Shauna Singh Baldwin is one women writer of diaspora, who has for the first time, written fiction representing Sikh community in diaspora, to which she herself belongs. John Barber in his article on Baldwin observes, "In a literary world that often seems dominated by recently graduated creative-writing students writing about their student friends, Shauna Singh Baldwin stands out as an author with a rich personal history at her disposal – sometimes in excess..." (n.pag). Baldwin through her stories strategically places the Sikh men and women, who had previously been neglected as the protagonists of diaspora narrative. She maps out with perfection the history of her people, which are testimonies of struggle, of painful exile, of immigration and certainly of new identity formation in North America. Today the Sikhs comprise an outsized and easily identifiable ethnic community in Canada and America. Essential as a vital monetary force in these countries; they have also tried to construct an 'identity' of their own in multicultural Canada and the melting pot of America. Centre for Studies in Democracy at the Queen’s University has carried out a research venture titled "The Role of the Indian Diaspora in Canada", which shows that Indo-Canadian Diaspora will be the largest ethnic group in Canada by the year 2017.

A collection of fifteen passionate stories, intricately drawn and vividly portrayed, "The English Lessons and Other Stories" (1996) presents character. Each unique in their own way. Each of them belongs to different classes of society, different generation and
different vocation. The stress mainly is on the lives of immigrant Sikhs, who first had to endure the bruises and wounds of partition and then the perils of immigration. Baldwin painstakingly follows the journey of these first generation immigrants to Canada and later to America. Baldwin’s stories in this collection emphasize her Sikh women characters. The stories here are woman centered and are therefore aptly named after their woman protagonists such as – Gayatri, Simran, Lisa, Jassie, Devika and Dropadi Ma. As an immigrant herself Baldwin provides a view of the lives of these women as those who witness cultural displacement in Canada and later in America and who struggle to create their identity at first challenging the patriarchy within the community and then confronting the ‘other’ outside. “Most of the stories in this collection are first person narratives. Telling the tale gives the woman a voice, lets them break out of silence they have been conditioned into, the solitude their silence has condemned them to” (Dhawan et.al 139). Due to her own experiences in three different countries- Canada, India and America, Baldwin beautifully portrays the cross cultural interaction with utmost truth and reality. The intermingling of the western and eastern culture forms the crux of many of the stories.

The stories in Baldwin’s collection *English Lessons* can be neatly divided based on the categories they belong to. There are stories of immigration, that talk of immigrant’s journey and the subsequent events in the foreign land. There are stories set in India that talk of loss and pain. These are stories set in colonial India that talk about the freedom struggle and the partition that resulted in the greatest human tragedy. Some even follow up to the events resulting in the emergency in 1984. Another set of stories are those that talk about “homecoming”. An aspect not much explored in diasporic writing.
Baldwin intrigues the life of immigrants who have come back to India, from Canada and America, some temporarily and some permanently. To begin with are her stories that are set in colonial India.

**Colonial Tales: Stories of Internal Displacement, Loss and Pain**

Two of Baldwin's stories "Rawalpindi 1919" and "Family Ties" talk about the internal displacement the Sikhs invariably had to suffer in the pre partition scenario and later during partition. Through the narratives of the unnamed mother and the little girl Baldwin sketches the horrors of timeless ruins of the imperial British rule. "Rawalpindi 1919" is told from the point of view of a mother, who is kneading flour to make chapatti for her son. Her act of kneading coincides with her random thoughts about her younger son Sarup, who is leaving for "Inglaand" for three years. The anxieties and fears of a mother form the crux of the story. The mother is perplexed to think about, how her son would get along with the whites, 'the angrez boys', especially when her husband Choudhary Amir Singh still detests shaking hands with an angrez and washes his hands if he had accidently done so.

The mother ignorant about the political dimensions of the act of immigration is more worried if her son would get to eat chapattis, with no women to cook Indian food, her son would be much thinner. The mother continues with her act of making chapattis, but along with that she has the greatest realization that learning English or going abroad not only changes relationships for the person who leaves but also for the ones who are left behind. The mother here accepts the changes that may occur in the due course to her son, but at the same time thinks of the changes that she must make in the household, in
her attitude to take her son in, when he returns after three years. Instead of steel ‘thalis’ the mother insists on buying white plates because the angrez use them. She wants to buy new chairs and also wants new crockery. The story ends with the mother talking to the father and hinting about the changes that they must bring in order to accommodate their foreign return son, whether willing or unwilling.

The mother, who must endure with grief the departure of her son, brings into mind the mother, Nnu Ego in Buchi Emecheta’s novel The Joys of Motherhood. It is with great struggle and sacrifice that Nnu Ego raises her sons in Nigeria. But both her sons leave the war torn home for the west. She fondly remembers her sons, “She used to go to the sandy square called Otinkpu, near where she lived, and tell people there that her son was in “Emelika”, and that she had another one also in the land of white men – she could never manage the name Canada” (qtd. in Kirpal 77).

Rawalpindi 1919 can be seen as a story that stands at a strategically important time frame. As the title itself suggests the story is set in the pre partition era, in the village of Rawalpindi that is now part of Pakistan, and the year is 1919. The story can be seen as standing on the threshold of history wherein people looked at immigration with mixed feelings and ambivalence. 1919 was the year when India witnessed the most violent and bloody massacre at Amritsar’s Jallianwala Bagh. The growing hatred towards the British rule had reached it epitome during the 1919’s.

A post partition story “Family Ties” gives a picture of the predicament of a family that has been unnerved as a result of the partition. Narrated by a ten year old girl, is the horrific and traumatic incidents of partition, abduction and the rape that
follows. The story takes place around the year 1970’s when India is at war with Pakistan. The young narrator learns about a dark family secret which in turn changes her life forever. Even though twenty three years have passed since partition, the memories seem to haunt the family even now. The little girl learns from her father that he had a sister named Chandini Kaur who was abducted by the Muslims who invaded Thamali village in 1947. The father opens an old suitcase and shows the sister’s photo to the young narrator and her brother. The aunt in the photo looks young and beautiful and the girl calls her the “moonlight princess”. Her aunt was abducted during the time of partition and was converted into Islam. The father after describing the story takes a gun from the suitcase and gives it to his son, who is fourteen. The father advices the boy to take care of his sister, and defend her pride and womanhood at any cost. By this the father meant that his daughter should not have the same predicament as his sister. The little girl is shocked to hear what her father says next — “If the Muslims come and your sister is in danger, you must shoot her rather than let her fall into their hands” (18). Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in their book *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998), write “...belief that safeguarding a woman’s honour is essential to upholding male and community honour” (187).

The story throws light towards the obsession people in India had about female chastity and purity, which always meant violence means against women. People belonging to certain religious community or ethnic minority always felt insecure about their women. Their sense of pride and gratitude was such that instead of giving away their women to the ‘other’ they think it proper to kill them. This is what has now become common as honour killing. Such killings were quite rampant in India during
partition and the riots that followed. "Women's sexuality symbolizes manhood; its discretion is a matter of such shame and dishonor that it has to be avenged" (Menon & Bhasin 43). The men thus forced their own women to commit suicides because they feared that the men belonging to the rival communities might establish their power and supremacy by way of exercising power by occupying the bodies of their women. The women were thus left with just two options, either sexual appropriation by the men of the rival community or death at the hands of their men. The Hindu and Sikh men thus killed their women by burning them alive, shooting them, poisoning them and so on. In some cases women who were sexually exploited, out of fear of rejection due to dishonor and shame never dared to come back to their family and eventually killed themselves.

