

CHAPTER 3

(a) Darkest Before Dawn: An intimate relationship with heritage

Uma Parameswaran deals with the major issues of Indian diasporas and negotiates the questions of identity and belongingness in most of her works. The present story “Darkest Before Dawn” has been taken from the collection of short stories *What Was Always Hers* and it embodies the problems of second generation immigrants who have taken the experience of both the lands, homeland and host land. Their sufferings are worse than the first generation immigrants because they think that Canada is their home now, try to send roots and struggles to assimilate in its culture but the intimate relationship with culture and heritage of homeland does not allow them to integrate.

Jayant is playing his violin but he is not able to get the right note and puts it aside. It is not at all surprising for him because he knows that everything he touches turns into a mess. It seems that treachery has become his companion for life. Nowadays he is planning for a road trip with his white Canadian friends and he would be away from his home for one year. His one and half year elder sister, Jyoti who is very close to him, is trying to tell him that how much they all would miss him. They start with some cold conversation but it soon turns into a heated altercation. She says, “I am glad you are pitching out because that is the only way it’ll get into that thick skull of yours that we are different, and no matter what we do, we are never going to fit in here. Take to the road, get high, sleep around, but still and all, we’ll never belong except in our own homes” (115). In this statement, Jyoti emphasizes on their identity as ‘Other’, that even spending so many years in Canada they are still being treated differently by its natives. No matters what they do, whether go for a road troupe for a purpose or reach a high position, nobody cares about them and they would never get the same status as any Canadian enjoys. It is suggestive that Jyoti is aware of a kind of difference which the diasporas receive and wants Jayant should also know this as soon as possible because they would not accept him as a part of this country at any cost. She claims that Jayant would never be able to be the one among the white boys since he does not have their skin colour and she is glad that he has stopped playing the games in which he excels because his talent would go waste on this land due to negligence of the people. Jyoti is conscious of her diasporic status and

seems to be more inclined towards her home land which has been left behind and she draws her real identity from this ultimate source. She firmly believes in Indian cultural heritage and values where she belongs. In contrast to it, her brother Jayant no more believes in them and argues in the following words:

Don't you come at me with all that crap about morals and Hindu values. I've had an earful from Dad for nineteen fucking years. He and his pipe dreams about India. Why the hell didn't he stay there? A nuclear scientist, Trombay, the whole bit. He'd have been somebody by now. Instead he quits the place to be and rots here selling houses. (115)

This fight discloses Jayant's disbelief in Hindu moral values and calls them 'crap' because he thinks that as they have left their home back in India so as the values and they should not stick to them all the time. In addition to it, they have been living in Canada for past several years so they should adopt this culture and its values to survive in this country. He complains about his father's decision of giving up his bright career as a nuclear scientist back in India where he would have reached a very high position by now, but he preferred to move to Canada for selling houses. And here being on this foreign land he has been teaching his cultural values and ancient heritage to his children for past nineteen years to keep them aware of it, but Jayant does not want to hear of him anymore. It appears vividly that Jayant is himself attached to his nation which has been left behind but externally he attempts to integrate into Canadian culture where he is destined to be in diaspora. He finds himself in-between two cultures and nations which is difficult to handle, so we might say that to get rid of such kind of situation, Jayant finds a way to run away by embarking this troupe. Whereas on the other hand Jyoti tries to defend her father for abandoning his career and his displacement from India to Canada by giving the reason that he wanted to provide better opportunities and environment for the development of his children. But Jayant does not accept it and states that it is just a way to rationalize his failure. Furthermore, he taunts her that she does not know anything since she lives in dreams with her white Canadian boy friend, Pierre but if she had got laid with him a couple of times, she would not have advocated Indian values like this. But her eyes reveal the fact that she has done what he is asking for. After this argument, Jyoti goes in her room and remembers a poem which she recited in the school. It says:

Oh call my brother back to me!
I cannot play alone:
The summer comes with flowers and bee,
Where is my brother gone? (116)

As Jayant is preparing for the road troupe and soon be away from his family. His departure would majorly affect Jyoti because she is very close to him and she would feel lonely. Even in this poem she is asking about her brother who has gone somewhere and wants him back because she cannot play alone. This poem also suggests the present situation in which Jayant is moving away from his roots, culture and moral values and struggling to merge into another culture but Jyoti is still stick to them and wants her brother back to the roots with the same beliefs.

