

its relative powers. I merely want to remain in this middle path where the intelligence can remain clear. If this is its pride, I see no sufficient reason for giving it up. (*The Myth* 42)

Showing his impeccable faith in his limited reason and in the unresponsive world as well, Camus further strengthens his stand against the existentialists and saves himself from the intellectual suicide which is so easy to commit. He explains very clearly:

My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. The evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together. Kierkegaard suppresses my nostalgia and Husserl gathers together that universe. That is not what I was expecting. It was a matter of living and thinking with those dislocations. (*The Myth* 50)

Therefore, Camus doesn't want to mask or suppress the absurd by denying one of the terms of its equation. He simply desires to enquire whether "one can live the [absurd] or whether . . . logic commands one to die of it" (*The Myth* 50)). And he makes his choice, a choice totally contradictory to the theist existentialists, and writes in the same essay, "I am not interested in philosophical suicide but rather in plain suicide" (50). Hence, what Camus wants is to be faithful and authentic to oneself. In this way, the absurd man lives in certainty of the absurd, without an appeal either to this life or to another life. In other word, he is somehow like a Buddhist monk who lives in the state of Nibbana, without any attachment, however realizing the best what life provides. Camus is often criticized as the defender of nihilism. However, Camus's absurd is not a prelude to nihilism, but a method which allows the reconstruction of positive ethics. He is ready to face the absurd and responds it with a positive attitude. But this acceptance is not a meek submission. On the contrary, it is a scornful revolt against the absurd and a deified faith in the dignity and capability of man to struggle with the absurd. His absurd man is that who doesn't flee from the absurd, but respects the tension of the absurd. Camus explains:

What, in fact, is the absurd man? He, who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is forging to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live without appeal and the get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom, consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime. (*The Myth* 64)

But in spite of his repeated clarifications, he has been termed as a pessimist by the Christians as well as the Marxists. Responding to their charges, Camus comments in his lecture "The Unbeliever and Christians":

By what right, moreover, could a Christian or a Marxist accuse me, for example, of pessimism? I was not the one to invent the misery of the human being or the terrifying formulas of divine malediction. . . . I was not the one who said that man was incapable of saving himself by his own means and that in the depths of his degradation his only

hope was in the grace of God. . . . If Christianity is pessimistic as to man, it is optimistic as to human destiny. Well, I can say that, pessimistic as to human destiny, I am optimistic as to man.
(*Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 72-73)

Therefore, revolt is the only logical consequence of the absurd acceptable to Camus. Hence, Camus's absurd man is ready to be condemned to death than to commit physical or philosophical suicide. He affirms the value of life through revolt, devoid of all confusions and unapproachable hope. Thus, revolt "restores its majesty to life" (Camus, *The Myth* 54). To him, "revolt", therefore, becomes "the first consequence of the Absurd" (Hanna 24). He talks much like Sartre and explains that the absurd liberates man and enables him to acquire the freedom of action and thought. It seems that Camus is not against atheistic existential philosophy of Sartre, because both of them seem to talk about the same kind of freedom. This returning to consciousness by rejecting all outer rules represents the first steps of absurd freedom. What is objectionable to Camus is "the existential preaching that is alluded to and with it that spiritual leap which basically escapes consciousness" (*The Myth* 58). The second consequence of the absurd, therefore, is freedom. Talking about the third consequence of the absurd i.e. passion, Camus opines that in an absurd universe without values to guide and choices to make, "what counts is not the best living but the most living" (*The Myth* 59). Hence, there is no need to commit suicide or to flee away from the absurd. It should be faced with courage, with full consciousness of one's revolt, freedom, and passion. Camus finds the incarnation of these responses to the absurd in the mythical character Sisyphus. He is "the absurd hero . . . as much through his passions as through his torture. . ." (Camus, *The Myth* 108). It is his "scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life" which won him "that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing" (Camus, *The Myth* 108). Camus observes that Sisyphus is condemned to "ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. . ." (*The Myth* 107). Camus compares the fate of a workman with that of Sisyphus and says, "The workman of today works everyday in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd" (*The Myth* 109). However, there is no fate that can't be surmounted by scorn and this is what Sisyphus does. He accepts his fate as a choice and not as a punishment enthroned by some higher authority. He realizes its futility but doesn't aspire for its fertility. This acknowledgement of his absurd struggle is Sisyphus's victory over his fate, over the gods, and, of course, over the rock. He is superior to his fate and stronger than his rock. And therefore, Camus argues that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (*The Myth* 111). Apart from Sisyphus, Camus further suggests Don Juan, the Actor, and the Conqueror as the illustrations of the absurd life. However, Camus makes it clear that these shouldn't be taken as the model of an absurd behaviour but only as illustrations of an absurd idea. P. McCarthy explains Camus's point regarding these archetypes of the absurd and writes that Don Juan is not a passionate lover, the actor juxtaposes his energy with the awareness