The girl is astonished at her father's statement and worries if she too will have her aunt's fate, "...wonder if he (brother) will have the courage to kill me to defend me, and where will I find the courage to die as Chandini Kaur must have, soft heart offered at eighteen to her brother's bullet? My father's bullet. It is worse to be caught, converted, killed or raped by Muslims that to be killed by a brother? A brother- my brother" (19). Inquisitive to know further about her aunt she enquires with the family chauffeur Nand Singh about her aunt. From him she learns that her aunt was alive and had acquired the name of one Jehanara Begum and tried to contact the family. But the family refused to take her in, for Nand Singh thought, "Any sister of your fathers would have died before allowing herself to be called Jehanara Begum" (22). In a last attempt to reconcile with the family, the aunt even killed the child she bore from a Muslim, but even then the family refused to take her in and declared her as a mad woman.
Many women had to give away their children born of mixed unions if they wanted to be accepted by their families. Pregnant women had to forcibly abort or terminate their pregnancies. Menon and Bhasin in their book remark—"Abducted as Hindus, converted and married as Muslims, recovered as Hindus but required to relinquish their children because they were born of Muslim fathers and disowned as impure and ineligible for membership within their erstwhile family community, their identities were in continual state of construction and reconstruction" (98). To make such a choice, regarding where to go, what to choose is difficult in reality. But in fictional renderings, the protagonists overthrow patriarchal domination and decide for themselves. The protagonist of amrita Pritam’s novel *Pinjar*, Pooro defies all patriarchal and political norms and dictates and chooses to stay in Pakistan.

Baldwin uses this narrative to emphasize the brutality meted out at women during partition and their rejection and disownment by their own families. The stress here is on the relationship within the family especially the brutal gender roles. The male is always considered to be the dominant, on whom the power and duty is vested to protect and guard the honour of the woman by killing her if she has been tainted or defiled by others. This story draws parallel with Bapsi Sidhwa’s 1991 novel *Cracking India*. The story of the partition of India is narrated through the eyes of young Parsi girl Lenny growing up in Lahore. Like the aunt Chandni Kaur in this story, Sidhwa creates the character of Lenny’s ayah, a Hindu woman who is forcibly taken away by Muslims during the riots. The ayah is the object of desire for all the men around especially the ice-candy-man. While violence engulfs Lahore and Muslims are hunting for the Hindus. Lenny unknowingly discloses the place where the ayah is hiding to the ice-
candy-man who betrays her. Lenny feels that she has betrayed the ayah who is taken away by the violent mob. Sidhwa draws out the most detrimental effect of the partition, the symbolic defilement of women on both sides. The story aptly titled “Family Ties” is a pun deliberately intended by Baldwin as she shuns the cruelty described here. The family here is thrown apart not by the partition or the riots that followed, but in a larger sense by their perception and guilt that refused to take the aunt in. Their sense of pride, honour and shame forced them to shun their own blood and thus suffered the fate.

Ritu Menon’s describes of the violence against women – “…the dramatic episodes of violence against women during communal riots bring to the surface, savagely and explicitly, familiar forms of sexual violence – now charged with meaning that serves as an indicator of the place that women’s sexuality occupies in an all male, patriarchal arrangement of gender relations, between and within religious and ethnic communities” (43). Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta in their book *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* say that

In a situation such mass scale displacements, the categories that inevitably get silenced are the ways in which women retrieve the daily requirements of social reproduction. Since this is the aspect that gets least spoken about, what gets elided is the agency of women who start up the family routine in changed circumstances, re-build the rhythms of daily subsistence, if not the actual search, at least the organization of shelter. The caring, nurturing role of women hounds them in these moments of public rupture. (5)
Stories of Homecoming: Bursting the Myth of “Glorious Return”

The immigrants are always ethnic minorities in the host country. Their sense of alienation and un-belongingness are factors that bring out the “homing desire” (Brah 193) in them. The return journeys of exiles and immigrants were largely ignored and only the immigration was focused upon as topics of grand debates and narratives, this is what Russell King remarks as “the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration” (King 7). Homecoming regardless of it being permanent or temporary is certainly a critical juncture in the transformation of diasporic beings and their journeys. The diasporic homecoming is a nostalgic concept, wherein the immigrant leaves (at least for the time being) all his/her global/transnational/cosmopolitan identification marks and travels back to reclaim what he/she calls ‘homeland’. But in certain cases, the return might not be as advantageous as imagined. According to William Safran, the immigrants always have a notion of imagined utopia, which they associate with the homeland, while their present state of stay becomes the binary opposite i.e. dystopia – “The ‘return’ of most diasporas…can thus be seen largely eschatological concept: it is used to make life more tolerable by holding out a utopia – or eutopia – that stands in contrast to the perceived dystopia in which actual life is lived” (94). Sudesh Mishra in Diaspora Criticism (2006) talks about such an ambivalent situation, where the diasporans are uncertain whether to return or not. He calls this as an “illusion of impermanence” (28) that they feel. But in reality the case might be different –

Few host governments are prepared to admit that the foreign workers will remain and that their children, or at least most of them, will not return home. The home country does not want to lose its nationals and certainly does not
want to lose remittances. And the parents themselves often continue to dream of returning ‘home’ and do not want their children to ‘lose their identity or give up their citizenship (Sheffer 64-65)

The ‘homecomings’ Baldwin talks of in her stories such as “Simran” and “Nothing Must Spoil this Visit”, are all natural, wherein the characters themselves chose to return, some permanently, some temporarily to India. Alfred Schutz in his essay “The Homecomer” remarks -

The homecomer...expects to return to an environment of which he always had and – so he thinks – still has intimate knowledge and which he has just to take for granted in order to find his bearings within it. The approaching stranger has to anticipate in a more or less empty way what he will find; the homecomer has just to recur to the memories of his past. So he feels; and because he feels so, he will suffer the typical shock described by Homer [in Odessey] (106-107)

The immigrants, while in their exile, or the period when they choose other countries of residence, conjure up their homeland, through imagination, which becomes in Rushdie’s sense of the term, “imaginary homeland”. But since the real homeland, is far removed from their imaginations, they end up being disappointed and disillusioned. This result in the immigrants experiencing a reverse shock of arrival and they thus become alienated from their homeland. William Safran depicts such ambivalence in the depiction of an old man talking about his homeland – “I have never lost hope in returning to my homeland someday. However, I no longer remember where I come from” (Safran 91). Homecoming thus becomes an ambivalent notion. (Re) creating and
Claiming the home involves challenges that evidently demands the returnee to undergo, changes and transformation in order to fit in.

“Simran” an emotional tale about a young girl being educated abroad, it narrates how Amrit, Simran’s dominant mother, and Mirza, a Muslim friend messes up Simran’s probability of being educated further. “Simran” is a story that stands unique because of its unconventional narrative style. The story is told from the point of view of two characters, who are linked to the title character Simran. One of the narrators is Simran’s mother Amrit and the other is Simran’s Muslim friend from America, known as Mirza. This is yet another account of homecoming, wherein Simran heads back to her home in Delhi for a vacation after being in America for four months. What awaits Simran here at home is old customs, conventions and traditional fetters. She realizes that nothing much has changed at home, and her overprotective mother seems to monitor her each and every move. Convention bound and traditional the mother is cautious that her daughter should not become too modern or americanized. On seeing her at the airport the mother says – “I was glad to see she was excited to see us. In America, children learn that they can blame their parents for everything and then they all, parents and children, spend years in psychotherapy. I felt so relieved to see her I was almost in tears. Which mother wouldn’t worry about a nineteen year old unmarried daughter so far away?” (39). The relationship between the mother and the daughter gets strained when the mother discovers a copy of Koran in her daughter’s baggage. Belonging to a proud Sikh family the mother does not tolerate it. Given the age old rivalry between the Sikhs and Muslims, the mother considers this as blasphemy –
We are proud Sikh family and we have long memories. Our gurus were tortured to death by Moghul rulers only three hundred years ago, and both Veeru’s family and mine still get tears in their eyes talking about the fate of old sikh friends and neighbours at the hands of Muslim marauders during the 1947 partition. Veeru is even old enough to remember the sight of Sikh women, raped and disgraced by Muslims, walking home to Amritsar. And my daughter comes back from America with a copy of the Koran? I don’t know what is in it- I only know it is the book that gave believers permission to kill us. Out loud, I said sternly, “I do not want this book in my house (40).