Though Jayant is trying to integrate in alien culture yet his beautiful memories of his past life spent in India always memorize him and he starts thinking about them. He remembers his grandmother seated in the large and rectangular courtyard of their ancestral house which had a bakul tree, flowers of jasmine, *raat-ki-rani*, and some banana trees. On the left side of the wall some patches of coriander, mint and fresh okra were also grown. The servants' quarters and latrines were separated from their house. The ground was usually plastered with the cow-dung water which was as hard as tennis court. At the centre, there was a planter of whitewashed bricks for *tulsi* plant with a space for niches where the clay lamps and incense sticks were lighted. And near it there was a parijata tree under which his grandmother used to sit with her violin. This explicit description of the ancestral house by Jayant indicates that it never faded in his memories, as he has an indelible impact of it which is still imprinted on his mind as it is. Suddenly, a scene from his first visit to his grandparent's house after four years migration to Canada flashes before his eyes. His Aji was playing her violin under the same tree and he who was conscious of his Marathi, tried to avoid taking the initiative to go and speak to her. The last four years away from India had rusted his Marathi, "even though his parents spoke Marathi at home, he and Jyoti had switched to English and his kid brother, Krish, could not even understand Marathi" (118). It is suggestive that young generation of diaspora is losing their connection with native language in order to adopt a foreign language. Jayant only listened to her well trained and melodious voice but Aji made him sit beside her and persuaded to sing a song for her but he avoided because he could not enunciate even familiar Marathi words. Then, Aji started teasing him for his calloused hands which he got from woodcutting and she intended to use those hands in learning violin so that she could leave her violin for him as a heritage after her death. She told him that she had been the only violinist in their musical ancestry family and wanted him to become her descendant in this art. Jayant got really excited, having heard his grandmother's promise of teaching violin and bestowing her violin

to him. Even in three months he learnt the basics of classical music on the violin. After two years of this incident his grandmother died and he still does not know whether she has left her violin for him or not. All this shows that Jayant himself is very much attached to the heritage and feels proud for being a part of it. Moreover, he has deep knowledge of the ancestry in which great number of warriors, patriots and legends were born.

His inheritance: Just outside old Pune, in the shadow of Shanwar Wada the stronghold of the Peshwas, within sight of the Hill of Lakshmi whose slopes housed their family deity Vithoba. His inheritance: trees that had stood there since the time a patriot had climbed the sheer face of the Moghul fortress with a rope tied to the tail of a giant lizard and earned for himself the name of Ghorpade; fields and villages that had increased gradually since the time Ram Shastri, to whom the family traced their lineage, had left Pune vowing never to return until the murder of Narayan Rao had been atoned with the ascension of Madhav Rao. Jayant remembered every detail of the proud family history that had been passed on to him through bedtime stories. (119)

This passage conveys a remarkable history of Bhave's ancestry that has an indelible imprint on Jayant's memory. Although Sharad has migrated from his home, heritage has always survived through the stories which he has been telling to his son Jayant at bedtime. That is why Jayant has a profound knowledge of it which has been passed on to him. Whenever he looks back he feels proud of it and reproaches his father why he had been so impatient to leave India and "renounced all claim to ancestral and paternal property" (120). Jayant feels betrayed by his father as well as by grandmother, because neither she fulfilled her promise by giving him the violin nor his father stayed back home.