that he is playing a part, while the conqueror knows that he can win no political victories. Hence, "all three are conscious of limits" which enables them to live the absurd (McCarthy, *Camus* 151). After going through Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it can be argued that Camus's philosophy of absurd is that of limitations, one, which respects the tension of the absurd. Carroll puts the gist of Camus's concept of the absurd in the following words:

The Absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to. Affirmed but not agreed to, resisted but not denied, engaged in the hopeless but at the same time not desperate tasks of living, thinking and acting, meaning and value emerge precisely out of their absence and in the very nihilistic desert that both negates them and makes them possible. (59)

To conclude, it can be said that *The Myth of Sisyphus* ends up, not in pessimism, but in optimism, without hope for the eternal and full belief in the absurd itself. One is not demanded to commit suicide, either physical or philosophical, but simply to live and revolt the absurd.

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[Re]-Remembering the Female Self in Shauna Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*

- Pragti Sobti

Abstract: Shauna Singh Baldwin first novel *What the Body Remembers* examines the resistant ways in women respond to racialized and sexualized violence at the backdrop of awful historical incident of partition between India and Pakistan. The paper focuses on the detailed depiction of prominent female characters through a gendered lens during times of partition, as well as it also tries to highlight the violence suppressed in the text of patriarchal memories.

Keywords: Racialized, Sexualized, Re-membling, Female self.

Women were the worst victims of the political upheaval during 1947 in India. They were maimed, raped, abducted; endured, displacement, violence and prostitution. Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers* deals with the grueling issues concerning women's bodies and spirits, their abuses at the hands of men - in background of the pre-partition Indian scenario. *Publisher's Weekly* describes it as:

Few novels deal with the wrenching period in Pakistan's history known as partition; fewer still filter these events through a woman's eyes. Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* does both, placing a heart breaking family saga against a turbulent period in world history to explore how the personal became political. More than just a story about a polygamous marriage the novel is an allegory for the partition period.

Femininity is the term defined as the marginalization of women from social and cultural discourses. However, the question of being a woman is more difficult than it perhaps originally appeared, for we refer to women not only as a social category, but also a 'felt' sense of self, culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity. (Barthes, 1968:21). Women are not treated at par with men in the multiple spheres of fire, though paradoxically they constitute half of the world's population. Third world feminist theorists meticulously favor the need of making a room for multiplicity of voices and perspectives to go beyond a literature of opposition, and to work across the debilitating differentials of home / abroad, nation / gender. By delving deep into the site of these discursal intersections and by trying to 'deconstruct' the connotative meaning of 'female', they try to open up a 'third space' in R. Radhakrishnan's terms (1993:755) - where these maimed indigenous minorities get the right to 'speak' as well as to be 'heard'; that is , by locating the stereotype as an "ambivalent mode of power and knowledge, a paradoxical mode of representation" (Bhabha, 1994:18) , it is possible to break racial and patriarchal coding of the 'other' sex. Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* is an aphonic revolt against the muffled silences of women at the triple level of dream, body and soul. Set in the undivided Punjab between 1928

and 1947 the novel memorizes the global silencing of sub-continental partition and the patriarchies of society. Woman is the essence of the book from beginning to the end. At thematic level it is the saga of womanhood. It deals with loved ladies, not-so-loved ones, with spinsters and co-wives, with mothers dying in childbirth, with women with and without children and also with defiant and obedient ones. It explicitly foregrounds the role of gendered bodies in and as the archive of communal memories of violence. In her novel, Baldwin suggests the ways in which the human body can retain and reveal individual and collective memory. Baldwin offers scars, tattoos, blood, and reincarnation as potential paths to testimony and healing; her work considers topics such as gendered memory, post memory and the relationship between individual and collective pasts. Even the name of the novel, proves it to be a collection of female memories, in one of her interviews Baldwin herself says:

The title has a multilayered meaning. A surface meaning rises from the facts that Roop means body, form/shape. So in a sense, the story of *What the Body Remembers* is what Roop remembers, is meant to remember, is expected to remember, and in some ways what she "re-members" at the end of novel by remembering Kusum. In addition, the title refers to ancestral memory, collective memory at the level of subconscious. (Babe, 2007: 40.3).