Simran dismisses it as a matter that is silly and urges her mother to be more tolerant. As soon as the mother tells the father about the Koran, both of them foresee an impending danger of their daughter becoming a Muslim. Matters become worse for Simran when her friend Mirza telephones her back home. Her mother is furious and asks - “who is this man who thinks he can call you in your parent’s home” (50). The mother is quick to notice that the man on the phone doesn’t have an American accent, and instead he has a Muslim accent. The mother blames Simran for encouraging and letting the Muslim stranger call her all the way from America. She strongly feels that sending her daughter to study in America at such a young age was a mistake. She feels that her daughter now laughs louder, improper for traditional Indian girls, her gestures are all of American indiscipline, and she walked as if a shameless blonde woman.

Simran has nothing to say in her justification except the fact that Mirza is just a friend of hers. Terrified by the events the parents think of getting Simran engaged to some nice Sikh boy before she leaves for America. Simran’s love for books such as
American Liberty theory and American sidewalk psychology is blamed by her mother for letting her daughter astray. Finally the parents take the fateful decision not to send Simran to America anymore. Their sense of hatred towards a Muslim, their sense of pride and honour of their daughter forces them to be blind towards their daughter’s future, her ambition and mostly her education. They had gone too far with their imagination that they felt –

...things people would say if they ever found out that she (Simran) consorted with a Muslim fellow. Still she denied it, as he explained disgrace as patiently as though she were a visitor from some other country. I (mother) felt now she was definitely pretending to be innocent. I even began to worry if she was still a virgin. I would look at her face and think; America has taught her to lie to her parents (53).

The story ends with Mirza’s narrative of how his wait at the railway station goes futile as Simran was never to come back. Mirza and Simran, though are from a new generation are still haunted by their once troubled past of being an Indian Sikh and a Pakistani Muslim. Even though they look forward to a friendly relationship and peaceful coexistence, the parents come as stark reminders of the brutality, bloodshed and hatred that happened during the time of partition.

The predicament of Simran is similar to that of Priya Rao in Amulya Malladi’s novel *The Mango Season* (2003). The protagonist Priya comes back from America to her traditional Telugu Brahmin family, in Hyderabad, in order to tell them about her plans to marry her American boyfriend Nick Collins. Like Simran’s mother, Priya’s mother also wants to dictate her life. Terrified that she has sent her daughter o study
abroad, the mother remarks, “An unmarried daughter, Priya is like a noose around the neck that is slowly tightening with every passing day” (35). As opposed to Simran, Priya is in a relationship with Nick, about which she is terrified to say to her parents, “my family was as conservative as his was liberal and that he would be lynched and I would be burned alive for bringing him, a foreigner, my lover, to my parents’ home” (2-3). Priya is thus forced to decide between romance and tradition. But unlike Simran, Priya seems to have a choice, her family as opposed to Simran’s yield to her wishes to marry Nick. The novel ends with Priya now back in San Francisco after her stay in India, which altered her perception of how she viewed her parents, her family and most importantly her relationship with Nick.

Bharati Mukherjee’s debut novel *The Tiger’s Daughter*, shows the protagonist Tara, an expatriate woman, who comes back to India to fulfill her desire to feel connected. It is only after her arrival that she feels that she fits nowhere. She finds her decision to visit India as “impulsive”, confusing her “fear of New York with homesickness” (21). Tara feels alienated in her home, with her extended family – “she now feared their tone, their omissions, and their aristocratic oneness” (43). The relatives viewed America as a place that is “lovely” (56), but disapproved her marriage to the white American David. Tara is stunned at their double standards. She finds it “best to return to New York” when she finds that the demarcation between “us people” and the “other” is much clear, evident and cruel within her family as compared to America” (84).

Another story in a similar vein is Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*. Contrary to the mothers in “Simran” and *The Mango Season*, the mother in Sidhwa’s novel.
Zareen Ginwalla, sends her sixteen year old daughter Feroza to America to keep her away from the conservative Pakistani society under General Zia. Being a liberal Parsee, a small sect in Pakistan it is difficult for the mother to see her teenage daughter growing much too conservative in her behavior and dressing. As a woman born into societies with restrictive social and political codes, however immigration is the only way of escape. Concerned with her daughter’s future in Pakistan, Zareen sends her daughter Feroza to America with her uncle Manek. But it is too late when the mother undertakes the journey from Lahore to Denver only to realize that her daughter is turned into a proper “American Brat”.

Baldwin’s “Nothing Must Spoil this Visit” talks about Arvind and his Canadian Hungarian wife Janet amidst turbulent politics of ‘race’ and ‘otherness’ as they return to India. What materializes out of this narrative is a reading of culture conflict and of how women are perceived within certain cultures. What forms the major crux of the story is the way Indian life is contrasted, with Canada through Janet’s perception of it – “India, up close. Ugliness, dirt, poverty, people. Janet closed smarting eyes” (98). The inherent ‘otherness’ of Janet is brought into prominence when the police officer at the check post insists on seeing Janet’s passport, while on the other hand Arvind’s racial proximity in an Indian context, helps him pass into Punjab without revealing his identity as a sikh. Janet is essentially perceived as the other when the policeman says to Arvind that he has managed to pick up a “meme”. Meme, a short abbreviation for “Mem-Sahib”, was used to describe a white woman. The policeman’s attitude, in a way portrays the feeling of pride, one has, when one is in possession of a white woman, a symbol of the colonizer. The policeman raked her bare legs with lecherous eye before permitting her enter the
state. Both Janet and Arvind, find it difficult to find the common ground in their respective understanding of border crossing. In possession of a brown man as opposed to a white man, Janet is reduced to an object now. The policeman's 'othering' of her by projecting gendered stereotypes, only emphasizes this fact.

Her close interaction with Arvind's family brings her closer to her husband's inherent Indianess, his personal history and their own inter-racial marriage. Janet admired the 'hero' within Arvind, through his descriptions of his political struggles in India. She viewed him as a 'heroic migrant'. As the story progresses we see that all of Janet's idealizations and self gratifying images of India, Arvind, and his family are shattered within the gendered and racialized stereotypes, practiced within the family. The Canadian experiences are portrayed through Janet, while Arvind's sister-in-law Chaya epitomizes Indian womanhood. Chaya who was once engaged to Arvind, later ends up marrying Kamal. Her mother-in-law remarks "After all, I chose her because I saw from the start she would be an adjustable woman" (120). For a woman like Janet, Chaya seems docile, dependant and incapable. On the other hand, from Chaya's point of view Janet has failed in her duty to give Arvind a child irrespective of her freedom and capacity for independent judgment. True test of womanhood for Chaya lay in bearing the husband's child. Janet is often referred to by Chaya as "Arvind's pale, large boned wife" (105).