The displacement of diasporas to foreign lands leads them to confrontation with many kinds of problems; one of them major being is the racial discrimination which has been like a dreadful monster in gulping the countries under its threat. Jyoti also becomes a victim of this discrimination when she encounters an overt racialism at Kamala's house from where she is to pick her cousin Priti. As soon as she reaches there, the door bell rings and two white boys ask for collection but Kamala replies that nobody is home and tries to avoid them to come later. Suddenly one of the boys mimicks "Nobody's home... what you see ain't people but ghosts" (120) and starts abusing "Paki, Paki house. Dirty, dirty" (121). Having heard this derogatory language, a shiver went down Jyoti's spine and she instantly reacts to the situation with a surge of power. She catches the boy from the shirt collar and drags him inside the house and starts shouting that "you want to grow up a barbarian, eh? This is a great country but snot-faced kids like you stinking it up" (121).

To teach him a good lesson she raises her voice and scolds him as being a representative of racial affected community. She says:

We are getting a little tired of obnoxious pigs like you, and our older boys have formed a cleanup brigade. Did you know I have only to make a phone call to get them to take care of you? They might not move in today or tomorrow but you can bet on it they will move in on you when you are not looking. When they are done with you, even your mothers' won't recognize you, eh? (121)

Jyoti's outburst has scared the boy that he would have peed in his pants if she had slapped him. It seems that Jyoti's long suppressed feelings, frustration, and anger against the natives suddenly get stirred and vent out like a volcanic eruption which not only frightens the boy but Jyoti is also trembling from inside. Her outburst has worked; she feels that she has reacted exactly like her cousin Vithal would have reacted, had he been in her situation. She has always been in the belief that Vithal exaggerates the things while speaking in rhetoric way to awake us to fight against racialism in the society, but this instance has encountered her with the true face of the society. When the word 'Paki' is flung at her, suddenly she feels "the uncontrollable spasm of fear and shock" (122). She is more worried about Kamala, Priti and many girls of her age who usually become the victims of obscene and intimidating gestures made by boy of junior high school. But she leaves this matter on time to come when people would be more involved in interracial marriages and "there'd be a lot more interracial kids" (122-123). She takes her own relationship with Pierre as an example but suddenly she ponders over the fact that Pierre himself is a white and belongs to the same society from where these boys learn to discriminate. She questions herself whether Pierre is the man whom she loves and would like to spend rest of her life with him. The most important thing strikes her is that whether he would ever able to understand or feel the pain of one who is abused with the kind of word 'paki. This incident raises many waves of doubts on her relationship with Pierre.

Jayant again feels betrayed when he comes to know of her sister's relationship with Pierre. Few months ago, there was a time when he could have asked the most personal question to Pierre without any kind of hesitation but now he hates him so much that he wishes to kill him by running a sword through his neck. He suspects on his appearance which seems deceptive, his symmetrical face looks "like a plastic surgeon's cast of Adonis" (123). Though Pierre is a college dropout yet he earns good money, wears fashionable clothes and drives Porsche. Moreover, Jayant knows that

his driving license has been suspended for three months which Jyoti might be ignorant of the fact. But still the sacred relationship between brother and sister does not get any kind of influence; Jayant feels that this inviolable bond could be expressed only in symbols of rakhi and ritual of wedding. On the occasion of Raksha bandhan sister ties a rakhi on brother's wrist, wishes for his long life and brother promises to protect her from all the hurdles and gives assurance that he would always stand by her throughout her life. Jayant also knows all the rituals of a Rajput wedding where bride's brother challenges the bridegroom for a symbolic duel before entering the gates and then they embrace each other and move forward to the bride who is waiting with garland. The significance of this duel is that it provides an opportunity to the brother who wants to know whether the groom is strong, courageous and suitable enough for her sister and how far he can go to fight for his bride. The fight continues until the brother is contended about his physical strength and realizes that he is the only guy with whom his sister would be safe and protected, and then he welcomes the bridegroom with all pomp and show to finalize his wedding with his sister. In case of Jayant his hatred for Pierre is just like this ritual, he and his parents hate Pierre because he is a white, an "alien seducer who had pulled away one of their own. They were taut like high-tension wires that vibrate almost unseen with sound almost unheard" (124). Due to this instinctive resistance of the family towards Pierre, Jyoti does not seem to be as happier as she should be and her face reflects her sadness. Jayant had liked Pierre once without any rhyme and reason and even now it is not impossible for him to like him again. He can eliminate his hatred towards Pierre immediately because Jyoti loves him very much and her family can sacrifice anything for the sake of her happiness. Jayant again moves into his memories which flash images of some recognizable faces, and places like his Ajoba's library, his grandmother's saris which usually scented with fragrance of jasmine, and the mesmerizing smell of camphor in the niche of the *tulsi* tree planted in the courtyard of his ancestral home. He is ready to perform all the rituals with due grace and honour which has been performed since ages and he himself must have followed them in his hundred past lives. When Pierre had come on his white mare, wearing silk turban tasseled with red and white flowers around his head, Jayant had definitely challenged him as per the requirement of the ritual and after that he would put a vermilion and turmeric mark and had embraced him with respect in the presence of stars, moon and assembled guests. It seems that Jayant who has been struggling with a conflict between his diasporic and cultural identity, has finally found a way to deal with the things. He has accepted Pierre who represents Canadian culture and simultaneously

