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Migration – A Cathartic Experience or A Different Source of Victimization: An Analytic Reading of Shauna Singh's Diasporic Women in Select Short Stories

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Abstract:
The emergence of hybrid multicultural and multiracial societies in the contemporary postmodern transnational landscape is the consequence of a significant upsurge in migrant movements during the latter decades of the twentieth century. The erstwhile imperial powers have now evolved into hosts for populations originating from their former colonies. These locations, characterized by moments of disjunction and intersection, serve as arenas for ceaseless negotiations of identity. The discourse surrounding subjugation, discrimination, prejudice, identity crises, and self-assertion, in the context of acute alienation experienced by displaced expatriates and scattered exiles, has rapidly gained prominence in the contemporary postmodern world. Predominantly, it is males who constitute the majority of this emigrating population, often accompanied by their motivated spouses. Only a minority of women exhibit contentment and confidence in navigating the territories and cultures of the colonizers, while the rest of them struggle with feelings of isolation, abandonment, and a sense of incongruity in the unfamiliar milieu. A multitude of diasporic authors have engaged in discourse concerning diaspora and the associated diasporic consciousness, primarily through the lens of creative expression. One prominent figure among them, Shauna Singh Baldwin, whose English Lessons and other stories provides a platform for women who find themselves compelled to both preserve their Indian identity and adapt to the milieu of 'diaspora spaces'. A significant proportion of these women find themselves embarking on diasporic journeys as companions to their husbands. Consequently, the primary objective of this analysis is to scrutinize the displacement of women not merely as a facet of the broader dislocation experienced by men but as distinctly unique encounters of the female gender. The current study inquires whether the transition from one cultural background to another represents a cathartic and empowering journey for women or if, conversely, this relocation results in their oppression, victimization, and marginalization, as evidenced in select short stories by Shauna Singh Baldwin.

Keywords: First world, Third world, Migration, Racial discrimination, Hybrid identity, Unfamiliar milieu, Cultural discrepancies, Displacement, Expatriates,

Psychological trauma, Subjugation, Freedom, Conservative or orthodox societies.

Introduction and Aim:

The emergence of hybrid multicultural and multiracial societies in the contemporary postmodern transnational landscape is the consequence of a significant upsurge in migrant movements during the latter decades of the twentieth century. The erstwhile imperial powers have now evolved into hosts for populations originating from their former colonies. These locations, characterized by moments of disjunction and intersection, serve as arenas for ceaseless negotiations of identity. They simultaneously encompass realms of inclusion and exclusion, as well as areas inhabited by indigenous populations and expatriates. Avtar Brah has aptly designated these spaces as "diaspora spaces" (Brah 209). The discourse surrounding subjugation, discrimination, prejudice, identity crises, and self-assertion, in the context of acute alienation experienced by displaced expatriates and scattered exiles, has rapidly gained prominence in the contemporary postmodern world. Narratives chronicling experiences of alienation, obscurity, peripheralization, and marginalization have made diaspora significant in the domain of literary studies. Consequently, scholars of literature now regard diaspora studies, themes pertaining to diasporic experiences, and approaches grounded in diasporic readings as integral components of the postmodern literary canon. In this context Dr. Gurupdesh Singh says:

diasporic writings can emanate from a floating or a settled diaspora or from those who are physically rooted but are mentally in a state of being 'not at home' — a state of psychological displacement, alienation, estrangement, a state with a self, divided or fused, between two or more cultures, a state of experiencing difference and discrimination within bounds of an ethnic or national body, a state of international sensibility with easy physical and mental connectivity with other ethnicities and nations, a state of worldly disconnection with a spiritual search for divine reunion (ix).