For Janet, the experience in India is disillusionment. She feels one could never live in India if one is a woman raised in freedom. No matter how earnestly you try to become Indian, people treat you with their inherent concept of the 'other', the 'outsider'.
The ultimate truth that changes the relationships within the family is that it is Arvind who cannot have children. The hypocrisy of all the people within the family is left open. The father had wanted his eldest son to come back to India and settle down with the family, for he wanted an heir. The mother-in-law had hidden all her unhappiness at Arvind’s marriage to a white woman, just because what she wanted was grandchildren. The younger brother Kamal, had all the time been worried about his own son’s chances of inheriting the property, once Arvind had children. And the most shocking is Chaya’s own revelation – “I am laughing at all of it...at myself for wanting all these years a man who could not have given me any child” (127). Chaya feels a man who cannot produce children is not worth marrying, not even loving. Janet had loved Arvind unconditionally, her love for him is not bound by the dictates of family and society, wherein bearing children is the ultimate worth of a man. Shocked by such ignorance Janet goes back to pack her luggage to leave the country, while Arvind ignorant about his families perception about marriage, love and relationship, stays back.

The characters of both Simran and Janet, talk about tragic tale of homecoming. Having stayed in the foreign land (as in Simran’s case) having tasted the freedom and opportunities at self discovery there, they find it difficult and absurd having to adjust to India, which now seems only vaguely familiar. The bold and independent Janet, who arrives in India with presuppositions as that of any tourist, of India being exotic, heartwarming, welcoming etc soon become myths that need to be busted. The ultimate trauma is their acute awareness that they cannot live in India anymore. India is a country, but not their home. Though Janet, being independent goes back to Canada.
Simran stays back in Delhi, having been threatened with traditional moral codes and an impending arranged marriage.

**Stories of Immigration: Creating New Identity in the West**

The blurb of Baldwin’s book describes it as thus:

Through the eyes of these women adjusting to change, we see a world whose familiar rhythms mask dissonance and discord. Overtly, the stories are about the ongoing struggle of the Sikh women to keep their identity and assert it. More subtly, the stories describe the cost of integration into the new world, how colonialism survives in the minds of the colonized, and how these women confront the twin fears: fear of freedom and of the other (n.pag.)

Set in Montreal, Canada and narrated from the point of view of a young Sikh woman, “Montreal 1962”, depicts in first person, the wife’s imaginary conversation with the husband as she washes his turbans. Her husband along with all other perils of immigration must now face the challenge of being a turbaned Sikh. At a time when, hate crimes and racial discrimination were rampant, and the Canadian government had not come up with their Multicultural policies to help immigrants, the young woman’s husband must face the outside world, if he has to get a job. Being a Sikh is difficult, “They said I could have the job if I take off my turban and cut my hair short” (5).

Cultural displacement, identity crisis and the conflict between adopting a “Canadian” identity and holding on to one’s older identities are important issues for Baldwin. In “Montreal 1962” wearing the turban becomes the issue around which the complex claims of identity are played out. The turban signifies the
difference between amnesia and memory, between anonymity and identity.

(Dhawan et.al 138 -39)

Turban, long hair, beard and kirpan are the primary markers of a Sikh identity. The turban represents the complete loyalty and conviction towards the religion.

Their emigration to Canada contrary to their expectation has become tough and enduring, “You must be reborn white skinned- and clean-shaven to show it- to survive” (5). The cultural clashes are evident from the very beginning, when she takes out her wedding saris to the neighborhood drycleaners and the white women mistook it for a bed sheet. Offended, she brings it back. The cultural shock and the perplexity that takes over is an inevitable aspect of diasporic journey. The woman here is doubly marginalized, first she is an immigrant and secondly because she belongs to religious minority i.e. Sikh community. Suniti Namjoshi, in her poem How to be a Foreigner says-

First,

You take off your clothes,

Your titles and name

And put on a robe,

Sterile and clean,

With neat black letters

Marking THE STRANGERS.

Then,
You walk down the street,

Alone in fancy dress. (Khullar 24)

The wife begins to wash her husband’s turban, thinking of her own mother, “as my mother and hers must have done before me, that their men might face the world proud” (6). She starts tying one of the turbans into her own head “I wound it swiftly, deftly, till it jutted haughtily forward, adding four inches to my stature “(8). Her reflection in the mirror reminds her of her father, brother and now her husband, “you as you face Canada, myself as I need to be” (8). This gives her immense strength and she begins to smile. As a dutiful Sikh wife, she justifies her husband’s need to wear a turban and uphold its virtue and identity. And she says-

I will not let you cut your strong rope of hair 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 every day upon your head and work 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. (8)

Quite contrary to the wife in the above story, is the wife in “English Lessons”. Out of all the stories in the collection it is “English Lessons” that emerges as one of the most realistic and poignant immigrant narrative. The protagonist and narrator, a young Punjabi woman named Kanwaljit has just moved to America and impatiently waits for her Green card to arrive. She thinks of taking English lessons during that time. It is
revealed that her husband Tony has managed to get his green card by living with a black woman of American origin "He lived with her for two years, shared her bed, and paid her our life savings for a marriage certificate" (131). Afraid that anyone in America would know about her identity as a wife, she decided to rather take the role of Tony's girlfriend. She blames Tony's ex girlfriend for such a plight, "Is not my worm existence, my unacknowledged wifehood, enough for you? Enough that I call myself his girlfriend, my son his bastard?" (131).

Learning English seems to be the first step to survival in America. What comes as a shock is the attitude of the husband when he remarks -"I will not like it if you teach her more than I know. But 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" (133). Typical of patriarchal mindset, Tony doesn't want his wife to know much, but just enough for their survival. What is reflected here is the selfishness and insecurity of a husband who doesn't want his wife to be above him, or to be independent. But unlike the wife in "Montreal 1962", Kanwaljit seems to be ambitious and bold. She is not meek and submissive, and wants to venture out to test the horizons. Determined to get out of her apartment, she imagines the question she would ask the teacher - "Tomorrow, I will ask her where I can learn how to drive" (133).

The unnamed wife in Baldwin's story "The Cat Who Cried", similar to the wife in "Montreal 1262" and Kanwaljit overthrows patriarchy practiced by the male (her husband) and decides to stay back in America. It's about her fight and resistance she puts up when she comes face to face with the question of going back to India, and settling there. The story highlights the difference of opinion between the wife, who is more or
less an American of sorts, who respects her freedom and the individuality she has in America, and her conventional mother-in-law and husband. Though an immigrant, the husband still has the yearning to go back to India and settle down at the old Delhi mansion offered to him. He seems to represent the older notions of empire and is in fact a product of colonial influence through education and learning.

The mother thought of the wife to be a bad influence on her son, who under her influence had decided to stay in America instead of the “huge white bungalow on Aurangzeb Road till her (Mataji’s) old age” (137). He works for an insurance company, selling health and life insurance to other fellow Indians whom he calls ‘exiles’. He thinks that since they have worked hard in America for ten years now, maybe it is a good time to move back. But the wife does not think so. She remarks, “I am happy here” (138). She feels that it would rather be very silly to leave America and go back to India, just when they have begun doing better. She says, she likes it here in America, where she has friends, people who listen to her.

The wife here strongly resembles the character of Nazneen from Monica Ali’s novel *The Brick Lane*. Nazneen is a middle aged Bengali woman who lives with her husband and two daughters in the Tower Hamlet of East London. Her life, uneventful and isolated is one that is synonym of cultural isolation. But towards the end of the story Nazneen emerges out to be independent and free willed. Her ultimate victory is when she challenges her husband, just like the protagonist in Baldwin’s story and decides to stay back in London with her daughters.