the Indian culture which is already infused in his blood, this mingling of two cultures which would lead to hybridity. The darkness which has been around him appears to fade away gradually and a new day with sparkingly sunlight would soon arise and that would bring new hopes, new desires and new ways to survive on alien land.

WORKS CITED

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(b)The Door I Shut Behind Me: A true picture of diasporic
Community

In most of her works Uma Parameswaran depicts the highest degree of cultural sensitivity among the expatriates. The present story, “The Door I Shut Behind Me” has been taken from the work *Trishanku and other writings* written in 1967, is a very good example of a powerful work which contains the politics of home and abroad as well as a struggle for life. Ms Anuradha Verma in her paper “Uma Parameswaran’s *The Door I Shut Behind Me: A Diasporic Text*” says that “By Parameswaran’s writings, we are not only constantly aware of the South Asian experience but also of the struggle in life that makes us all human. Parameswaran has depicted a true picture of

Indian diaspora in Canada. She slowly explores the layers of self-doubt and anxiety that exist in the mind of an immigrant” (Agrawal, 197). Parameswaran has presented a true picture of Indians living in Canada for a long time and also explores the mindset of first time immigrants to an alien land through the characters Chander and Kishen Agrawal.

The trans-Atlantic jetliner piercing the dense white cloud, flying high into the serene blue upper sky has taken off to reach its ultimate destination that is Canada. The protagonist of the story, Chander is an introvert, sophisticated and unmarried young man of twenty five years and has three older brothers and two sisters. He has a doctorate degree from Madras University and for the time being he has a two-year contract with the University of M. at an annual salary of \$8,500 and that is why he is heading to Canada. While sitting in the plane, Chander focuses his eyes on the book which his mother gave at the last moment of departure so that he could not refuse it. The book is a translation of our epic *The Ramayana* into English by Kamala Subramaniam and there is another book his mother gave is a translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Annie Besant. She prays for his safety and wants him to visit home occasionally for the sake of wisdom and spiritual solace enriched in these books. His mother has always been undemonstrative of her emotions and never interferes in his work but at this moment of his departure her heartache is spurting out of her eyes. While on his way to airport, Chander had bought a copy of *Chandrasekher's Radiative Transfer*, though it was neither his field of study nor a material to be read during a journey yet he had an urge to take this book before leaving Indian soil. “To see it was to think of its India-born author, and to think of him was to open a world of ambition and inspiration. (94)”

