
**Hybridity of Three Cultures: A Comprehensive Study of Shauna Singh
Baldwin's Selected Short Stories**

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Abstract:

Shauna Singh Baldwin is one of the most influential voices in the literary world. She is a famous Canadian-American award-winning author of Indian descent who writes in English. She was born in Canada, grew up in India, and settled in America. Due to this, she has multi-identities and is known as an Indo-Canadian-American Diasporic writer. She is also skilled in multiple languages, such as Punjabi, Urdu, French, and English, which help her to examine the world and people around her. Baldwin uses many words from these different languages for her writing according to the appropriate situation. Shauna conjures a variety of themes in her writings in a particular style. She is an excellent voice of Indo-Canadian origin, and in her personality, one can see a fantastic combination of three traditions: Canadian, Indian, and American. Instead of lamenting her hybridity, she celebrates it in her writings. Shauna feels affection for her hybrid world, but at the same time, she refuses obsessive purity. She provides various aspects of diasporic experience and women's problems in a thoughtful way related to the flowing concept of home, identity, and migration.

The present paper is an attempt to illustrate the picture of women's intricacies and bitter experiences, along with the challenges of hybrid culture in society. It will also illustrate Baldwin's personal visions about being a migrant in her selected short stories.

Keywords: plethora, conjures, hybridity, obsessive, intricacies, hybrid culture, migrant and migration.

Introduction:

Shauna Singh Baldwin is an Indo-Canadian writer with tremendous strength to compel readers to think about the present world and the ignored past. Being an amalgamation of three cultures: Indian, Canadian, and American, Baldwin transcribes her literary creations from the perspective of all three for the hybrid and global audience. In her short fiction, Baldwin attempts to build a harmonious world by

presenting the human strife for survival and integration of culture, region, language, religion, and race along with the daily realities of life. Baldwin questions the bruises and wounds of the immigrant Sikhs and scrutinizes their sufferings and position in English-speaking North America. Baldwin presents the minute details of tradition and culture in North America and India with the help of her emotional insight. In her Keynote speech delivered at the Great Lakes Writer's Conference, Baldwin states: "I am a hybrid of three cultures, Indian, Canadian, and American, and I write from the perspective of all three. Today, my answer is: I write for the people I love, a hybrid, global audience, for people interested in becoming human, how we live, the influence of history, philosophy, culture, tradition, and memory on our sense of self."

Baldwin's fifteen insightful but primarily sad stories in "English Lessons and Other Stories" (1996) passionately dramatize the lives of Indian women from the early twentieth century to today as well as their expansion from India to Canada and North America and from the closed circle of the family to the wilderness of office and university. In these precise, nuanced, sensual, and autobiographical stories, she assesses to draw the positions and postures of the female characters from different generations and social spheres. Here, in a mournful tone, Baldwin mainly focuses on the problem of Sikh women being suppressed under masculinity in North America and India, even in their families. Baldwin's heroines are merely ordinary women who find strength and awareness even in the most paradoxical of

Places and tap their minds and hearts to enter the new emotional and material worlds. Her stories describe the friction between the East and West, the traditional and modern, and her personal experiences of being an immigrant in the U.S.A. **Discussion:**

Baldwin is expanding the world of Indian fiction in English by taking enormous risks to write frankly from an ethnic minority about her community. In the story "Montreal 1962" from the collection "English Lessons and Other Stories," Baldwin employs first and second-person narrative to depict the dilemma, dislocation, and disappointment of an immigrant Sikh wife living with her husband in Montreal, Canada. She mentally converses with her husband's turbans. She feels guilt and expatriation in Canada because of their unloving and insensitive attitude. Being an Indian, she always wants to cling to her customs and traditions, but due to this, she has to face racial discrimination in Canada. Although she lives in Canada, she feels very much attached to her Indian cultural identity and to her husband's turbans, which symbolize pride for Sikhs in India. For her, the turban is a root for the cultural tree of life, which is why it is an essential constituent related to the identity of the Sikh community. In Canada, her husband was forced to cut off his hair and remove his turban to continue his job. However, being a Sikh, it is just like discarding his attachment to his Indian cultural and spiritual relationship. In the Sikh community, the turbans have a profound impact as they carry the traditions and individuality of a Sikh. For that reason, the Sikh wife feels nostalgic regarding her strong cultural lifestyle in

India.