Colonization and subsequently, the advent of Capitalism, have engendered a patchwork pattern of growth and expansion in colonies, notably India. This has resulted in a substantial emigration of populations from the Third World to the First World, fueled by aspirations of accessing enhanced employment opportunities and, on occasion, emancipation from their perceived conservative and traditional societies. Predominantly, it is males who constitute the majority of this emigrating population, often accompanied by their motivated spouses. Only a minority of women exhibit contentment and confidence in navigating the territories and cultures of the colonizers, while the rest of them struggle with feelings of isolation, abandonment, and a sense of incongruity in the unfamiliar milieu. Those

women who exhibit lower levels of confidence rarely attain agency through the act of immigration. Nevertheless, these immigrants find themselves ensconced in the complex web of power dynamics, which influence their process of identity formation and the subsequent maintenance of their identities in foreign territories. These asymmetrical power relations invariably persist in the unfamiliar locales. Consequently, immigrants find themselves oscillating amidst a multitude of ethnicities, traditions, languages, perceptions, and attitudes, a phenomenon which continually shapes their experiences and perspectives. It has generally been observed that "with the global literature publishing, distributing, establishing and canonizing industry shifting its focus somewhat from the European/white 'centre' to the 'margins' consisting of former colonies, an increasing number of authors and literary works, originally published or translated into colonial/neo colonial languages like English and French are gaining audience, recognition and appreciation in many parts of the world" (Romana 86). A multitude of diasporic authors have engaged in discourse concerning diaspora and the associated diasporic consciousness, primarily through the lens of creative expression. One prominent figure among them, Shauna Singh Baldwin, explores these themes in her work, English Lessons and other stories. In this literary work, she adeptly captures the inner turmoil experienced by immigrants, who perpetually face uncertainty regarding their identities. This uncertainty arises as a consequence of their displacement and resettlement in foreign lands, a process that prompts them to question the identities they believe they have left behind in their countries of origin. Simultaneously, they are compelled to embrace romanticized identities imposed upon them in Western societies.

The compilation of short stories under consideration provides a platform for women who find themselves compelled to both preserve their Indian identity and adapt to the milieu of 'diaspora spaces'. Their involvement in these spaces is occasionally voluntary, but often influenced by social pressures. English Lessons and Other Stories by Shauna Singh Baldwin serves as a mosaic that weaves together the narratives of Sikh women from diverse generations and social strata residing in India, Canada, and the United States. This literary work chronicles the trials and the tribulations faced by immigrant women from as early as 1919 to the contemporary postmodern era. Baldwin's literary corpus delves into the perceptions of foreign lands and the overwhelming cultural shifts experienced by women. It captures the perspectives of mothers whose children pursue education and careers abroad, as well as those of young immigrants such as Simran, Lisa, Piya, and Devika in Canada and the United States. Additionally, it also sheds light on the life of an elderly woman named Jassie in a retirement home in Canada. In examining characters like "Simran" and "Piya," one discerns the fundamental erosion of trust in mother-daughter relationships due to their

distinct allegiances to disparate cultures and traditions. Meanwhile, "English Lessons" and "Devika" masterfully depict the experiences of married women confined within the domestic sphere, who endeavour to recreate a semblance of 'mini India' within their homes to entice their husbands to relish and revere their cultural heritage. "Jassie" articulates the poignant sensation of growing old and fading away in an unfamiliar land. These diasporic characters are exposed to a myriad of experiences, with distinctions arising from diverse factors such as motivations for migration, linguistic and caste affiliations, varying levels of education, economic status, gender, age, perceived value to the host culture, and individual compulsions and sensibilities. These multifaceted variables contribute to the uniqueness of each individual's journey and experience.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the experiences of dislocated women markedly differ from those of their male counterparts. A significant proportion of these women find themselves embarking on diasporic journeys as companions to their husbands. Consequently, the primary objective of this analysis is to scrutinize the displacement of women not merely as a facet of the broader dislocation experienced by men but as distinctly unique encounters of the female gender. The current study inquires whether the transition from one cultural background to another represents a cathartic and empowering journey for women or if, conversely, this relocation results in their oppression, victimization, and marginalization, as evidenced in select short stories by Shauna Singh Baldwin. The paper analyses if the geographical movement into the first world gives women an opportunity of the possibility of "agentive new woman" (Pandurang 90). Despite the unique nuances and idiosyncrasies that characterize each migrant's encounter with both their native and adopted cultures, a pervasive sense of double consciousness and an enduring yearning for stable foundations pervades their experiences. This paper aims to revisit the notion that, rather than attaining emancipation or forging new identities, women are often relegated to roles where they are primarily viewed as custodians of their ancestral traditions, cultures, languages, and religions. They are generally seen as instrumental in transmitting their traditional values deep into the fabric of the new NRI (Non-Resident Indian) generations or as moral pillars upon which their spouses rely for support by acting as "a vital link in the continuation of the culture of the sending society" (Pandurang 90).