The husband in Baldwin’s story wants to go back to his homeland. He seems to have made his mind—“Don’t be stupid, now. You think I want my daughter to paint her
face and have a boyfriend by the time she’s twelve and my son to join a gang and bring home some New Age junkie? You just leave the decisions to me” (139). This seems to be the temperament of every immigrant father in America who fears that his children will grow out to be Americans in thought, feeling and attitudes. Similar in attitude is Nazneen’s husband Chanu in Brick Lane. Justifying his decision to go back to Bangladesh he says—

[to] the white person, [we] are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan... But these [white] people are uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition...I don’t look down on them, but what can you do? [...] If a man...never in his life held a book in his hand, then what can you expect from him?” (Ali 28)

Having realized that going back to India would mean an end to her independence and freedom, the wife decides to apply for a job in America, and manages to get one in an accounting firm. She gets taunted for behaving like an American feminist. The final blow strikes the relationship when she learns that her husband is now in possession of her salary. Desperate to free herself from the suffocating shackles of her husband’s world and its values, she comes up with the ultimate truth that, she does not want to go to India and if he wants to go, he should better go alone.

Nazneen in Ali’s novel grows and flourishes, perceiving the idea of returning to Bangladesh as something constrictive, frightening, feudal and foreign. She physically and mentally embraces western standards, while Chanu denies them and slowly stagnates. He finds his situation in Britain intolerable, almost unbearable. His position as father,
husband, wage-earner and breadwinner is threatened by the society he believed was his future and which he never really became a part of.

Our society, whether in the homeland or the adopted land has certain fixed notion about the roles men and women have, and in truth they differ a lot. The men Baldwin portray here, such as Kanwaljit’s self centered husband in “English Lessons” or chauvinist husband in “The Cat Who Cried” all have set ideologies about what their women must do. In the pretence of providing security for the women, the men keep them shut from the outer world. “Woman who pays a price for the preservation of the essential (nationalist) spirit, always a woman who must keep smiling and hide her pain so as not to betray the fragility of this spiritual heritage, the high cost of its maintenance, and the euphoric security of its myth” (Bhattacharjee 24). Karen Homey writes : “Men have certain fixed ideologies concerning the nature of women, that women is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, is limited in capacities for work – even that masochistic by nature” (Horney 231). Commenting on the role of Sikh women towards identity building and preserving Sikh cultural beliefs, Baldwin in an interview with Naheéd Mustafa says –

Sikh women are also at fault because we leave political and religious leadership roles to men. In fact, the whole burden of our faith resides visually on the men. They have to wear the turban, they have to wear the beard, and they have to be brave enough to look different. So a sikh women becomes pretty strong because she has to defend her man in many instances. In that sense, yes we do become equal, because we are equally capable in defending our religion. But that doesn’t mean we are equally capable in defending ourselves (n.pag)
Explicating the dialectic of power among the individuals, Foucault maintains that where there is power among the individuals, there is surely resistance. He argues that every relationship of power implies a potential “strategy of struggle” that is to say, a relationship of power has as one of its limits a relationship of confrontation by which it may be displaced or undermined. He further maintains that existence is one of the fundamental conditions of operation of power. It is through the articulation of points of resistance that power is disrupted. (Foucault 147 & 225)

“Toronto 1984”, depicts the life of two Sikh women, who have come to Toronto after the terror and torture of the Sikhs back in India during the emergency. The story is narrated from the point of view of the mother (Bibiji) and her daughter (Piya) in an alternative fashion.

Piya is twenty four years old and is essentially Canadian in her ways and attitude. Assimilating into the Canadian culture for survival with markers such as- lipstick, briefcase, skirt, slip, pumps etc she works for an accounting firm and takes pride in the fact that she knows computers and owns one. She sighs, “...lucky I have fair skin” (57). With each gesture she does she fakes the essential Canadian-ness needed for an immigrant, “Omigod, with sugar! I keep saying I like it cold. Yes, Canadian way” (57), but is still referred to as “paki” in her office. “Paki” is a widespread term used by the Canadians to refer to south Asians in general. Piya realizes that she must now represent a lot many different things, “I am all of India and Pakistan and Bangladesh. I am a million and a half people sitting in one small office in Mississauga. I wear a label and will take pride in being a damn Paki” (61). Identity crisis and the conflict between adopting a
Canadian identity and at the same time holding on to one innate Indianess is an important issue here.

Bibiji, belonging to the older generation, is cautious about the significant change that has come over her daughter. Complaining to her son, who throughout the story is a mute listener to his mother and sister, Bibiji says “I ask you, is it decent for a not-married girl to go travelling all over Canada, computer or no computer, ji?...first you got us immigration here, she did her classes at polytechnic. But now I don't like this too much freedom” (58). This reflects a somewhat patriarchal ideology, which she holds to be the norm which can be seen as an offshoot of her life in India, combined with her insecurities of being uprooted from home to an alien soil makes things difficult. Belonging to the older generation Bibiji tries to cling strenuously to her culture and her religious and linguistic identity. Bibiji fears that something bad might happen, if the daughter becomes too much Canadian in her ways. She asks her son to find a suitable “Jat Sikh” boy from India for her daughter. With the intervention of her sister back home, Bibiji manages to find a suitable match for Piya, and intends to leave for India soon before her daughter gets too much Canadian.

Their visit to India is cancelled when they hear the news of Indira Gandhi’s assassination on the BBC and that too by a Sikh. Obvious of the fact that the casteist Hindus will be after Sikh blood they choose to stay back in Canada. The decision is taken quick, for Bibiji believes that instead of the communal riots and bloodshed it’s far better to be in an alien land. The desperateness makes her find another match for Piya, the son of the travel agent Sardar Mohan Singh, “they have been here for many years, but I think he is still a good boy. Not too much freedom gone to his head. You know, not become
too Canadian” (63). The story ends as she says- “Achcha, no more time for talk. I must say my prayers for all the Sikhs in India” (63).

In *The Third World Novel of Expatriation*, Vinay Kirpal states – “For modern or traditional, it is the eternal quest of man to seek to put down roots somewhere, to possess some point of space to which he can relate emotionally or psychologically” (45). What we see here is the fact that diasporic subjects like Bibiji are quite capable of building an imaginary community around her. She need not be at home i.e. India to reclaim her identity, what she needs is emotional tropes which make her feel at home and some space she can relate to as home. Bibiji is what Rushdie in *Imaginary Homeland* says, “...obliged to deal with broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost... (and he) will create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10-11). Similarly what we see here is that both the women, the wife in the earlier story and Bibiji, try to make the adopted land (Canada), a little closer, by reproducing and replicating their tradition, stories and lifestyles there, which they could identify more as a home.

“Devika” is a story, typical of a woman immigrant’s narrative of her fears, anxiety and astonishment in a foreign land. Having arrived in Toronto after her marriage to Ratan, who is a big and established stock broker, Devika’s disillusionment starts at a very early stage. Forced to stay alone, the whole day in the twenty first floor of the apartment complex, all Devika does is to cook Indian food for her husband, “This is what good wives do” (159). Her thoughts constantly shift to her parents’ home in Delhi.
...and then street vendors would be crying their wares with dust-parched throats, stripping tar off sun-baked streets with their worn cycle tires. There, scooter rickshaw drivers would be squinting into sun mirages. But here, on the twenty-first floor overlooking the Don Valley Parkway, the Toronto Star sat on the coffee table and, unaware of clashing adjectives, proclaimed it a sunny and cold day. (160)

Ratan wants Devika to be like a Canadian woman, dressed in skirt and blouse, instead of salwar kameez. He wants her to try and make Italian and Chinese dishes instead of mutter paneer. He wants her to be able to speak English and learn driving. For Ratan, the ideal was his boss, Peter Kendell’s wife. Ratan feels about Devika thus, - “She looked like one of those Indian women who promenade on Gerrard Street on Sunday evenings, teetering in their high-heeled sandals on the slushy sidewalks, examining racks of ready-made salwar kameezes from India and gossiping about the Hindi film stars” (165).