The Sikh wife recalls that her father, brother, and husband always wear a turban on their head. According to her, the red color of a turban represents the sacrifices and blood of the Sikhs, "I unfurled the gauzy scarlet on our bed, and it seemed as though I had poured a pool of the sainted blood of all the Sikh martyrs there" (Baldwin 7). Baldwin here illustrates the ruthlessness and racism of Canadian society towards Indians as they have No reverence for the turbans of Indian Sikhs. The female protagonist feels irksome at her inability to give a sari for laundering, "today I took one of my wedding saris to the neighborhood dry-cleaner and a woman with no eyebrows held it like a dishrag as she asked me, "Is it a bed sheet?" "No," I said. "Curtains?" "No." I took the silk back to our basement apartment, tied my hair in a tight bun, washed the heavy folds in the metal bathtub, and hung it, gold threads glinting, on a drip-dry hanger" (Baldwin 5-6). For them, it is like the bed sheets or curtains without feeling. Despite the constant pressure and expectations of the Canadians about cutting her husband's hair short without the turban, the Sikh wife remains firm in maintaining the cultural heritage of her community. She also requests her husband not to sacrifice his cultural identity and tradition to suit the new world, "You must be reborn white-skinned – and clean-shaven to show it – to survive" (Baldwin 5).

Through this story, Baldwin attempts to show the religious and cultural viewpoint of Indian immigrants against the cultural supremacy of Western countries. The story's female protagonist suffers from homesickness on an extreme level and tries to preserve the purity of her culture even in an alien land where the inhabitants challenge her to violate her roots in the motherland. They force her and her husband to adopt their culture in the situation of displacement. To express the deep pain and clear visions of Indian immigrants' culture, Baldwin makes use of emotive and lucid language. In the story, the Sikh woman dresses in her husband's turban to feel the cultural legacy of her community, even in the new world. She says, "I wound it swiftly, deftly, till it jutted haughtily forward, adding four inches to my stature In the mirror, I saw my father as he must have looked as a boy, my teenage brother as I remember him, you as you face Canada, myself as I need to be" (Baldwin 8). Moreover, the Sikh wife requests her husband that he should not take off his turban before the Canadians because it is deeply attached to their roots of the native soil. In place of defying her traditional and cultural identity, she prefers to retain it at the stake of her.

Husband's job. She does not want to surrender at the hands of the Canadians who do not consider the value of a turban in the lives of the Sikhs.

After some time, the Indian female protagonist of the story comes to a radical decision: instead of losing her heritage, she would work for her family's survival. Moreover, if her husband cannot continue his job because of the turban, she will make

an effort to defend her husband from disgrace as best as she can. However, even now, she will not allow the Canadians to mingle with them and their identity. Here, Baldwin provides courage to the Sikh woman, and she quickly makes such a firm decision. On the contrary, her husband does not dare to stand out against the people of Western countries. The Sikh woman asserts with confidence:

Thus, my love, I will not let you cut your strong hair rope and go without a turban into this land of strangers. The knot my father tied between my chunni and your turban is still strong between us, and it shall not fail you now. My hands will tie a turban upon your head and work every day so we can keep it there. One day, our children will say, "My father came to this country with very little, but his turban and my mother learned to work because no one would hire him." Then, we will have taught Canadians what it takes to wear a turban (Baldwin 8).

This reveals that the Sikh woman has a lot of love, respect, and pride for her culture, and she does not want to degrade it at any cost. She also creates a militant outlook of cultural independence rather than imitating Canada's alien culture. Therefore, she feels connected in the process of washing, drying, folding, and wearing the turbans, which reflect the moral and social framework of her native culture at home, but at the same her decision to work outside shows her adoption of the Canadian custom in a hybrid manner.

The same strength and courage of a female character are also clearly visible in another story, "English Lessons," from the same collection, "English Lessons and Other Stories." This story presents the marginalization as well as physical and mental exploitation of an Indian woman, Kanwaljit, the first-person narrator, who is married to an American, Tony. After marriage, Kanwaljit comes to America with her husband, but she is acknowledged as a prostitute by him. Tony makes her a source of income in the States, and she is forced to perform this role without her wish. Being an Indian, Kanwaljit has a lot of respect and attachment to her Indian culture and way of life. For this very reason, even if the torments and mistreatment of her husband, she suffers all these silently. Kanwaljit lives in a chaotic condition and becomes a tool for earning money for her husband. Without thinking about the dignity of her wife, he hands over her to one of his American friends who exploited her sexually. In the absence of her green card and her husband's dominating nature, Kanwaljit lives underground in America 'live like a worm avoiding the sunlight' (Baldwin 131). He rules over his wife and never allows her to meet anyone, especially Indian people living in America.

Kanwaljit is an Indian immigrant woman who follows even the wrong wishes of her husband due to the influence of Indian culture on her. To hide her Indian identity, he compels her to give the impression of a Mexican girl by wearing pants, "He makes me dress in pants so that I look Mexican and says it is only a short while now, But first I will learn English. It is not that I do not understand it, but it has too many words. Get it. Put it. I am stuffed" (Baldwin 130). This shows her inability to

match with the identity, customs, and culture of the American alien society. She cannot speak English, and her husband Tony wants to make her learn this language as well as her amnesty story so that she can clear her immigration interview. Instead of introducing Kanwaljit as his wife in his community, Tony calls her his girlfriend all the time before others without paying attention to the fact that

They have a son named Suryavir. To get rid of her husband's torture, she decides to form a new identity by accepting the changes entirely, and in this way, she wipes out her past identity, as is evident by her statement, "I told Valerie I would change my name. I asked her to call me Kelly. No one here can say Kanwaljit. And Kanwaljit is left far away in Amritsar, before the fire" (Baldwin 131).

