



One of the most compelling modus operandi used to represent the extreme violent behavior meted out to women in the dividing wall narratives is the use of symbols and metaphors. Body represents the documentation of torment which tells the depressed stories of how female bodies become territories bearing the signs of triumph and the marks of surmount as well. This paper will make a study of Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers* (2000) and show how contravention of female bodies may generate multiple metaphorical interpretations.

Keywords: Shauna Singh Baldwin, Detachment, Female Body, Allegory.

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The cultures of all times and places have always been fundamentally thoughtful with the body. From the time of ancient mythology like Ramayana and Metaphorising the Body in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* conflict the usual patterns of brutality and retaliation are abduction, rape, sexual abuse, murder, and mutilation. Jill Didur theorises that the silence about the experience of sectarian violence found in the writings of women writers materialize from their

inability to find a language to commune their experiences. She further states that the fictional illustration of partition where women tell their stories, it almost becomes a ritual to coherent the extreme violence meted out to them by invoking the metaphors of 'purity' and 'pollution'. The reference to the ideas of dishonor and shame as put forward by Didur "critique the patriarchal logic of a "cultural system that dictates that rape signifies a woman's shame and the dishonor of her male protectors".



This practice of veneration of women besought early practices like 'Sati' (women burnt alive on the pyres of their husbands) and 'Jauhar' (self-immolation practiced by Rajput women to save their honour against their captors) as means to purge the defiled female bodies. Paradoxically violent behavior performed on female bodies began to be deemed as a means to retain the chastity of the body.

Susan Bordo in her significant essay "From upsetting burden: Feminism, Western ethnicity and the cadaver" states that "body is the symbol of civilization" that is, body becomes a concrete medium through which culture inscribe and reinforce its norms. Bordo says that the rules of womanliness have come to be transmitted through the visual images and behavioural presentations which she calls "bodily communiqué" (Bordo 1): how women should costume, budge, express, talk, and behave. Bordo also uses the term Agoraphobic (extreme enlightening sex-role stereotype of women) to symbolize the minutiae and inhibition of behaviour female organization are subjected to.

A momentous observation is made by Butalia in regard to female body representing the national honors. The suffering of women is rooted in national culture and gendered nationalism. There are ancient myths where motherhood is best realized when enthusiastic to the cause of the nation as begetters of heroes; wifhood is acknowledged when used as the strength of the heroic husband or sacrificed for the dead husband as Sati; womanhood is marked in the idolization of Shakti. These myths have congealed into the Indian cultural imagination the icon of nation as mother..The story of Roop's sister-inlaw Kusum in Baldwin's novel becomes imperative for understanding the dividing wall hostility. Kusum, who is connubial to Roop's brother Jeevan, an officer in the Indian Army is a just the thing "Sita" . She does the whole thing that she is told to do. When their Muslim neighbors begin riot; Papaji, Kusum's father-in-law tells her to be ready for his knife. He decides to kill her and she too readies herself to be sacrifice for the honour of her neighborhood. Kusum's assassination by Papaji becomes an honour-killing. She prefers death to the disgrace of rape and conversion. She becomes a martyr, who sacrifices herself for the greater cause of

protecting Metaphorising the Body in What the Body Remembers her community's honour. This concedes the fact that most Hindu and Sikh women became intent of the men of their own community. Butalia's oral testimony show how the Sikh survivors of the separation took pride in the mass-killing and mass-suicide of their womenfolk. One of the interviewees in Butalia's authentication retorts the idea of fear as a persuade against factor in the forfeit made by the seventeen women and children of his family. In his words, "The real revulsion was one of humiliate. If they had been caught by the Muslims, our honour, their honour would have been sacrificed, lost. It's a question of one's honour...if you have self-importance you do not trepidation."