Baldwin's focus is on delineating the life journey of Roop, a young sikh girl from *Pari Darvaza*, (in Pre-partition Punjab). She is married to Sardarji, a middle-aged Oxford trained engineer and a rich Zamindar in Rawalpindi, who takes Roop as a second wife, when his first wife Satya, fails to bear him a child. Roop is surrounded by a number of female characters before and after her marriage (her mother, Revathi Bua, Kusum, Gujri, Satya, her grandmother). The lives of all these women reveal the ways in which they being trapped in a biologically defined existence and became victims of female body politics. The narrative revolves around Roop's account of her childhood and life after marriage which is alternatively described from Roop's as well as Satya's perspectives. The novel introduces Roop as a seven year old girl, who is taught the do's and don'ts of being a girl with a confidence fuelled by knowledge that ultimate aim of her life (like other women relatives around) is to marry and bear children. Roop's father loses his inheritance and in crises, Roop starts harboring the fear of spinsterhood. The partial loss of her hearing ability compels Roop to diligently follow the rules laid out for girls of marriageable age. She is not allowed to study as men shun those girls who are highly qualified, neither is she permitted to indulge in laborious outdoor works as it might harm her chastity. Finally sixteen-year-old Roop is made to accept a proposal from the middle-aged landowner Sardarji, whose first wife Satya had borne no children. After marriage Sardarji leaves her under care of Satya whom Roop accepts as a benevolent sister. Satya is portrayed as "a strong-willed woman". Despite being illiterate Satya holds an equal position to her husband. She helps her husband in business and financial matters. Her strong hegemonic emotion control over her husband results in promise by Sardarji to let her

rear the child borne by Roop, and Roop being taught to repress her anger-silently accepts Sardarji pronouncement. But, Sardarji, the typical representative of patriarchy, controls and manipulates both his wives. He transforms Satya and Roop into "instrument (s) of torture" and pits them against each other, for the fulfillment of his selfish needs. Satya unable to bear the banishment given by her husband commits suicide by torturing her body from tuberculosis. Baldwin deftly reveals Satya's thoughts, "I am not wife, for my husband has abandon me. I am not widow, for he still lives. I am not mother, for the son (Roop's) he gave me is taken away. I am no sister, for I have no brother. With no father, I am but daughter of my Bibi ji. And so I am no one" (308). Shauna Singh thus composes a feminist script centered on Roop and Satya while depicting the times and social structures when men "only saw women from the corners of their eyes" (47). Ardent, capable, heroic and brawly Satya is "a woman born before her time into a feudal practical world, unable to lower her resolute grey eyes in front of a man" (Choudhary, 2010:114) And "good-good perfect wife" Roop grows to be a resolute woman as she face the horror of partition. Baldwin's female characters like Roop and Satya are models of typical Indian women who face the dilemma of standing at cross-roads of freedom and culture symbolized by 'world' and 'home'. They are unable to sever the ties with culture and home (no matter they are denied freedom) because this process creates in them the fear of isolation as they feel they are deviating, from the role models set for them by the patriarchal society. It is not easy for them to shrug-off their emotional and psychological dependence on men, family, and community. *What the Body Remembers* depicts the mental helplessness and confusion in women that arise due to discriminatory patriarchal attitudes towards them despite their high levels of education and economic independence. Roop's mother, who is not assigned any name in the novel though, is flat character but the treatment given to her under the domain of Bachan Singh (Roop's father) metes her character in the patriarchal boundaries. Roop's mother is a typical example of an individual living her life in what Sartre terms as "bad faith". She lives by the belief that her existence revolves round playing the roles of as obedient wife and devoted mother. She and her new born son die because of improper medical care. But ironically, at funeral the relatives mourn the death of newborn son. Her fate represents the patriarchal image of "selfless mother". Patriarchy glorifies, represents, and reiterates the notion of motherhood though cultural myths, religious scriptures and even the educational system. Deepti Misri opines:

If, in the novel, men remember though a regulated set of narratives, women literally re-member community through reproduction. At various points in *What the Body Remembers*, women are reminded that having babies "is what women are for": this ideology is responsible for death of Roop's mother in childbirth. (2011:1-25)

Minute analysis of the novel scum up the violence which arises due to fixed female identities established in the patriarchal societies of pre-partition India. Baldwin meticulously captures and brings up the women's acceptance of this violence in order to conform themselves to these patriarchal definitions of femininity. Spinsters, barren wives and