Analysis:

In "Simran" and "Toronto 1984" Baldwin skillfully portrays the dual challenges faced by Simran and Piya, encompassing the pressures of conformity inside their homes and the pervasive racism they encounter outside. Concurrently, the stories also deal with apprehensions experienced by the two respective Indian mothers, Amrit and Bibiji, regarding their daughters' pursuit of education and employment overseas respectively. The Western milieu, replete with its customs,

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vernacular, ethical paradigms, and attitudes towards gender and matrimony, to which the younger generation readily assimilates, stands in stark contrast to the cultural milieu of their homeland. Nevertheless, the older generation remains steadfast in their adherence to the ethnic heritage of their native land, striving to instill these values in their descendants. They aspire to shield their children from the potentially corrupting influences of ethnic and racial hybridity, the duality of consciousness, and allegiance veiled in mystique. Their expectations encompass academic excellence, adherence to established codes of conduct, and securing parental consent in matters of marriage from the younger generation. This is the reason that in "Simran" Amrit, the protagonist's mother worries "about a nineteen-year-old unmarried daughter so far away", and also wants to protect her reputation (Baldwin 49). When Simran comes back, for a three-week winter break after spending only four months in America, Amrit is happy to notice that her daughter is excited to see her parents, also that she "had not caught an American accent" and that she wants her father "to put some brandy in her hot milk and Ovaltine just as she did when she was a child" (Baldwin 49). But soon Amrit is appalled to find a copy of Koran cradled in her only daughter's baggage. The presence of the pious book of some other religion makes Amrit feel that her daughter has disrespected their lineage. Simram has forgotten that she belongs to a proud Sikh family whose "Gurus were tortured to death by Moghul rulers", and that her parents' eyes still get moist when they talk about "the fate of old Sikh friends and neighbours at the hands of Muslim marauders during the 1947 partition" (Baldwin 50). Simran's plea of developing and of having developed more tolerance for the other religions falls flat on her parents' ears. Her parents are also horrified at the changes that they gradually notice in their daughter's mannerism and conduct.

Amrit observes that Simran is "keeping a diary", that "she laugh[s] a lot more and louder since she came home" and that Simran has begun to "argue regularly" with the unchallenged patriarch of the family (Baldwin 56, 54). Amrit is distressed that her daughter is reading "all American sidewalk psychology and all this American liberty theory"; that her daughter no longer walks with a graceful glide in a sari; that she has "lost all restraint, all decorum" and that "even her limbs imitated American indiscipline" (Baldwin 50 italics mine). Last but not the least, Simran's friendship with a Muslim and his phone calls with a wish to talk to her finally goad her parents to look for a match for their daughter. Now, they see her as "an ungrateful, rebellious, selfish monster" (Baldwin 57). To save their family-name from being ruined the "enlightened, well-educated, English-speaking parents — who had always allowed her as much freedom as if she had been a boy... were even willing to spend fifteen thousand dollars on a woman's foreign education" decide to not to send her back to complete her studies (Baldwin 64 italics mine). Henceforth, Simran's parents

exemplify the sentiments of countless parents who recoil at the notion that their offspring in the diaspora have unexpectedly become disobedient, succumbing to the allure of a foreign environment. These parents are taken aback when their progeny display an affinity for Western freedoms, the principles of Western liberty, and a longing for assimilation into a foreign culture, often at the expense of forsaking their indigenous ethnic customs and conventions.