With the multifaceted family structure missing all together - “She wanted 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.”(163). Devika must improvise to build up her identity. Ultimately, she succeeds to do so by creating her alter ego, Asha. Asha an imaginary character, her old friend now starts living with her. Devika has always been fascinated by Asha. While in college Asha was a revolutionary, a rebel and free thinker. Asha is all that Devika is not –

Asha wanted things Devika had never wanted. Asha wanted t take driving lessons. Asha wanted to visit Niagara Falls. Asha wanted to take flying lessons
at Brampton Airport, instead of going and visiting Vandana Di every Sunday.
Asha wanted to climb the CN Tower and go to Canada's Wonderland all alone.
Asha wanted to know how it felt to ride a horse bareback. Asha thought love
should make a woman feel like a banana split with all three scoops melting
inside. Asha wanted to ride a fork-lift truck and wear a hard hat and overalls.
Asha wanted to drive all the way to Vancouver with a CB radio and a trucker
who could sing woeful country ballads (172-73)

Asha with her foreign cigarettes and leather mini skirt is strong-willed and provocative.
She represents the Western wife that Devika's husband encourages her to become.
Hallucinating about Asha's presence, Devika goes for walks in the street all alone. On
the pretence of buying clothes for Asha, Devika buys cowboy jean jacket and high
heeled boots. Asha likes to smoke too.

Devika's disillusionment grows by each day, that she turns out to be more of
Asha. The final transformation takes place when Devika meets with an accident. She
suffers from concussions, bruises and a broken arm. She wanted her family back home,
"but here there was only Ratan, Canadian Ratan...there was only Ratan, and Canada,
and herself. No one else" (179). When Ratan asks her how she feels, she replies - "I am
Asha...Devika was afraid of living here, so she just flew away" (179). Devika quite
knew that in order to survive in Canada, it is necessary to kill, one of her 'self' that
yearns for India, her culture, and her people. Impossible to shed her native Indianess,
she creates her alter ego Asha. It's through Asha that Devika hopes to survive in
Canada. Asha's rebellious nature, her carefree attitude, her love for travel and
exploration are things Devika can't think off until and unless she disowns her identity.
As 'Asha' which means hope Devika is reborn to survive in the cold country that Canada is.

Baldwin's Devika finds parallels in Bharati Mukherjee's Dimple Basu, the protagonist of the novel *Wife*. The novel marks the failure of its protagonist Dimple, who in her struggle to maintain the balance between her desire to assimilate and feel at home in America on the one hand and retaining her self-imposed Indian identity on the other, messes up her life. Like Devika, Dimple also had dreams and aspirations such as “freedom”, “love” (3), “real life” (13) and “expressing yourself” (20). She thinks of her marriage, and her travel to America as a stepping stone which will bring her closer to fulfilling her dreams, which eventually fails her. She like Devika fails to act upon her wishes as she does not possess the strength of breaking off from her traditions, fearing that it may invite criticism from her husband and her family back in India.

In the women centered short fiction created by women writers, geographical dislocations are portrayed to be emancipatory and are seen as providing considerable opportunities females to confront and revise the stereotypical gender roles. Women who are in transit between the homeland and adopted land, between past and present are initially seen to be at conflict with themselves. Many such women characters create their alter egos and cultural doubles. This is what Homi K. Bhabha calls the 'uncanny moment' of cultural difference.

In Devika’s case Asha comes into being to resurrect and de-center the gender roles into which Devika has been put. Her role is to give voice to Devika who has been silenced and forgotten. Asha counters gendered expectations of acceptable behavior on
the part of the woman and also bursts the west’s categorizations of India as a site of muggy traditions and the West as a site of freedom and agency. Devika thus invents her alter ego to create new interstitial spaces for identity. Baldwin’s women, in their own capacity,

...try to make the land which is not “theirs”, a little closer to what they would identify as “home”, by reproducing and replicating their traditions, stories, even lifestyles. The act of story –telling takes on an important dimension in Baldwin’s *English Lessons*; writing from the perspective of these women in a way of giving them a voice, or rather, perhaps, of giving them an ear, for their eloquence was never in question. (Dhawan et.al. 139)

Quite different from the earlier collection of short stories, Baldwin’s *We Are Not in Pakistan* (2007) broadens the geographical canvas of her creative writing and stretches it to myriad of characters who are not just Indian Americans and Indian Canadians, but also from Ukraine, Moscow, Pakistan and Costa Rico. Talking about her identity Baldwin says “I never fit in anywhere...I’ve been a minority in three different countries, so I’m quite comfortable with the idea of being uncomfortable” (Barber n.pag.). Adjusting her fiction to the changes of globalization Baldwin creates stories that are set in the background of events such as Chernobyl gas tragedy, 9/11 terrorist attack and the tsunami of 2005. Since the focus in the chapter is on woman from the Indian subcontinent, the stories “Naina”, “We Are Not in Pakistan” and “The Distance Between Us” fall under such categorization.
Magic realistic in nature “Naina” portrays the life of the title character and protagonist Naina, a Sikh woman, living an isolated life in Canada. Her predicament is the aftermath of a fourteen year long pregnancy, where still the baby refuses to come out—“Leave her. When she’s ready, she’ll come” (53). Pregnant for fourteen years now, with no trace of the baby coming out, she has become a curious case for medical sciences, media and newspapers. The baby conceived as a result of a relationship with her white lover Stanford, who left her soon after, has been intriguing many doctors. Baldwin has endowed Naina with immense courage and fierce independence. Having shunned the Indian traditional ways and moral codes, she has survived in Canada for this long. After coming to know about her affair with the white man and the subsequent pregnancy, her traditional family has abandoned her—“I have done nothing wrong” says Naina. All I committed was love. There is too little of it so I felt it. Enough for all of us. Assimilating into the Canadian way she has struggled for survival—“One job she had, soon after Stanford left, was delivering parcels. She discarded her bright salwar kameez for the drab brown slacks and shirt of a UPS uniform. Perched high above cars in her cab, long hair wound into a tight bun and hidden away under the cap” (56).

Her cousin sister Sunita, who likes to be called ‘Sue’ is the only visitor she has. Presented as a complete foil to the character of Naina, Sunita is hypocritical in her attitude. Even though Sunita is modern outwardly, “driving all the way east and spending several toonies to park her white BMW” (57), she too cannot get out of her typical Indian mindset. She advises Naina—“Lose a little weight....Otherwise, even if you make up, how will uncle and aunty find you a match? They’ll have to find a widower or even a divorced fellow now, but still you have a chance. Then you can have children just like
mine” (58). Commenting on the gender bias prevalent in our society from time immemorial, Simone de Beauvoir observes “He (man) is the subject, he is absolute, and she (woman) is the other”. “She is differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential” (XLIV-V). “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to woman by society. It is still true that most women are married or have been married or plan to be or suffering from not being” (291)

Such advices never bother Naina, as she continues to do what she is doing. For a livelihood, Naina works as a cleaning staff in a corporate office, since its good money. A job her family would have detested – “the family is not of that caste of people who clean for others” (59). Naina had faced racial discrimination in Canada, from none other than her white lover Stanford. With a white collar job in hand, he always felt threatened by the presence of the brown immigrants around. He looked at them as possible threats who might dilute his purity of being white in a white society – “It took months for her (Naina) to understand that he felt foreign because of all these people from other countries coming to Canada, taking over all they (Canadians) have built” (59).

The unborn girl child of Naina is symbolic of a yearning of immigrants to someday inhabit a society free of racial discrimination and hate crime. The child conveys her fears to Naina that she wants to be born in a society that respects her for what she is. The unborn child inspires Naina to keep her struggle going “live with your fear and your doubt and, even so bring me to light” (63). The daughter is born to her on the Diwali day. Again an apt symbolism conveying the return of lord Ram from fourteen years of exile.
just as the baby here. Her birth signifies an end to all the evils in the society at least that is what Baldwin hints here.

