

Shirley Admas, as they shift role and she acts as a Goddesses bestowing him with the current knowledge and reality, which he so far has tried to suppress by drinking too much of alcohol. As long as he continues to drink, which acts as a talisman in his journey, he is able to sustain his heroic illusion. As earlier in the story, we see Neddy having "a vague and modest idea of himself as a legendary figure" (603-604). Shirley Adams not only humiliates him by asking when he is growing to act as a grown up but also rejects any further assistance either with money or a drink. After her refusal, he states that he is on his way and takes the plunge in her pool, wondering if she was still wounded. But, as he leaves her place, he notices that he has been replaced by another young man, suggestive of the fact that Love too has left him alone, as the cycle of life continues without him. As the season undergoes a change during his quest, we see Neddy in an abyss of puzzlement and agony, when Neddy finds his house deserted at the end of the story. He even begins to cry after all the rebuffs he has withstood. He is so much severely weakened and terrified of confronting the reality after the alcoholic withdrawal, that instead of diving into the pool of Gilmartin's and Clyde he slopes into the pool by the help of a ladder or steps. His own dark locked empty house signified not grace and comfort, but loss and desolation. The brilliance and natural beauty of suburbia can only be viewed as the exasperating reminder of some lost paradise. His "Return" back home deals with knowledge and powers he has acquired on the journey, as a modern failed quester who though has completed his race, but has lost his spiritual bearings as the lifesaving waters can only be viewed for pleasurable swims rather than cleansing of his deep stained soul. As the story moves from pool to pool, we realize that all is not what it seems with Neddy Merrill and his quest. The casual, calm prose, reflecting Neddy's mind, gradually darkens as Neddy's memory becomes suspect. Beneath that lucid, almost lyric prose style darker moments intrude- Neddy's loss of memory, Mrs. Halloran's warnings, the gathering thunder, the autumnal chill in the air. The story begins on a dreamlike effect, as Neddy gets trapped in the ongoing quest which leads us to dark and terrible revelation of the reality which Neddy Merrill has tried to suppress by drinking too much. Cheever carefully laid the trail toward the deserted house, so that when the reader arrives there, he is stunned at the transformation that takes place between his first impressions of Neddy Merrill and his final understanding.

In *The Swimmer*, Neddy Merrill has fallen from grace, but there is no restoration here. He represents the suburbia, as a hero in monomyth, is often a person who displays personae necessary for a culture to thrive on. His success lies in his ability to capture the crucial elements in his characters' lives and present the extreme human vulnerability that lies in those aspects. Cheever's characters are primarily either indulged in unrealistic visions or, conversely, worn out by the heavy demands of reality. Being engrained in the suburban life that contains nothing but commuting, partying, and socializing, they are protected—sometimes even secluded—from the ups and downs of the outside world. Therefore, the slightest intrusion of reality for the unrealistic and the least hint of vision for the conventional would prove extremely fatal. It is worth

noting here, what Cheever reveals about his storylines: "I don't work with plots. I work with intuition, apprehension, dreams, and concepts. Characters and events come simultaneously to me. Plot implies narrative and a lot of crap. It is a calculated attempt to hold the reader's interest at the sacrifice of moral conviction." (Donaldson, 102-103) Since, he never bothered about plot, the words flowed of their own accord as characters and events took shape of their own, giving Cheever's each story and characters a uniqueness that cannot be undermined. Cheever suggests that it is necessary for one to retain individuality within a community, which not only help us in sustaining our personal vision, but also aware us of the balance that we are to maintain between vision and reality.

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What The Body Remembers: A Tale of Trial and Turbulence of Sikh Women

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Abstract: The story of *What the Body Remembers* is set in the Sikh community and is told from the point of view of two women Roop and Satya. The book illustrates woman to woman power relations and surrogate motherhood. Roop, a young girl of sixteen, is married to a man twenty five years her senior already married to Satya in the year 1937. This time period is pre-partition period and the location of the story is in West Punjab which is now in Pakistan. Therefore the pre-partition turbulence, its fears and anxieties get naturally interwoven into the texture of the story. The novel finds out in detail the pangs of other woman as well as the pathetic end of first wife who is left by Sardarji for not procuring male heir to him.

Keywords: Partition, Blood, Woman, Other woman, Body, Free bird, Princess.

Shauna Singh Baldwin's short story *Satya* that became *What the Body Remembers* has won the 1997 Canadian Literary award and Commonwealth Writers' prize for best book in Canada and Caribbean. The story is set in the Sikh community and is told from the point of view of two women Roop and Satya. Although the book deals with the theme of woman to woman power relations and surrogate motherhood, the time and the atmosphere in which the events unfold and the characters evolved are extremely important dimensions of the novel. Roop, a young girl of sixteen, is married to a man twenty five years her senior in the year 1937. This time period is pre-partition period and the location of the story is in West Punjab which is now in Pakistan. Therefore the pre-partition turbulence, its fears and anxieties get naturally interwoven into the texture of the story. The novel runs its course through the actual partition period and includes some heart-rending scenes of uprooted people and their hardships and trauma. We know that the theme of partition has fired the imagination of many Indian writers who seem to be in the process of going back to their cultural roots, more through their memory and some times through nostalgia generated because of separation from their native land and culture. A recent example is a second generation Canadian Sikh writer called Shauna Singh Baldwin living in Milwaukee whose *What the Body Remembers* published in 1999 in Canada is set in colonial India. Telling us the woes of people Baldwin writes in her internet article "there will never be enough novels either by Indians and Pakistanis or by diasporic Indians and Pakistanis to tell the tales of each of 17 million people who became refugees as the two countries celebrated their independence from the British. There will never be enough novels to tell the tales of those who died—5 million people." In her secondary research she discovered that "the culture of origin of the historian influenced statistics and even dates. For instance,

