

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Uma Parameswaran is a first generation immigrant from India to Canada. She is the kind of writer who opts for permanent exile yet draws her cultural and aesthetic sustenance and substance from her Indian past and heritage. The act of displacement from the homeland activates the diasporic writer, Uma Parameswaran to pay frequent visits to home through dreams and writings. She knows that human being is not similar to a piece of baggage which does not feel anything. The displacement and relocation form a saga of pain and sufferings in an immigrant's life which has been portrayed through her writings.

As the result of physical displacement from home, whether the immigrant 'straddles two cultures' or 'falls between two stools', there is always the dual feeling of the sense of wonder and excitement at the sight of new culture and landscape, and simultaneously a feeling of alienation and lostness also emerges. The expatriate feels nostalgic for the world left behind. This experience of two geographical and cultural spaces simultaneously causes many tensions and conflicts in the life of an immigrant and she/he gets polarized between dislocation and relocation, domicile and diasporic consciousness, heritage and hybridity. The ensuing conflicts between these two mental frames are well observed in the works *Mangoes On The Maple Tree*, "Darkest Before Dawn", and "The Door I Shut Behind Me" by Uma Parameswaran. After analyzing these works, we can conclude that the author has portrayed a genuine expression of emigrants' ambivalence, it is not merely exaggeration of the typical diasporic sentiments.

In her novel *Mangoes On The Maple Tree* Uma Parameswaran has presented the plight of three generations living in diaspora. The first generation includes Sharad Bhave, his wife Savitri, his sister Veejala and her husband Anant Moghe. Both these families left their homeland in their adult years after marriage and came to Canada, an alien land which was entirely different from their own country in all respects. But even after spending a length of time in Canada they don't feel a part of this society and live with the memories of their homeland. Sharad, belonged to a rich Bhave family back home and had a wonderful career as a nuclear scientist but he left all his luxuries

of life as well as his bright future and decided to settle down in Canada for better opportunities. But here he rots as real estate broker and finds the situation so grave that he is afraid of facing those alien white faceless people who stare at him and ask about his existence on this alien land. Sharad derives his source of identity and a sense of pride from Indian culture and heritage and seems to be isolated from western culture. On the other hand his wife Savitri still seems to follow her traditional values and customs. Her attachment to her Indian values and culture could be seen through her Indian dresses like silk *sarees* which she generally wears at home. Like any Indian mother she takes care of her children's needs during the dinner time and she loves to cook Indian food in her kitchen. Being the mother of a young girl she gets worried about Jyoti's late night arrivals and her physical relations with Pierre. Moreover, Savitri fights a tough battle living a life in Canada but she does not give herself enough time to think about it and its inconsistencies. On the one hand she says that "we carry our gods within and with us wherever we go" (93) but soon feels worried of losing her spirits on an alien land. She cannot bear the idea that her spirits are drying up in the cold of Canada. All this shows that she is still a pure Indian by heart and unable to cut off herself completely from Indian ethos and sensibility. Though she has learnt to get acculturated to Canadian situation externally yet her indianness never dies in her and she lives with it.

The divergent views of older generation towards their homeland are disclosed through the characters of Sharad and Veejala. Veejala is an Assistant Professor of Astronomy. From her outlook she seems to have completely merged into Canadian culture and lives with a belief that "one can have only one home at any given time" (47). As she has been living in Canada for so many years, it is her home now. As far as the past culture and heritage are concerned, they are just a burden, make us handicap and do not allow us to integrate into Canadian culture. Initially, we think that it is only Veejala from the older generation, who has been able to mingle with host land but when she resigns her job and decides to go back to her native land, exposes her inner suppressed feeling in which she seems to be in the same state of in-betweenness as Sharad and Savitri has been for many years. She herself is not able to cope with the culture in which she becomes the victim of racial and gender discrimination. Finally, she decides to waste her time in her native place than in the backwoods of Canada.

After going through the novel, we can draw an idea that the first generation of immigrants suffers a lot in adjusting on host land. It is clearly depicted that they are neither able to detach themselves from their homeland nor completely merged into the culture of host land. It seems that they are merely footed on the alien land with the bag and baggage of their culture and heritage not only in their hands but also in their heart. They face tough competition in settling down in a new land. While confrontation with racial discrimination, some people of first generation like Sharad tolerates it silently and avoids going out in crowd for practical reasons and some like Veejala decides to run away from the situation and prefers to suffer in her native land than tolerating the harshness of host land. The idea of assimilation is really difficult for this generation.