Basundhara Roy in her article “Re-Inscribing the Mother within Motherhood: A Feminist Reading of Shauna Singh Baldwin’s Short Story Naina” notes –

The Naina that the end of the story leaves us with is a confidant mother, aware of her own potentialities, her empowered identity and assertive of her position in society. She no longer needs to fear countenancing her ‘Family’ or Stanford (both being agents of patriarchy in her life) for she has achieved the joyful state of motherhood without their help and her daughter desires no other identity than that which her physical coming to birth will give her. Baldwin’s tale, therefore, ends in a triumphant celebration, reclamaiton and repositioning of the silenced and marginalized mother within the narrative of motherhood and by its establishment of a matrifocal family unit through a firm mother-daughter bond, the story envisages an enlightened feminist future. (5)

Baldwin’s “Naina” can be seen as a satire on the rigid presuppositions that prevailed in Indian immigrant communities in Canada. There are instances where she mocks at the high class morals set up by the conservative families and also women Canada. “Naina” subverts the whole notion of the ideal female representation we find in reformist literature in general where a woman’s role is to obey the rules put up by the patriarchal society, to marry and settle down, and to raise kids as per the wish of the husband. She thus totally dismantles and topples the standards of the procreative, restricted, family-centered feminine ideals. Naina’s case is one that talks about the
significance of the social fabric which determines what we become, rather than what we are. Gender is a totally different construct, and has nothing to do with biology. It is a socially and culturally constructed which regularly traverses with the issues of race, class and ethnicity to produce fundamentally dissimilar experiences of what it means to be a woman. As Simone de Beauvoir says, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295). The verb “becomes” implies that gender identity is both culturally constructed and in some senses constructed by the individuals themselves. Naina is utmost a feminist subject, a rebel in all aspects who creates her own destiny, in contrast to the iconic figure of the female as passive, culturally fixed in an object relationship in which she is always the inferior.

Two young women trying to negotiate their life in post 9/11 America forms the crux of stories such as “The Distance Between Us” and “We Are Not in Pakistan”. Uma Ginther, a twenty three year old feels the need to find and meet her father, Karanbir Singh, a Sikh, after her mother dies. Now orphaned, and a racial hybrid she must negotiate with an environment that has turned hostile to immigrants lately. Even though she has a pale skin, her black hair and brown eyes mark her out as an ‘other’ among the whites, an inheritance passed on to her by her mixed German and Indian parentage. The father, a sikh man, a first generation immigrant has lived in America for long and has secured a position of an economics professor in a university in Santa Barbara, California – “Only faculty member with turban and beard” (219). The daughter, a product of his green card marriage years back, brings him to think about his own lonely existence. A startling realization of his own misfortunes dawns upon him when he thinks of himself, all alone, unmarried and old without a family of his own. Striving to secure a job and a
fortune for himself and his mother and sisters back home, he had forgotten about himself. Neither did he feel the need to remarry after his green card wife left him as soon as the contract ended.

The difference between the daughter and father is that, Uma always tried to be an American – “puts on a pair of boxy sunglasses and flicks a lighter without asking permission, takes a deep drag on a cigarette” (223). Her father’s appearance invokes in her the same feelings as any other native would feel – “The turban, the moustache. Jeez, a Toyota. Pretty uncool. Were all Indian men so dark? She had not met any Indians up close in Detroit. Only seen bright fluttery figures entering a Hindu temple” (224). The father himself acknowledge these differences thus – “Uma has what he came to America for. Economic freedom, intellectual freedom. She can be anything he once wanted to do, more than can be accomplished in one lifetime. You are born here….You cannot be deported. You have light skin…” (232-233)

Her stay with her father brings her close to realizing how vulnerable immigrants are to crimes related to religion and race. Being a Sikh immigrant has its own difficulties. There are many instances of racial slurs being hurled at her father throughout the story. His days open up to news about hate crimes, now rampant “another Sikh man beaten up in New Jersey” (209). His turban and bearded brown face has always framed him with suspicion. While waiting for her at the train station, he is abused “Go home, Bin Laden!” (221). The neighborhood kids have painted his garage door with graffiti “How to stop wars - kill the ragheads” (227). Karan’s travel to Karachi in 1977 had landed him in great trouble during the post 9/11 days. The police got him arrested and interrogated. Those were the days of fear and trauma –
His alien registration card said he was a permanent resident on Day One. But they took till Day Five of harassment and solitary to let him go. This happened in God Blessed America. It happened to him. And for five days and nights he sat alone in a cell in Sacramento, no one asked where Dr. Karanbir Singh was (231)

Sunil Bhatia in his article “9/11 and the Indian Diaspora: Narratives of Race, Place and Immigrant Identity” observes –

These post 9/11 narratives from the Indian diaspora spell out the contradictions, tensions and the cultural specificities involved in the experiences of a diasporic immigrant living with multiple cultures and histories that seem incompatible living with multiple cultures and histories that seem incompatible with each other. Additionally, these narratives show how various structural and sociological forces influence the psychological positions of feeling simultaneously assimilated, separated and marginalized. (Bhatia 29)

The tragic events of 9/11 have made Indian immigrants to rethink and reassess their position as immigrants in United States. Their process of assimilation and their freedom of movement have been deeply constrained by the horrors of the terrorist attacks. Many immigrants are thus using the frame of 9/11 and are forced to contextualize their Indianness and racial identity in the wake of these events. The larger sentiment prevailing among the Americans during the post 9/11 scenario was to hate everyone who looked different from them. The nationalist attitude was in peak, that the whole nation was gripped in nationalist fervor where people raised slogans, draped themselves in American flag etc. The American news channels and print media played a definitive role in shaping the post 9/11 Indian diasporic consciousness as they kept flashing the photos of Osama
Bin Laden, the mastermind behind the terrorist attack who is also the leader of Al Qaida. This man with his turban and long beard emerged as a new face of terrorism. According to Bandana Purkayastha

When other countries are seen as “threatening” to the United States, politically or economically, racialized individuals who look like “the enemy” to a section of majority group are subjected to higher levels discrimination and hate. Those caught in the spotlight remember their vulnerability at being under a significant level of public scrutiny, while those who turn on the light do not hold the impression beyond that moment (42)

Suspicions about alleged terror links was so much that, days after the attacks many Indian origin men, especially Sikh were interrogated. The physical appearance of Sikhs with, beard and turban had raised much suspicion among the whites that they looked down upon them as possible threats to the white society. “The Sikh males in the South Asian community became hyper visible because of their beards and turbans and were victims of several hate crimes across the nation. The hate crimes were further legitimized when some radio stations described Sikh men as “towels”, “diaper heads” and “cloth heads” (Bhatia 31). Sikh men with family and other responsibility felt so insecure that many of them cut their hair, and shaved their beards to get rid of the social stigma. Even though many Sikhs who had been living in America for quite a long time had integrated themselves into the white society, 9/11 attacks recasted their cultural identity and ethnicity as dubious, suspicious and dangerous. Communities of Sikh religious groups in America tried to campaign against such misunderstandings and tried conveying people that Sikhism was different from Islam, and believed in peace and harmony. Talking about
her own experience as a Sikh in the post 9/11 America Baldwin in an interview with Deepa Kandaswamy says, “Fear of foreigners ("foreigner" is currently defined in each society and time) stems from fear of miscegenation/pollution across race, caste or class. So there is not more or less xenophobia after 9/11, but the crime became an excuse for xenophobes to act out repressed fears” (n.pag.)