Like Simran, Piya in "Toronto 1984" is also caught in the dilemma of wending her way between insensate colleagues and a conventional mother to find her own individuality. Like Amrit, Piya's Bibiji is unable to adjust with her daughters new avatar, with her "lipstick, briefcase, skirt, slip, pumps, power blouse... travelling all over Canada... too-much freedom... talking of buying a car... getting Canadian" (Baldwin 67-68, 70 italics mine). Out of fear that her daughter may not get absorbed into a foreign culture seamlessly, Bibiji forces her son to take them to India and to get his sister married into a good and reputed Jat family. The author hints that Bibiji does not notice that Piya who feels "lucky to have fair skin", and asserts that she likes her milk cold "yes, Canadian way", would try to defend herself against her mother's Indian influence and fit completely into the white world. But an incident in Piya's life proves detrimental in her endeavours to assimilate in the foreign culture. At a dinner party with her collogues, Piya does not stand up to raise a toast to the "Canadian Queen", actually the British Queen who for her is the "symbol of the empire [her] grandfathers fought against for independence, the one whose line had sent [her] grandfather to prison" (Baldwin 69). For her disobedience to the dominating culture, Piya earns the title of being "a damn Paki". She arrogantly wears the label and takes "pride in being a damn Paki" and decides to work harder not only for herself but for "all of India and Pakistan and Bangladesh", for "a million and a half people sitting in one small office in Mississauga" (Baldwin 71). It may then be ascertained that during the initial phase of their journey, Western culture may initially captivate young diaspora members. However, it swiftly transforms into a disheartening experience. They encounter rejection from the host community that once appeared to embrace them with greater tolerance. The foreign culture metamorphoses into a realm characterized by racial discrimination, chauvinism, inhospitality, and marginalization. Much like Piya, young diaspora individuals find themselves ensnared, compelled to reassess their lives and reevaluate their connections to both their origins and their newly discovered home.

"English Lessons" and "Devika" explore the themes of Indian women's sexual identity and their reconfiguration in the New World following their arranged marriages to men established in Western countries. These women have endured, persevered, or merely subsisted for periods extending up to a year or more, awaiting the issuance of visas that would enable them to join their spouses abroad. They occupy a

transitional space, navigating between disparate cultures and evolving self-identities, suspended betwixt the past and the present, and confronted with fragmented realities upon their entry into what is often termed the Western world. The cultural dissonance they encounter intensifies feelings of nostalgia and rootlessness, particularly palpable in Devika, the central character of the story with the same name. Devika is the archetypal good Indian wife. When the story opens Devika is seen spending her morning cooking traditional dishes, like "mattar-paneer and almond chicken curry", indulging in cleaning the house "with the cleaning solution she could just spray and wipe away", washing "her waist-length hair", ironing "a fresh melon-coloured silk salwar kameez", polishing "her silver anklets" and dressing up while patiently waiting for her husband to come home (Baldwin 169). The narrator too affirms, "This is what good wives do" (Baldwin 169 italics mine). Women, like Devika, who are isolated in apartments where the neighbours are usually unseen and unknown and commuting is impossible without a right-hand driven four-wheeler constantly bounce back and forth between the blankness and purposelessness of new Canadian life and the cherished memories of the bustling and lively world of their homeland. Nearing June when Devika feels cozy with a shawl around her shoulders and a fourth cup of steaming tea in her hands, she reminisces that "the cyclamen bougainvillea would be in valiant bloom around her parents' veranda. It must be sunrise... maybe sun had already risen at home... street vendors would be crying their wares with dust parched throats.... scooter rickshaw drivers would be squinting into sun-mirage" (Baldwin 169-170 italics mine). Here, in her sterile world where, "there was no break in the necklace of twin-diamonded cars glowing on the collarbone of the Don Valley.... She could see no people in the other apartments, there were no people walking along the side of the road, no people sitting on the scrapes of green between the expressways. No people." Devika misses "her mother, her father, and at least twenty solicitous relatives telling her what to do, how to do it, how to live, how to be good, how to be loved" (Baldwin 173,189 italics mine). Under the pressure of alienation and severe lonesomeness, Devika mentally transports her friend Asha across time and a space of the seven seas.