As soon as Chander makes himself comfortable inside the plane, an “unctuous- faced young man” comes and introduces himself in a loud voice “Hello! I am Mr. Kishen Agrawal” (94). This man exudes friendliness and perfumed hair-oil which clearly indicates that he has come from some rural area where people usually speak in high tone and never bother about others who get disturbed due to their loudness. Chander takes the proffered hand and says “J. Chander” (94) in a low voice in order to compensate the loudness of the man. Agrawal sits beside him and starts talking about himself to make a kind of acquaintance with Chander who is a companion in this journey. But Chander dislikes the way when people start disclosing their personal life, and exchanging life stories in the first meeting itself in front of a person who is completely an unknown to them. It is really very annoying for him to give a corresponding response to the straight questions

asked by Agrawal but he can't avoid him for long and submits before him by revealing his academic details and the purpose of moving to Canada. Agrawal gets astonished having heard that Chander has a two years contract with University of M. and makes an assumption that he would have a luxurious life there in Canada because he has an immigrant visa in his hand which is a way to lifelong luxury. But unluckily, being a student, Agrawal cannot enjoy such life in Canada. As their conversation session goes on with the increasing loudness of Agrawal's voice, the resentment level of Chander also rises up high and he becomes conscious each time when any passenger or an air-hostess passes by their seat. When the air-hostess comes over their seat to pull out Chander's lunch table, Agrawal says in Hindi, "Do you see how she sways and leans over? Seductresses all" (94) it shows his rough manners of middle class rural society where people are not used to such modern young women and usually pass lewd comments whenever they get the opportunity. Moreover, he is wondered and excited at the new environment just like Bihari in "Trishanku: A Cycle of Voices" who expresses his feelings at the first sight of Canada. He says:

Jes lookit these womens
nekkid almost as god made them
Why, my chaddi has more cloth
than their whole dress!
Shame shame
What she-dogs they be. (37)

After few minutes, he falls silent and concentrates on his food placed before him but his movement shows that he is conscious of correct use of his tableware which is not habitual thing for him. His lack of knowledge in using westernized toilets surprises Chander and he wants to make a sarcastic remark when Agrawal says, "On the Bombay- London flight I tried all those knobs and taps but nothing happened. The handle isn't in its usual place. I am a man of regular habits... my whole day is upset if I don't start it right. I am feeling ill already" (95). Chander feels mean for teasing him and tells the correct way to use toilet but his sympathy for his irritating neighbor remains only for a short period because when Agrawal returns from the toilet he again starts with his annoying trend of behavior and says, "Our toilet habits are much cleaner. These westerners..." (95). He keeps on criticizing the western ways of toilets, their culinary arts and passes adverse comments on their culture, throughout the meal and peeves Chander who is already fed up of him. And now everything about Agrawal gives him a feeling of disgust whether it is his shining rayon suit, ornate watchstrap, his plastered hair with fragranced oil, his loud noise, his

egoism and his boasting about his achievements and his shallow generalizations. The author, Uma Parameswaran has portrayed these two characters, Chander and Agrawal in contrast to each other. Though they belong to the same country and follow same culture yet they are different from tip to toe. The only common thing between the two is that they are moving to Canada. On the one hand Chander is introvert, shy and reserved but Agrawal who is an opposite of Chander, is extravert, loud and spontaneous in disclosing his emotions. Agrawal is a foil of Chander and this man has only one feeling that they both belong to the same country and are leading to the same destination, it makes him friendlier to Chander.

After landing on foreign land, poor Chander has to tolerate his company even in a hotel room, where Agrawal is planning to celebrate his arrival in Canada by going for some party after dinner. However, Chander does not show any kind of interest in it and refuses to go but his roommate insists him to behave like Canadians because they are in Canada and they should do what the natives do in this country. Moreover, he teases him for his possession of immigrant visa which is like a “magic wand” (96) for him and without formalities of asking permission, Agrawal takes out his visa from the briefcase and declares that “...evidence that the rightful holder is a landed immigrant. The magic carpet to health, wealth and happiness- The GREEN CARD!” (96). Again Agrawal shows the evidence of his lack of knowledge by declaring Canadian immigrant visa as the green card which is officially a popular name for a United States Permanent Resident Card that gives its holder permission to live and work in the United States. Chander points out his mistake but he does not bother about it and keeps the visa inside Chander’s wallet safely. But Chander who is completely got exhausted by this guy thinks why he has been so patient in tolerating him and starts questioning on his own ability whether it is his tolerating power or weakness that keeps him from rebuking Agrawal. He contemplates that whether it has been the tolerance that has allowed India to suffer time and again the cultural and political invasions inside its boundary or a kind of weakness or cowardice that prompted Hinduism to be submissive before Britishers and government and allowed their people and wealth to be snatched away. But he finally believes that tolerance and weakness are the two names of the same quality because there is no difference in their meaning and in actual practicing these traits. He thinks that these are the:

two names for the same quality, and that quality a national trait for a people who flaunted it by using the more flattering name... a nation made of spineless thinkers and unthinking

egotist, and Agrawals always led Chanders by the nose because Chanders permitted them to (96).