The children of the second generation are different from the children of third generation who are born in Canada and deeply rooted in Canadian culture. As Uma Parameswaran in her essay "Home is Where Your Feet Are, and may Your Heart be There Too!" says "Home, for those born in Canada, is very definitely Canada, but because of force-feeding by their parents, "Homeland" could still be India" (216). Krish, Priti and Romona belongs to this generation who have never experienced the life of their homeland but only accustomed to it through the stories told to them by Sharad and the kind of Indian food made by Savitri. Apart from this touch of their culture, neither they know their mother tongue nor remember the country which has been left behind. But when we peep into the life of Jayant, Jyoti and Vithal who are the representative of second generation immigrants in Canada, we come to know that this generation is a blend of two cultures. Jayant's attitude towards Indian and Canadian cultures are similar to Veejala's because in the beginning he also shows his pull towards Canadian culture and calls Indian values as crap but the enormous influence of Indian culture, heritage and ancestral home on his life haunts him all the time from inside. He also oscillates between two polarities. In the short story "Darkest Before Dawn" we find the closeness and intimate relationship of Jayant with his culture and ancestral home. He remembers each and every detail of the house in which he spent few days with his grandmother. This indelible imprint of past memories on his mind indicates that he would never be able to come out from this nostalgia. Most of young people of his generation are found in the same situation because their parents keep them stick to the old ways. On the other hand, we have Jyoti who has a Canadian boyfriend, Pierre yet she seems to be attracted towards Sridhar who belongs to her country, culture and home. It indicates that her true Indian heart lies with Sridhar but her relationship with Pierre always restricts her.

As far as the conflicts of the first generation are concerned they are not so intense because they are still rooted to their homeland and merely footed on alien land. They have a home to go back as Veejala decides to run away after facing racialism. But the sufferings of the second generation immigrants are far more intense and worse. They think that Canada is their land and try to get assimilated and merge into it. As in the present novel Jayant is hopeful for his survival on host land and says “This is our land and here we shall stay” (31). But this generation gets disappointed to find the truth that they are not accepted by the host society and does not consider them as a part of it. They generally become the victims of racial discrimination but the characters like Jyoti who are the representative of second generation know how to answer or tackle this problem. They are not easily suppressed by the whites. Jyoti immediately takes an action against the racial slurs when she comes across with this kind of situation. She does not run away like Veejala but fights back. On the other hand Vithal becomes the voice of second generation expatriates who are compelled to give up their faith in assimilation in Canadian society. In order to save themselves from complete rootlessness and alienation from both cultures they cling to their own Indian culture. They mix with their own people and prefer to live in ghettos, but determined and hopeful second generation compares themselves with the evergreen tree which survives without roots though planted on Manitoba soil and it is enough that the tree survives, looks green and beautiful even on the alien land. They have found a way to deal with their status as ‘other’ by creating a ‘third space’ of hybridity by identifying with both cultures. Similarly, these immigrants would also survive like the evergreen tree on host land and as far as the major problem of racialism is concerned it would be resolved only through inter-racial marriages as a result of which more brown-white kids would be born.

Similarly, in the story “The Door I Shut Behind Me” Uma Parameswaran has presented a genuine expression of immigrants’ ambivalence living in Canada. She has delineated two main characters Chander and Agrawal who are completely different from each other. Agrawal is an extrovert, loud and very spontaneous in revealing his feelings even before an unknown. But Chander belongs to a sophisticated and well educated class of Indian society which characterizes his behaviour as an introvert, shy and reserved. Having reached on Canadian soil, Agrawal wonders at the sight of new culture and new environment but simultaneously feels nostalgic for his family and home, when Chander presents a filthy picture of Indian society where gossip

women grow in elephantine size even at an age of thirty, men kill their time in chewing betel leaves and spitting tobacco around the shops.