Far from being the replica of the real Asha, who sent an aerogramme from India commemorating the joys of arranged marriage and the delight of being a mother of a healthy son, Devika's hallucinatory friend is "wilful, fun-loving, irreverent... the one who'd sworn never to be married..." (Baldwin 170). Her delusion works as a coping device to reassert space and boundaries in the face of double-consciousness and acculturation. Devika continues to comply with the norms that construct a selfless and pleasing Indian wife who has learnt to live inside the threshold but her other self or her split self Asha facilitates her to indulge in westernized leisure pursuits and activities like smoking expensive

"Canadian cigarettes such as Benson and Hedges", going for a walk all alone and running "all the way home, duppatta streaming behind her", buying and "dumping cowboy jean jackets, high-heeled boots and lingerie in a separate cupboard" and also creating a crevice for herself to observe the "Mr Right-Can-Do-No-Wrong Ratan" from a perspective of cynical, non-reformed and non-docile woman. Despite the fact that initially Ratan is irritated by Devika's hallucinations, nevertheless he begins to acknowledge Asha's presence in the hope that Asha, with her different tastes, may influence Devika to put on a modern shiny finish and dress in "black velvet skirt and a white silk jacquard blouse, like Peter Kendall's wife" (Baldwin 175). Later on, Asha's demand for a new camera makes Ratan realize that "his hair was thinning. In fact, his hair was falling out in patches. There were small bald spots on the back of his head, and he took himself to the emergency room at North York Hospital" (Baldwin 184). Rattan could not confess to the doctor that "Canada was causing his stress, and so was Peter Kendall... that his family [was] causing this stress... and Devika was not helping at all" (Baldwin 185). In this regard, Asha, whose name signifies hope, symbolizes an isolated domain of new possibilities, an intermediary position of authority, and an ethereal foreshadowing of an identity that awaits both Devika and Ratan in the future.

Devika's desires to own her Ratan, "to have him, a piece of him, all the time." She also longs to fulfill her repressed and fearful wish to acculturate, to take driving lessons, to visit Niagara Falls instead of visiting Ratan's sister, to climb the CN Tower and go to Canada's Wonderland, to know how it feels to ride a horse bareback, to assure herself that she could live even if Ratan dies (Baldwin 184). That is why she is now ready to embrace Asha, her wished-for-identity. One Sunday, when Devika is ready to go and meet Vandana Di, and the car has picked up speed on the ramp, she realizes that her Duppatta — which persistently reminds her of her Indian origin — has got struck in the door of the car. And, "before [Ratan] could stop her, she pulled at the handle. The tempo door flew open and there was a whirr as the automatic shoulder strap released her. The car slithered over an ice patch and veered away from her flying body" (Baldwin 188). In this regard, the car accident, in which the protagonist narrowly escapes death, serves as a catalyst for the demise of Devika's traditional Indian identity as a virtuous, obedient, and dedicated wife, and concurrently, heralds the emergence of a more comprehensive and transformed sense of self. Within the confines of the hospital, during Ratan's visit to Devika, he is astounded to witness her adoption of a new identity, Asha, effectively re-territorializing and reestablishing her presence in the novel diasporic milieu, and initiating a redefinition of her life as "Ratan, and Canada, and herself. No one else" (Baldwin 189).

Devika, therefore, embodies the archetype of an expatriate whose persistent longing is directed towards her relinquished

cultural heritage, ancestral roots, familiar neighborhood, and ancestral lineage. Given the formidable challenges associated with her existence in an alienating environment, she steers one facet of her identity towards a return to her accustomed homeland and culture, while simultaneously embracing her other self — the immigrant persona, Asha. This latter identity openly embraces the prospect of acculturation. To elaborate upon Devika's situation, the idea of Wang et al. can be used, who says, "loneliness can limit individuals' recourses to seek help when they suffer adversities … [and causes] more anxiety and depression … increase[s] perceived stress or decrease[s] resilience." (7). As an expatriate, Devika, lives in soreness and grievance. She makes an attempt at assimilation, at giving up an unyielding grasp on the past and at dwelling in dislocation and multiple positioning but fails and in desperation hires a new self and a new identity.