In these thoughts, Chander presents the negative side of India where he finds that people generally praise of their strength of tolerating injustice but the fact that it is not tolerance but the weakness of Indians that dominates over them and does not allow them to fight back. Similarly, Chander has also been tolerating the droning of Kishen Agrawal, it is not his strength but weakness that holding him back from revolting against him. But now he no more wants to tolerate this man and bursts out with virulent words, “Agrawal was a bundle of preconceptions and prejudices, a shallow, selfish, callow brute, pampered by his illiterate community which adulated university graduates as gods on earth” (97). Though sarcastically Chander also describes a filthy picture of Indian society where gossiping women grow in elephantine size even at an age of thirty, men waste their time around shops, chewing betel leaves and spitting tobacco here and there on the pavement of the shop. But all this makes Agrawal so disappointed that he starts crying like a small kid and bursts into sobbing:

I am a shopkeeper’s son. My mother is a gossip, and my wife is fat. My children do play on the street with snotty noses. But I love them. I want them. I would rather have them around me and me in my rope strung cot in my dung polished courtyard than this... here...(97).

A few minutes before, Agrawal was in a jolly mood to celebrate his arrival in Canada and had been praising Chander for his privilege of having immigrant visa which is like a magic wand for him but a sudden change can be noticed in him when Chander sarcastically mentions about unsophisticated lifestyle of Indian communities in backward areas. It really hurts Agrawal and sputters that though his father is a shopkeeper, his mother is a gossip, and his wife is fat and his children play in streets yet he loves them and it is the place where he belongs to. He becomes nostalgic and really feels deep anguish for his homeland which has been left behind. In “Trishanku: A Cycle of Voices” Uma Parameswaran has depicted the same nostalgic feelings through the words of small boy, Suri and he misses something in the following words :

Why can't I soo soo on the grass,
Pappaji?
Why do you never let me soo soo
Not against our garage or appletree,
Not even here off the road.
Miles and miles of bushes and no people

But you won't stop the car. (55)

Having seen such a young man in sobbing, Chander's distaste for him turns into fascination but still he feels jealous of him for this experience, "this feeling of utter lostness in new surroundings, this surging, tempestuous, irrational onslaught of nostalgia for persons and a place" (97). Chander has no yearning for his home and family. Even his arrival to a new land where he confronts with new civilization, new culture and tradition which is completely different from his own does not influence him to remember his home land and become nostalgic like Agrawal. At this moment he is ready to forgive his roommate for everything and realizes that some subconscious feeling of lostness must have moved him to attach himself with his family and community. This is one of the most common problems of diasporas who keep remembering their country and culture living on an alien land. Another major problem the author has described here is the language, which initially becomes a barrier for diasporas in mingling with native people if they don't know their language and it is right that they gradually learn the native language with the passage of time but soon they realize that there is nobody around them to speak and communicate with them in their mother tongue. The same kinds of sentiments are expressed in Agrawal's words when he says, "I'd give anything, anything in the world to see one of my own people, to hear my own language" (97). Having heard his sentiments, Chander realizes that it is not his family that he is longing for rather he eagerly wants to meet the people who speak his native language. Chander ponders over this crucial issue that there are two men who belong to the same country, salute the same flag, and worship the same gods and goddess yet they are so different from each other. He poses a question that whether only a common language unites the people and creates a healthy environment for living on alien land. He raises this point and thinks that whether it is impossible for different language speaking people to stay together peacefully.