There is another problem of diasporas which has been depicted in the story - the lostness of their language or mother tongue. Agrawal is desperate to meet his people or the community which speaks in his own mother tongue, while at Mundras all the people belong to the same nation and culture but he hardly uses a word of Hindi in conversation with them. It is strange that he adopts the English language as a medium of communication with his own people and immediately forgets to use Hindi language for which he has been longing for. On the other hand, the present gathering also discloses their common problem that their children are moving away from their culture and mother tongue. One of the lady says that her baby boy uttered his first words in Marathi but now as he is growing up and going out in the park, he neither understands nor speaks a word of Marathi. Chander observes that these people who come from the same ethnicity have created this gathering to strengthen their Indian ethos by meeting regularly but their own children are not aware of their culture, heritage and religion. They feel ashamed of speaking their mother tongue and some of them have almost forgotten it completely.

When Chander is asked about the prevailing conditions in India, he mainly mentions pathetic and negative side of his country. He speaks about draught problem, long queues for grain, fuel, milk and medicine throughout the country. It seems that he wants to draw the attention of the gathering towards the major issues of the country which have been left by them. But the people around him do not pay attention to him and try to avoid him as if he is narrating his own personal grief and they are not concerned about it. It seems these expatriates only want to see the positive side of their homeland and remain unbothered to the sufferings of the people which have been left behind by them. The recording of Saigal's music at the background takes them back to their boyhood days and past sweet memories in which they enjoyed the happiest days of their life. Some of them remember the old trams of Madras, some anti-British slogans and some talk about the Lala Amarnath's double century against Don Bradman's team. All this shows that the memories of their past is still fresh in their minds and they enjoy it utmost. But when Agrawal serves them his *Paan-beedas* most of them refuse to take, it suggests that they just want to enjoy their past in memories not in actual life by accepting Agrawal's offer. This experience of Indo- Canadian gathering raises many questions of their identity in the mind of Chander who has been noticing them. He thinks

that these people are neither Indians nor complete Canadians. Though they have detached from their country yet their Indianness can be seen through their dresses and food habits. On the other hand, they have been living in Canada for many years yet not able to accept its culture and tradition completely. They are just hanging between these two cultures and in this sense we can say that they are in a state of in-betweenness. Their situation is compared by Chander with “the mythological king Trishanku, they stood suspended between two worlds, unable to enter either, and making a heaven of their own” (101). Now Chander feels isolated and alienated because he is not able to merge in the crowd who belong to his own country. There is another character in the story Hari Bahl who initially impresses him but when he comes to know that he is married to Canadian woman, Chander again feels alone. A kind of weight in his heart curses him and hates this lostness of own culture and connection with the western culture.

Due to a sense of exile and abandonment of his poor nation at the time of utmost need, Chander accuses himself and expresses his anger while talking to Hari, he says that he would return to his homeland after completing his work in Canada but Hari Bahl gives a very taunting remark that initially, all the immigrant who come to this land have the same views but gradually they all become the part of “brain- drain casualty” (104). This remark affects on Chander’s mind and he accuses himself for betraying his country and contributing in the rise of brain drain. But soon he realizes that it is an age of individualism “not of abstract ideologies of patriotism and nation-building” (104). He thinks that everyone has the full freedom and right to decide about his or her future. If these people who are staying here in Canada, it is their decision to be here on alien land and struggle to assimilate into its culture. Their homeland has been left behind and they have come very far from it. As they have changed according to time and requirement they know that their homeland might have also changed with the passage of time and that is why these expatriates always remember their boyhood days which never alter in their memories. 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) but Chander who is aspired to move ahead, says “There are many doors ahead of us” (105). These doors indicate the new life in Canada, where he may find new opportunities and achievements.

The expatriates who lose their homeland are usually seen oscillating between home and host country. Their ambivalent feelings seem to be genuine because it is not possible for anyone

to cut off completely from the culture of his/her origin in order to adopt an alien culture. They always long for their lost home and construct it in their memories and imaginations but it is just a mythical place which is difficult to be retrieved in reality. So, they try to relocate themselves on concrete alien land by sending their roots in its soil. After critically analyzing the politics of home and abroad in the concerned fiction of Uma Parameswaran, it is observed that she ends her works with the modern notions like transnationalism and globalization in which the expatriates don't confine themselves to the motherland and consider the entire globe as a single home. They realize that no place on this earth graced by men is god- forsaken. Hence, they build their home where their feet are and try their heart be there too. Keeping in view of all these incidents, the present research fulfils its aim in reflecting the politics of home and abroad in the fiction by Uma Parameswaran.

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