In the Eastern cultural context, marriage is regarded as a sacred institution, characterized by its communal nature. In this framework, women bear the onus of cultivating and sustaining the relationship through care, dedication, and concessions. The prevailing societal norms prioritize social honour and adherence to the prescribed code of conduct, often at the expense of the individual happiness of women. Cultural norms prompt women to relinquish their distinct identities and autonomy and lead a life of dehumanized and unexceptional bodies. They are supposed to "carry internalised the lesson of exchangeability of home, as the basis of identity" (Spivak 252). Women, like Kanwaljit in "English Lessons", are propelled into a trauma while they are waiting for their visa to go and live with her Green Card holding husband. Kanwaljit does not return to her parents' house even though she comes to know that Tony, her husband, had married a black woman to get his own Green Card, and that, it will take him two years to get her visa. She says going back "would have smelled of disgrace, and I am not shameless" (Baldwin 141). To save her parents from this disturbing ordeal, Kanwaljit opens her legs to the bullying of Tony's younger brother who laughs at her, waves the pictures of Tony and the black woman in front of her face, and tells her "Tony left [her] for an untouchable, a hubshi" and also threats to narrate the story of Tony's relation with the black Canadian to her parents (Baldwin 142). Kanwaljit loses her virtue but soon gets her opportunity of vengeance. When the police men, who had come to round up all the Sikh boys for questioning, are told the lie that Tony's brother is with him in America, they set the house on fire in anger. Kanwaljit runs up the stairs and locks the servant's quarters where Tony's brother is hiding. She dashes back "through lung-searing smoke and purifying flame" (Baldwin 142 italics mine). Kanwaljit's may have felt relieved momentarily but her turmoil has not ended yet. Her de-territorialization gives birth to a hybrid identity. In America she lives as the girlfriend of her husband who can neither answer the phone, nor meet anybody from

India, nor move out of her house for the fear of being caught as an illegal resident until she gets her Green Card. She dresses in pants to look like Mexicans. To feel close to her language, culture and home, Baldwin's alienated, friendless, and house-arrested Kanwaljit takes the number of the English teacher so that she could "call her just to speak in Punjabi for a while" (Baldwin 141). Kanwaljit is eager to learn a new language for three reasons: one to clear her immigration interview, second for a job and last to become competent to survive in her husbands adopted land. But to her dismay her chauvinistic husband instructs her teacher, "'I will not like it if you teach her more than I know. But just enough for her to get a good-paying job... you must not teach her too many Ameriacn ideas'" (Baldwin 143). In addition, here in the alien land away from the support system of her parental family, her husband's past has not abandoned her. She is haunted by the "tearful voice on the answering machine" of Tony's black wife (Baldwin 141). Kanwaljit nurtures tremendous anger towards the black American Green Card wife who continues to call, long after the man has left her and whose resentment follows them from city to city. She wants to ask the western woman, "'Is not two years of our life enough? Is not my worm existence, my unacknowledged wifehood enough for you? Enough that I call myself his girlfriend, my son his bastard?'" (Baldwin 141) Kanwaljit is, consequently, subject to a dual colonization. Following her immigration, she has not transitioned to a significantly improved state, as her profound hardships persist unabated. She lives "like a worm avoiding the sunlight" (Baldwin 141). Evidently, the author seeks to cultivate in the reader a deep appreciation for Kanwaljit, who adeptly navigates the most adverse circumstances in her life. This respect is engendered by the considerable tolerance she exhibits towards the incongruities and uncertainties that pervade her existence. Consequently, through the characters crafted by Baldwin, we are presented with a portrayal of the destiny that befalls disheartened and rootless exiles, evoking admiration in the process.