After searching the Indian names from telephone directory, Agrawal calls to Srivastava who is going to Mundras for an Indian get-together and invites the two of them to accompany him. The proposal is happily accepted by Agrawal and with an excitement he starts preparing to go. He scoops his clothes from suitcase, plasters his hair, pulls out some Indian songs record albums, and takes his packets of *paan-beetas* in order to serve the people assembled there. At the Mundras, Agrawal greets everyone with warm enthusiasm but Chander as usual shrinks from mingling with the people. It shows his insensitivity and unemotional nature that does not respond

meeting with the people who belong to his own country even in foreign land. Mrs. Mundra takes them to a larger living room where they join a gathering of twenty odd Indians. Due to shy nature, Chander is not able to mix with them. They ask the same questions about his work and give assurance of their friendliness. Agrawal easily becomes a part of the gathering but Chander notices that he hardly uses Hindi language while speaking to them. Recently, Agrawal was missing his linguistic community so desperately that he was ready to do anything to meet them but here he does not bother to utter a single word of his native language and tries to adopt the foreign tongue which has already been adopted by this gathering. As the people present in the living room has come from different parts of India so they speak in English and occasionally use Hindi phrases while communicating with each other. Even small children speak in fluent English that Chander is ashamed of. One of the ladies among them tells that how her baby uttered his first words in native Marathi-“ *Aai, dada*”(99) but now as he is growing up and going to park, he neither understands nor speaks a word of Marathi. A man standing next to him says, “Just you wait a few years and he’ll be correcting your English. My daughter is on tenterhooks whenever her friends drop in; she is afraid we’ll say or do something wrong” (99). Having heard their conversation, Chander observes that these people gathered here are together only because they have same ethnicity but more than that they have similar kinds of problems which unite them. They have created an Indian ethos while their own children do not have any knowledge of their country, religion and native language. While in India where different sects speak different languages and demand a different status according to their religion and language. Moreover they have built walls between themselves with the slogans like “My people, my language (99)” but here in Canada, people from different parts of India are collected together but hardly bother about giving knowledge of their culture and language to their children. When Chander is asked about conditions in India he starts it by mentioning drought problem in the country but one of the women chips in and tells in a gushy manner how much hard work they put in collecting the thousand dollars for soldiers two years ago. Chander seems to be annoyed by the gathering that are not paying attention to the serious problems of their own country rather enjoying the talkativeness of this lady. Then, he speaks about long queues for grain, fuel, milk and medicine everywhere around the country which reflect the pathetic condition of India but they only sympathies with him as if he is narrating his own personal grief and they are not concerned about it. When he continues to speak on other majors issues like “black marketeering, rampant corruption, bribery, inefficiency...” (100) in the

country he finds that nobody bothers in listening to such talks and very politely topic is changed. Chander observes that drought, Indo-Pakistan war, long queues and other crucial issues have just become a matter of social bash for them. They don't want to listen to the sufferings for those people which have been left behind by them. He is very much hurt with their attitude. He wants to sensitize them by describing the devastating picture of Indian society but his efforts result nothing and they scatter in different groups for other conversations. It appears that these Diasporas only want to see the positive aspect of India which refreshes them from their routine life and makes them feel proud of being a part of this vibrant culture.