Thus the detachment of the nation was a metaphorical contravention of the body of the mother Earth implemented through the actual violation of the female bodies. In *What the Body Remembers* the description of Kusum's dismembered body "segment into six parts, then prearranged to look as if she were whole again" metaphorises the territory's panel on the one hand and the community's self legitimization on the other. Papaji thinks that for good-good women death should be preferable to dishonor. He kills Kusum so that her body does not get despoiled by the men of the other population. Unaware of his father's actions, Jeevan proceeds to his father's home and discovers the body of his wife Kusum that has been dismembered, rearranged and placed beneath a white sheet. He thinks... "Why were her legs not bloody? To cut a woman apart without first raping—a dissipate, without doubt. Jeevan understands the anthology of the limbs after scratch out the womb from her body. Kusum's severed body bears the message that, "Independence and its dark 'other', Partition, provided the rationale for making women into symbols of the nation's honour"

Thus body becomes the metaphor for the nation's dividing wall. Baldwin herself claims that "the metaphor of the 30s and 40s in undivided India was the body - the country as body, woman as womb for the tribe. And the story (of Partition and loss of the country's "children") is what the whole country remembers as part of its creation story, its birth pangs." Body also acts as the archive of memory in



Baldwin's novel. Body re-members the communal violence acted upon them. Women have a unique way of re-remembering violence through images of imitation. Their bodies become sources of imagery through which they internalize what their bodies are meant for. Szymanski, Moffit and Erika Carr in their understanding article "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research" write that "women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others. Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire."

At various points in the novel, women are reminded that having babies [apparently sons] is "what women are for"). Woman is seen as the metaphor of earth in the words of Bebeji, "A female is simply cracked open for seed like the earth before the force of the plough. If she is abundant, good for the farmer, if not, bad for her" This rigorous patriarchal philosophy brings death to Roop's mother at child-birth as she tries to deliver yet another child. This also results in the fertile Roop's entry into Sardarji's household as his first wife Satya's archenemy and ultimately leads to Satya's denunciation for her barrenness as an supplementary offence to her already disapproved Metaphorising the Body in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers Pinky jealousy, quarrelsomeness and obstinacy. Thus it remains a fact that if this ideology of identification women's bodies in terms of reproductive capacity restrains them in their everyday life; it also renders them unprotected in times of collective violence. Towards the end of Baldwin's novel, the women of Pari Darwaza meet their most tragic fate. They are sort out for various kinds of violent behavior according to their reproductive probable. Kusum's violated body stands not as an quintessence of anguish she must have gone through but rather it is the insult of the Sikh community that her despoiled body represents. When Jeevan discovers her dismember body; her limbs cut and estranged and her womb removed, he interpret the ripping out of kusum's womb and leaving of the empty shell as a sign of emasculation of the valiance of the Sikh community. The feminist

intervention of the metaphorical interpretations of violence of the 'female body' lays bare the complexities of male ideology. Such metaphorical implication in Baldwin's novel sometimes serve to foreground the qualms with which Roop endorses the stories of forfeit made by Kusum and the other women of Papaji's household. Kusum's laying bare her neck to Bachan Singh's knife, metaphorical of her 'sacrifice' may not be interpreted as her consent to death.

This is however, manifest from Bachan Singh's recitation of Kusum's enthusiastic acceptance of death. As Kusum prepared herself for the beheading, he says, "she turned her back, so I should not see her face, took off her chunni to bare her neck before me. And then . . ." Here Bachan Singh's grief is intensified as a souvenir of the affective complexities underlying male self-constructions of victimhood. Roop's aunt Revati Bhua, unmarried and past beyond her reproductive years could be tolerable to be handed over to the rioting mob and Gujri, a working-class poor woman could be forsaken amidst the turmoil for the expediency of the male members of Bachan Singh's family. Nonetheless among all these sacrifices only Kusum's sacrifice is elevated to an act of heroism. She becomes the allegorical Sita, who is first disgraced, then defiled and then deified to be martyred.

CONCLUSION

Baldwin's novel portrays a complex array of violations that a female body undergoes in the context of the dividing barricade. Each kind of infringement enacted upon the female body becomes the source of metaphors for her to understand her predicament in the society. The violated body is either an embodiment of put on a pedestal woman (wife/daughter/mother) and/or the upholders of male honour. This paper explores how female bodies become figurative in conveying multiple social meanings and how these meanings shape gendered familiarity.

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