In contrast to Devika and Kanwaljit, the narrator in "The Cat Who Cried" falls within the demographic of immigrants who relocate in pursuit of enhanced educational opportunities and a career as an educated professional in the developed world. These immigrants, primarily hailing from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, tend to seamlessly assimilate into the former colonial dominion and rarely voice grievances concerning racial prejudices or social exploitation. For the narrator, the act of migration represents a means of emancipation from the congestion, rampant dishonesty, neglect, and laxity prevalent in the Third World. She is one of those immigrants who "carve their own (hybrid) routes" while trying to enjoy the best of both cultures beyond the binary fixities of home/abroad instead of "lamenting over the lost roots" (Kaur 47). In India Prem, the narrator's husband, is "unable to find a job where he did not have to give or take bribes to survive", but after moving to the

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promising West both "savoured the time to be just two of [them] exploring a new land, freed from obedience to Duty, awed by the power and burden of this thing called Choice... [and] Prem got a job selling health and life insurance to the other expatriate Indians — exiles, he calls them" (Baldwin 147 italics mine). The narrator readily becomes familiar with the sloping roofs and accepts them "than the hot shimmer-haze concrete flatness of an Indian city view." But on the other hand her mother-in-law, an old woman who "comes to visit [them] in summer to escape the Delhi heat, the loneliness, the power cuts and the water shortages" begins her day "at five every morning to confide her irritation" against "the whiteness of people and the greyness of that twilight that arrived just when she was ready to face another day of strangeness" (Baldwin 145, 147, 146). The response exhibited by the narrator and individuals of a similar disposition toward diasporic existence markedly diverges from that of their male counterparts. Immigration to an unconventional society affords them superior prospects for livelihood, social and economic autonomy, and the liberty to reshape their own lives according to their wishes. They lead a comfortable life, as the narrator has "begun doing better"; she has "friends here, people who listen and talk" to her; she knows that her children "Sheila and Nikhil would never get such attention in school in India" (Baldwin 149). However, the narrator is perturbed by her mother-in-law's persistence and her husband's insistence on adhering to his mother's desire to return to the Third World. This unsettling situation engenders psychological, emotional, and ethical turmoil within her.

Similar to his mother, Prem perceives the developed world as a menace to the second generation. He does not wish his daughter "to paint her face and have a boyfriend by the time she's twelve" and his son "to join a gang and bring home some New Age Junkie" and therefore, Prem decides to make a choice for the whole family (Baldwin 149). But the narrator is not ready to abide by the traditional role that she is expected to play and wants to "decide what is convenient for [her] and not convenient..." (Baldwin 152). She goes and tells her extremely superstitious mother-in-law that she "was the cat who cried" (Baldwin 153). Consequently, the narrator's response to her superstitious mother-in-law serves as a rejection of the constricted and sequestered way of life, gender-based subjugation, oppressive daily routines, financial hardship, identity crises, disorientation, dearth of fulfilling employment opportunities, inadequate compensation, and the absence of a splendid apartment replete with amenities and luxuries characteristic of life in the Third World.

For young women, both single and married, the Western world may offer improved prospects for living independent lives, greater resilience against a racist and inequitable society. In contrast, the older generation perceives itself as defenseless, vulnerable, unjustly restricted, and constrained in the multicultural diasporic

domains. Jassie a sixty-five years old Sikh woman in an American retirement home, shares her room with her daughter's mother-in-law, Elsie. Elsie has little empathy for Jassie's traditions and culture and tells her stories from her own past, but Jassie has "none to give her that she could understand" (Baldwin 161 italics mine). In the retirement home, two elderly roommates, with their stark dissimilarity, only share smiles and a view of the natural world beyond the hospital window. Jassie, one of these occupants, feels disconcerted in the unfamiliar location and amongst its inhabitants. She possesses limited knowledge regarding the socio-political history of the white population and is disheartened to confront the prospect of passing away in this foreign land. Jassie's decision to relocate to America came in the aftermath of the tragic loss of her two young sons during the second war with Pakistan. Her husband subsequently sold their khadi store, and together they embarked on a journey to the United States, where they received a warm welcome from their dutiful daughter, Minni, who had married a white man with light-colored eyes. Regrettably, with their departure from their homeland, Jassie also left behind the warmth and familiarity of her native surroundings. Jassie's husband could not become accustomed to "a coldness of [American] soul" and the emotionlessness of Jassie and soon passed away leaving the old diaspora to cope up with an alien world (Baldwin 166).