Irrespective of the differences, of habit, colour and most of all nationality, Uma forms a bond with her father, one that is initiated after the final blow of racial attack when his house is set on fire by a supposedly hostile neighbourhood kid. Uma’s proximity to her father at the times of despair, as she witnesses the horrors, makes her think about her own identity. Her pale skin and American accent might help her a little, but her own realization about her own racial hybridity and racial vulnerability, thwart her attempt to aspire a place at the centre. She still hopes for a place at the centre leaving the peripheries. Her condition as a hybrid diasporan can be well exemplified through Walker Conner’s understanding of where diasporans stand in their adopted country. Conner says

...diasporans are viewed at best as outsiders, strangers within the gates. They may be tolerated, even treated most equitably, and individual members of the diaspora may achieve highest office. Their stay may be multigenerational, but they remain outsiders in the eyes of the indigenes, who reserve the inalienable right to assert their primary and exclusive proprietary claim to the homeland, should they so desire (qtd. in Sheffer 18)

“We Are Not in Pakistan” talks about the relationship between sixteen year old Kathleen and her grandmother, whom she hates for being a Pakistani. Kathleen feels it is her
Pakistani grandma’s presence that frames her family as different when compared to other families and kids in the predominantly white neighborhood. She thinks that –

Without Grandma’s world hanging its stinking sandals about her family’s neck, Kathleen’s mom would not have been born in Pakistan or have her name like Safia. And Mom wouldn’t have jabbered in Urdu every Sunday on the phone with Grandma. Mom wouldn’t have “needed” Pakistani food all the time....Without Grandma Miriam, Kathleen would not have long black hair and a too prominent “Pakistani nose”. And she would not get so mocha toned in summer that her skin got out of sync with her hazel eyes (136)

The grandmother on the other hand does not seem to make much effort to assimilate into the American ways of life, and reclaims as much of her home she can in her small apartment in Lafayette. The only regret she has is that she was born a Christian in Pakistan – “We had to leave. Slowly, gradually, each of us realized we had no future there. People in Pakistan didn’t want us...we are Christians” (139-140). Her only acquaintances in America seem to be a bunch of Pakistanis who toil hard to find some ways of survival. Many of them have had bad experiences and murkier pasts. Thinking about them grandma says – “There’s Anser Mahmood....He spent next four months in solitary at the Detention Center in Brooklyn and hasn’t been the same....And Aisha, the Immigration chaps arrested her husband Touseef – anthrax possession. Aisha was taken away to local jail and strip – searched” (142).

Kathleen and her grandmother’s position as immigrants is a complicated one. Since they belong to Pakistan, they are invariably thought to be Muslim. Christians are a
minority group in Pakistan, and hence are influenced by the Islamic culture. The grandmother and Kathleen’s mother speak Urdu at home. The mother is named “Safia”, a Muslim name as opposed to Christian names the grandma and granddaughter have – Miriam and Kathleen. Grandma insists on following Islamic ideologies of how a woman must dress, keep her head covered, and modest ways of behavior in public. Women in diasporic communities are viewed as representatives of tradition, spirituality and cultural roots. According to Sayantini Dasgupta “The main casualty of our communities’ efforts to reformulate homogenous ‘authenticity’ are women...South Asian women in America are given the task of perpetuating anachronistic customs and traditions” (5). Kathleen hates her because she had put puritanical restrictions on Kathleen – “Tankinis, tank-tops and spaghetti straps were not allowed. Nor were bare midriffs. Hipster jeans were forbidden. And no Nikes, absolutely no Nikes” (136). Frustrated Kathleen associates her grandma with the “Third world” (13) and feels glad that she is not in Pakistan. By dressing up like other white children, Kathleen is preventing the danger of being thought of as a Asian Muslim, a situation that she feels is dangerous - “Several South Asian American women were reminded by their friends and family members to stop wearing *saris* or *salwar kameezes* (traditional clothing) and were also asked to “lay low” so that they don’t make themselves visible during the post – 9/11 times” (Bhatia 31).

Grandma’s disappearance later in the story provides Kathleen a chance to do whatever was restricted to her. She loves the new found freedom “She runs upstairs, wriggles out her pyjamas and into a sweatshirt and jeans. Turns on rap music louder than loud, just because she can” (149). Growing up in the dominant white society can be stressful and confusing. Kathleen’s situation is such –
Not able to live up to the “unattainable” images of “Charlie’s Angels” and the golden – curled girls of “The Brady Bunch”, and facing repeated and constant racial slurs at school such as “nigger”, “injun” and “hindoo....For many second generation immigrants, being “othered” or “racialized” accentuates the pain of dislocation and displacement. These external positions and voices that are marked and assigned to the “brown” girl become internalized or appropriated” (qtd. in Sahoo and Maharaj 627)

It is with the disappearance of the grandmother that things start getting complicated. Provided the insecure state in which the family lives, they find it hard to communicate this to the police or even to the Homeland security - “We might as well phone Homeland Security. The cops are in cahoots with them anyway. Don’t I see it at the airport? They don’t look at the expiration dates on passports. They’re looking at place of birth. Mine clearly says Pakistan. If they take me away too, who’ll look after you?” (155). Post 9/11 situation in America, has been one where a number of South Asians and people from Middle East, irrespective of their national belonging, ethnicity and religion were misrecognised as ‘Muslims’, and were thus suspected of having terror links. Issues such as religion and nationality play a decisive role here, as they become politically charged categories. According to Sunaina Maira, in her essay “Citizenship and Dissent in Diaspora: Indian Immigrant Youth in the United States After 9/11” –

As part of the domestic ‘war on terror’, over 1,200 Muslim immigrant men were rounded up and detained in the aftermath of 9/11, without any criminal charges, some in high security prisons. Nearly 40 percent of the detainees are thought to be Pakistani, through virtually none of the detainees has been identified publicly...
and the locations where they have been held remained secret....hate crimes against those believed to be Muslims in 2001 increased by 1,600 per cent from the previous year’s” (Raghuram et.al. 134).

Even though the grandmother is a legal immigrant with all her documents and passports intact, they worry about different accusations the grandmother might face, in case her identity is revealed to be that of a Pakistani. She might be thought of as a ‘terrorist’ –“she could be wearing an orange jumpsuit along with the 9/11 detainees and the Afghan POW’s at Guantanamo, and we wouldn’t know” (156). From what emerges out of this post 9/11 narratives is that, more than a war waged against terrorism, it was more against the immigrants who felt threatened, their freedom of movement curtailed and their lives monitored. The FBI and other home security departments are supposed to have monitored phone calls, emails and even personnel bank accounts of Muslim immigrants. The family here in the story is not different. The disappearance of the grandmother, they think might put them in target positions as supposed enemy. Their nationality puts them in such a fluid state that they are even afraid to exercise their rights as other American citizens might have. Summing up the angst, the mother says –

Have you any idea how difficult it is to stay legal? Its damn near impossible. Lose a job that brought you here or get laid off before you have enough money saved for the trip home and two months later you are illegal. Take nine credits instead of twelve on a student visa and you can be deported. And now they just take away your passport and you’re stateless. Can’t prove you’re from anywhere. (155)
As a second generation Sikh immigrant Baldwin's short fiction is culture and religion specific. With a rich history and legacy of Sikh heroism, their pain and passion at her disposal, Baldwin clearly lends voice to her people in diaspora. Her major concern however is to look at the issues of racism in Canada as experienced by the first generation, and later in America in the wake of 9/11. Shifting from one country to another, Baldwin stresses on the different modes of identity formation adopted by Sikh women. Having stressed the need to build a global identity, it would be interesting to note how, the much younger second generation writer Jhumpa Lahiri, with an already hyphenated identity and hybrid consciousness, takes these issues a lot further.