Through this story, Baldwin presents the cultural clash and predicament of an Indian woman in America who does not have an acquaintance with any of the Indians there except her husband. However, her husband is irresponsible towards his wife as he used to dominate her, threaten her, blackmail her, and prevent her from doing anything on her own. She feels suffocated in America but never thinks to go back to her father in India. The reason behind it was that it is a matter of disgrace in India if a daughter leaves her husband and stays at her father's home even after her marriage. It reveals the cruel face of patriarchy where a son is never blamed for anything, even if it is his fault, but a daughter is always held responsible for everything without the fault of her own. As in the story, Kanwaljit bears every brutality of her husband only because she does not want to humiliate the reputation and honor of her father and her Indian family. Besides, she does not want to cause any harm to them on account of the problems she has in her marital life. Being self-sacrificing in nature, her thinking is not self-centered like her husband, so she always thinks about her father and family rather than thinking about her.

Kanwaljit survives in America as an illegal, unidentified immigrant who suffers there due to the load of Indian culture on her. She does not complain to her husband about his affair with an American girl with whom he has lived for two years and also shares his bed with her. Furthermore, she also endures the loss of their life savings on the same woman for a marriage certificate, and only because of her does Kanwaljit come to live with her husband, Tony, in America. On the contrary, her husband Tony's American girlfriend constantly threatened Kanwaljit for her unlawful migration to America. Her husband Tony surrenders Kanwaljit.

With another American man who sexually abused her by taking immigration papers in his hands and persistently blackmails her. She asserts about it:

He looks like Tony, only younger. Moreover, he still laughs at me, waving pictures of Tony with her. He tells me Tony left me for an untouchable hub and threatens to tell my parents if I do not open my legs to him. I did. Rubba-Merey, I did. (Baldwin 132).

This reveals that in her life, there are many problems just because of her illicit

immigration, which she silently suffers all through the time. She tries to assimilate the American customs with the Indian way of life to uphold her aspiration for independence.

Being an Indian, Kanwaljit finds some affinity with her Indian English lady teacher, so she describes everything about her husband's girlfriend and requests her the way of asking about it to her husband, "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 131). However, Tony has no feelings or attachment to his wife and wants to keep her dependent on him. He speaks out to Mrs. Keogh, the English teacher, that she should not educate Kanwaljit very much, as it is clear from his warning: "I will not like it if you teach her more than I know. However, just enough for her to get a good-paying job at Dunkin' Donuts or maybe the Holiday Inn. She will learn quickly, but you must not teach her too many American ideas" (Baldwin 133). However, Kanwaljit decides that she will learn English from the English teacher as much as necessary with the intention that she could get the green card and asks about where to "learn how to drive" (Baldwin 133). This reflects the hidden desire of the narrator, who needs to have a great deal of extensive freedom from the traditional constrictions on women in the course of the cultural regime of patriarchal society. Thus, the story revolves around the intricacies of nationality and the consequences and issues that women have to come across while finding their footing in an alien land.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

In the present research paper, the proposed objectives are achieved by the following research methodology:

1. The foremost foundation of this research is the primary source, namely, the famous short fiction "Montreal 1962" and "English Lessons" by Shauna Singh Baldwin.
2. The exploratory qualitative method is used to examine the lives of female characters, their situations, and outlooks in the hybrid culture.
3. Other secondary materials, such as critical books, journals, anthologies, interviews, internet sources, etc., are used to gain extra insight into the research and to achieve a significant outcome.
4. The support is taken from the 9th edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper* to form the whole research paper reasonably.

Conclusion:

Baldwin writes about her past experiences and personal problems in multicultural existence, which are apparent in various types of hybridity in her famous collection "English Lessons and Other Stories." She exhibits psychological suffering and seclusion along with the alienation of diasporic female characters, which supply

the raw material to her stories. Her female character feels lonely even in her husband's presence, as he cannot understand her wife's desires and her freedom. Baldwin provides well-righteous exposure to the inner life of the female characters, which is visible in her gift of writing.

Almost all of her stories focus on issues related to women's lives in one way or another. Her female protagonists attempt to create their own identities in society to achieve equality and independence like men.

The predicament of women in the selected texts exposes the dislodgment of identity and hybridity on the level of physical, psychological, and cultural repression of humanity. It also focuses on the social and economic factors that maintain the marginality and lesser status of the women in their homelands and the adopted lands. Through their writings, Shauna Singh Baldwin establishes and defends women's problems and equal rights and opportunities for women in the cosmopolitan world. In a way, Baldwin advocates and supports women's equality through her female protagonists who fight for similar status to men and create their own identity even in an alien land. Instead of lamenting their position and binary oppositions, Baldwin's women characters celebrate their difference from men more explicitly in the cross-cultural world.

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