Jassie's roommate remains oblivious to the deep impact that a mere phonetic variation has on the protagonist when she addresses her as 'Jessie.' 'Jessie' signifies not only the loss of Jassie's homeland, personal identity nationality, culture, roots, and sense of belonging but also implies a sense of tarnishing her skin color, bloodline, and soul. On occasion, Jassie yearns to assert to everyone that her name is "Jassie, not Jessie" (Baldwin 167). Yet, she finds herself amidst individuals who cannot fathom her perspective. During Sundays, Jassie engages in singing religious hymns with fellow residents of the retirement home, adhering to habit rather than wholeheartedly embracing the new culture. Perhaps, in an attempt to assert her distinctiveness or stemming from irritation, she disturbs others by reciting her own scriptures in a resonant manner. Despite this seemingly insurmountable divide, Jassie extends her assistance to her daughter's mother-in-law in preparing for the transition to the next world. Ironically, the older generation, which typically arrive in Western lands as guests, often find themselves unable to return to their native soil and roots, ultimately passing away in an unfamiliar land. Their hearts remain laden with a yearning for the cosmology they have left behind. They remain unable to fully immerse themselves in a foreign religion and metropolitan culture.

Conclusion:

The second-generation women, such as Piya in "Toronto 1984" and Simran in story with the same name are caught in the impasse of finding their own individuality and identity. They become the victims of an unaccepting environment and their

conventional mothers. They adapt themselves physically and virtually to these two contrasting worlds because they have learned to counter the daily onslaught of racist attacks, although they are often troubled by the same. However, the two married women in "Devika" and "English Lessons" sometimes embrace the prospect of a new Western world with hope and opportunities, but more often than not; they also find themselves isolated, alienated, stranded, unmoored, disoriented, and misplaced. In contrast to Devika, the narrator in "The Cat Who Cried" views the First World as an escape from a marginalized, peripheral, subservient, and conformist Third World society. The promise of self-employment, self-respect, identity, individuality, and unrestrained choice lures her to the Western metropolis. On the other hand, Jassie, an older-generation woman, lives in constant fear of decaying in the unfamiliar terrain. Baldwin's stories shed light on the physical and psychological claustrophobia experienced by women living lives of exclusion. The derogatory terms like 'Pakis,' 'coolies,' 'ragheads,' 'heathens,' 'Hindoos,' and 'wogs' constantly haunt them, making their hearts ache with every backward glance.

Consequently, it may be deduced that regardless of disparities in age, socioeconomic class, generation and educational background, the diasporic women portrayed by Baldwin find themselves ensnared by the multifaceted intricacies of multiculturalism and power dynamics. They are not able to fully assimilate into the diasporic environments, nor can they readily revert to their ancestral origins. The duality of existence proves indefinable, as they are caught in a perpetual struggle to belong to one of these two worlds, ultimately resulting in a sense of not truly belonging to either. Using Brah's words, it may be said that these migrants "invoke[s] the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience" (193). The majority of these individuals fight with psychological turmoil. They are torn between the competing forces of bicultural influences. They contend with an overwhelming sense of dislocation, upheaval, stagnation, and an intense longing for home. What endures within them is a fractured sense of self, marked by feelings of rejection, animosity, and disillusionment. The foreign land they inhabit resembles a transit lounge, further amplifying their sense of displacement characterized by an "out-of-placeness", as opposed to the "fullness of being in place" (Kunow 17). They become disoriented and unanchored. For this category of migrants, "exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home. The essential sadness of the break can never be surmounted" (Said 439).

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