Chander joins Agrawal's group where they are sorting out some of his record albums. Agrawal has all the latest records but people around him are more interesting in listening to old classical records or songs of Pankaj Mullick which they don't find in his collection. A young man finds the Saigal's album and starts it. There is deep nostalgia prevails in the air with Saigal's music in the background and everyone goes in his past days and romanticizes the sweet memories of India. But India they talk about is not the present India or the India when they left it but the India of their boyhood days or even earlier of that time. Some remember the old trams of Madras, some anti- British slogans and some rejuvenate themselves with the greatest event in cricket history when Lala Amarnath scored a double century against Don Bradman's team. But all this shows that either they have some nostalgic idealism in which they indulge in beautiful and pleasant past and no negative aspect of their ideal home is viewed or it is a kind of escape route to run away from their diasporic life to the life where they find their true happiness. When Agrawal serves them his *paan- beedas*, most of them refuse to take, that vividly reflects their indifference to enjoy or experience the same pleasures again if they are given a chance. They just want to enjoy this pleasure only in their memories not in actual life. Though betel roll packets reminisces them to the betel- areca shops at the street corner where they used to gather as Romeos for eyeing on college girls. A kind of disgusting feeling arises in Chander's heart for these people, he doubts on their identity and thinks, "What were they? Not Indians any more, nor were they Canadians (101)". He thinks that these people are neither Indians any more nor have completely become Canadians. On every Saturday, they arrange this get together only to maintain their cultural ethos by meeting the people of their country and ethnicity, otherwise they are not nostalgic and mesmerized by their past memories. They are aware of their diasporic identity and that is why they remain in groups like "ghettoes" and maintain a distance from Canadian culture which does not allow them to

assimilate into it. They meet the people who come from their country with open arms but do not care to listen to the problems of their country and would never dare go back to the nation of their origin to live the same happy days. Moreover, they have no close affinities with the Canadians around them. Though they want to live in Canada yet want to maintain their culture and tradition that is the reason that women here have not changed their traditional costumes and still prefer Indian dresses. As far as their food habits are concerned they seem to be purely Indians but shy away from the talk of return to their nation which is the source of their identity. They neither want to go back to India nor integrate into the new culture of the country in which they are living but they are just “hanging” between the two cultures. Having seen the ambiguous situation of these people, Chander seems to be confused and thinks that their situation is “Like the mythological king, Trishanku, they stood suspended between two worlds, unable to enter either, and making a heaven of their own” (101). He observes that they neither belong to their “home” (India) nor to “aboard” (Canada). They have not completely accepted either of cultures and have made a new place for them which are a mixture of these two cultures. This attitude of immigrants makes Chander feel alone and isolated. He is not able to understand or connect with them and moves away from the crowd but his head is heavy with a kind of weight or burden which gives him a great pain. But this weight is actually in his heart that makes him feel lost and nostalgic even being in the crowd and his situation is like Agrawal when he felt nostalgic in the hotel room. This weight gives an “inexplicable sense of loss, anger, contempt” (102) to Chander. He sits quite and silent on his chair. Then, a pale short man in thirties joins him and makes fun of Agrawal who got Saigal’s album by mistake. Initially, Chander is impressed by this man whose name is Hari Bahl but as soon as he comes to know that he is married to a Canadian woman, again the weight in his heart crushes him and he feels disgusted and deeply anguished. He hates this connection with western culture.

The sense of exile and abandoning the country, its culture and heritage becomes so strong in him that he vents out his frustration in saying that “I don’t expect to be here that long. I just want to pick up some experience and go back home” (104). This evening experience with the people around him has made him so grieved that he no more wants to be a part of it. He feels alienated and alone that intends to go back to his native land after finishing his work. But Hari Bahl remarks that initially every immigrant who leaves his home and comes here on alien land has the same kind of notions but gradually they all become “brain-drain casualty” (104). Chander feels

accused that if he is contributing to the brain- drain and abandoning his poor nation when it utterly requires him. Very soon we find that he overcomes his nostalgia and thinks rationally that “This is the age of individualism, not of abstract ideologies of patriotism and nation- building” (104). He realizes that individual is all important in contemporary world and one must do what one feels to do without thinking about these abstract ideologies of patriotism. He feels a pull towards the new country where he is standing. At the end of the story, Hari Bahl says, “When we leave our country we shut many doors behind ourselves though we are not aware of it at the time” (105). To this Chander replies, “There are many doors ahead of us. (105)”

Thus, the story “The Door I Shut Behind Me” ends with a modern notion as Anuradha Verma in her paper “Uma Parameswaran’s *The Door I Shut Behind Me: A Diasporic Text*” says that “today’s generation is not confined to the motherland but they consider the entire globe as a single home. Parameswaran has delineated a wonderful picture of an immigrant experience” (Agrawal, 201).

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