English historians place the number of people killed during partition at two million, Indian and Pakistani historians place it closer to five million.” Apart from digging out the ‘Sikh memory’ during the partition of India the book has to be read as a ‘feminist treatise’ voiced through Satya. Asserting woman’s spirit Shauna Singh Baldwin again writes in her internet article “my challenge to myself was not to tell the story of the Sikhs from the standpoint of the men—there a few non-fiction books that cover their story—but from the perspective of the Sikh women. This quickly became very frustrating because books on Sikh history are usually written by men. They contain on average a single index entry under ‘women’ or mention a maximum of two Sikh women by name. As a member of one of the few religions in the world that actually says women and men are equal, and demands that a Sikh woman be called “princess” to show how valuable she is, I found my research running up against the difference between theory and practice.” Depicting the story of Satya and Roop the author herself asserts that it is the story of every woman who fights and faces awesome challenges after marriage to chisel out her place in the family. The novel begins with the first meeting between Roop and Satya and we see the world through the eyes of three main characters Satya, Roop and Sardarji. Set against the backdrop of partition, against the world of strict social norms, Roop, a simple, innocent sixteen year old girl of Pari Darwaza agrees to be the second wife of a wealthy, Sikh land owner. Oblivion of the fact that her husband is of her father’s age she marries him believing the astrologer’s prediction that she would marry a rich man. The world of Roop revolves around Pari Darwaza, least bothered about turbulent India burning for independence. Her father Bachan Singh is the man of the house expecting ‘achaji’, ‘haanji’ from every member including her Bhabhi Kusum, her brother Jeevan, her sister Madani and Gujari, an early aged widow who accompanied Roop’s mother and Roop as well. Since early childhood Roop had experienced discriminating treatment. She recalls when hungry she was offered lentils while her brother Jeevan was given eggs. Gujari used to say “eggs and meat for a girl? No, don’t waste them.”¹ She has also seen the difficulties in getting fixed her sister Madani’s marriage because of dowry and her father had to “renegotiate Madani’s price.”

Baldwin, thus, dexterously creates an exotic milieu where women are sheltered from outside world and they struggle inside among women for power, influence and dominance. After marriage Roop wishes to treat Satya, her husband’s first wife, like her elder sister. But she gets disillusioned when Satya shows her indifference towards her. Satya has been the dominant figure who cannot lose her position, her claim over her husband as well over the house just because she has not been able to procure an heir for Sardarji. Still she has never felt inferior and talks with her husband with confidence and equality. Many a times Sardarji’s ego is deflated because of her reasoning. She leaves her stamp of identity on everything she does. So it becomes unbearable when her husband’s attention is diverted to Roop. She considers Roop as a ‘silent thief’ who has usurped Satya’s right on everything that once belonged to Satya- her *kantha* necklace, her earrings with three tiers of Burmese rubies

surrounded by diamonds and of course her husband. Her father and brother who could have guarded her right are no more alive. So she accepts her sealed fate. But she never loses her hold over the house and innocent Roop is helpless as Mai regrets "A mother would have taught her to beware of other women especially of first wives." (*What the Body Remembers*: 19) Her marriage has brought a complete change and she moulds herself to suit Sardarji's persona whose head is in India and heart is in England. Roop adapts herself to his way of life, his Oxfordian attire and his English furniture and his luxurious life style. Her first girl child is an "unwanted gift" and Sardarji assures himself that next time she will beget a male child though to show off his generosity he decides "to feed the poor as if she were a boy." (*What the Body Remembers*: 234) Roop has been taught not to revolt, not to question, not to express her views. But she inwardly longs to tell her infant daughter "Don't be like me." She pours in her ear the words of wisdom "Listen, but do not obey everything. Always speak. Never be silent. Respect your elders, but don't be too generous... say what you want." (*What the Body Remembers*: 235)

The family waits anxiously for another sacrifice from Roop when she has to give her daughter to Satya. Roop's mother always taught her "to give to those who need. Satya needs this baby more than I." (*What the Body Remembers*: 238) Her daughter Pawan is separated from Roop as Sardarji wanted to avoid Satya's outbursts of anger and to compensate his guilt he surrenders to Satya's whims and fancies. Satya takes her daughter to Rawalpindi where she is living alone managing Sardarji's estate. But as soon as Roop begets a male child she wants to bring him up as her own child. Thus she overpowers every thing and questions the utility of Roop's stay in the house as latter has 'done the needful.' She is always involved in plotting and maneuvering against Roop. She is strong headed and stubborn and successful in getting the custody of Roop's son Timcu. Roop's insecurity, therefore, intensifies and she loses peace of mind. She stops taking food and water and goes back to her father's house. Unaware of the growing rift between his two wives Sardarji is more concerned with Indian independence and turning India into modern world. After meddling from her father and her brother Jeevan the matter is settled and Satya is sent to live in Rawalpindi and Roop comes to Lahore with Sardarji. Jeevan uses the trump card of Timcu, a male child, very precious heir to Sardarji. Jeevan inspires her to learn English so that she can be a perfect match for Sardarji. An Anglo Indian Miss Barlow is appointed to teach English to Roop. Even after death Satya lives within Sardarji's family because of her dominating presence every where. Sardarji misses Satya's pinni sweets-salt taste the way Satya made them. It is only after partition that Choti Sardarni sheds off her girly image and becomes a woman, an equal partner in Sardarji's life and house. Of the two Roop is submissive, never questions her husband. Her teacher Miss Barlow tells her that women have been suffering and agonizing because of Eve who ate the forbidden fruit. If it were Satya she would have given Guru Nanak's reference that "all women are valuable as princess and should be called *Kaur* to remind men of it. Why should we talk ill of her,