Chapter 7

Conclusion:

The Road Map to an Engaging Bilateral Journey

When we look at a country, we try to evaluate it through its economic, political, historic, geographic and cultural variety. In the context of bilateral association, every aspect of each other becomes a matter of examination and research. These are rational and reasonable expectations. Canada wants to understand more of India and India wants to understand more of Canada especially in the context of globalization, as is unmistakably palpable through the meetings and business delegations that are taking place in the political arena. These are encapsulated in the various economic and business reports. Most of them repeat one another though they provide valuable data. The exclusion of diaspora in the context of strengthening Canada-India bilateral association is palpable. However, we find that Indo-Canadian literature reflects the cultural exchanges and economic motivations of the Indian immigrants in Canada. Both categories of texts are important in gathering diplomatic, economic and cultural picture of India and Canada.

There is a growing realization that post the nuclear tests in India in the seventies, there was an interregnum—a period that could have been otherwise capitalized on. Now, since there is awareness regarding this on both sides, what is vital is an increase in frequency and perhaps urgency in getting acquainted with each other. This has been happening. The process is already rolling but insistence in continuing and sustaining them
for a long time is the need of the times. Globalization and an understanding of it helps gather an international perspective on ‘movement’ that is economics-motivated.

What is notable is that Canada and India are connecting not only at economic, political and business levels that constitute practicality but also via creative and imaginative acts of writing and literature. As Satoshi Machida mentions “deepening levels of economic globalization have eroded the importance of national borders” (119) and “Economic globalization driven by “neoliberalism” has dramatically affected citizen’s livelihood around the world, establishing a system of “global capitalism”” (119). In this dissertation economic reports and backgrounders provide the data to complement ideas of transnational movements and economic growth. The study has considered whether migration provides fillip to trade and we find that such a theme exists in Indo-Canadian literature. Indians do travel to Canada for occupational and economic purposes.

Writers and critics who have provided insights on the problems and challenges in India and Canada respectively, happen to also construct them as nations that have the potential to grow immensely. Critics have attempted to see the positives, as well as factors that can hinder progress. They have endeavoured to recognize and see the diverse features and then compare them, tracing the differences and also the likenesses. Commercial co-operation and cultural reception are inextricably connected. These two can ensue successfully only when there are negotiations taking place at the political level also. Of course, politically the two countries have not connected too strongly but perhaps it is time that there is serious contemplation on this issue. According to a report by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (2007):
Through the middle of the last millennium, Europeans launched exploratory ventures seeking a shorter way to reach the land of silks and spices. The voyages of Columbus and others of the era were an effort to find a better route to India. In 2007, a new mission of exploration is underway as businesses from around the world look to India for opportunities. India is not just being rediscovered — it has been found. And like the world’s gravitation towards opportunities in China, India beckons with many similar yet different opportunities. (4)

The historical dimension alluded to in the report is indicative of the deeper studies being conducted to understand not just contemporary cultural scenario but also the evolution of India as of today. This is essential for better planning and layout of political and economic strategies. Educationally too, Canada and India have been making efforts to connect with each other. There has been an emphasis on internationalization since such experiences improve knowledge and create channels of communication. Paul Kurucz states:

We are composed of primarily immigrants from other countries, and we espouse a multicultural approach to living together. A curriculum defines the whole experience a student has as they go through a structured learning process. If the experience is limited to a narrow set of geographic, cultural, political, and socioeconomic views of the world, that is all the student will get” (49).

This statement stresses the need for giving an international edge to education and curricula. The approach is student-centric but then this internationalization process requires movement of people. It is a like a chain reaction. One activity leads to changes
and implications on other areas. Seemingly small collaborations have implications on diplomatic and commercial relations in the long-run. The resulting alumni networks create and stabilize relationships and these are contributory to bilateral association.

Economic, cultural and historical threads braid together in the materializing of long term and stable associations. There have been several bilateral meetings between India and Canada and these have accelerated trade volumes and initiatives to revitalize partnership. As a matter of fact, Canada already has a presence in Asia and with sustained efforts and dialogue; this relationship can be invigorated with implications on both the regions. Research and studies done by Prof. Milton Israel, Uma Parameshwaran, Himani Bannerji, Neil Bissoondath, R. M. Touhey, Doughlas Goold, Wendy Dobson, Prof. Milton Israel and several others reveal that the process of settling of the Indians on the Canadian soil and snow has been a long and adventurous story of transplanting cultures and creating space and identity in Canada. In the literature by writers of Indian origin in Canada, there are representations of the origin, movement and eventually settlement of Indians in a foreign soil. It has been a journey of cultural transplantation. There is the customization of the new environment to make it much more palatable in terms of continuance of rituals and stories which partially relieve the characters of the pain of moving away from Home. There is in the process, a satisfaction of having successfully continuing the inherited culture and religion in a new country.

While trying to mingle in the new environment, the settlers also try to retain their identity. This is reflected in literature too. For instance, Parameshwaran’s proclivities to Indian mythology is evident when the character Chander is given a copy of Ramayana and
Bhagavad Gita by his mother before he leaves for Canada. The mother desires her son’s commitment to his cultural roots even after his departure to a faraway land. The writer’s attachment to the culture of the homeland is evident through her choice of themes in the works *Meera: A Dance Drama* and *Sita’s Promise: A Dance Drama*.

The philosophical implications of the image of Trishanku mentioned in Chapter 5 is so powerful that it spans the literature of Indo-Canadian writing in a manner as to become a motif for identifying the situation of Indians uprooted and relocated in a new land. It is to be noted that Uma Parameshwaran’s works are replete with Indian mythology and culture because remembering them allows the expatriates a chance to relive the Home experience. When portraying Canada, the references to Indian traditions suggest how the fusion of two varied places can give rise to a multicultural dimension in literature.

In her short story “The Door I Shut Behind Them”, Parameshwaran portrays the position of the diaspora: “Like the mythological king, Trishanku, they stood suspended between two worlds, unable to enter either, and making a heaven of their own” (45). I am dwelling on this image of the Trishanku because this state of not belonging to anywhere is an idea that reverberates in most Indo-Canadian writers of fiction. The sense of ‘not belonging’ is serious and needs to be addressed in a situation where the Indian diaspora in Canada is actually there contributing meaningfully to the economic growth while at the same time prospering economically. It is again a very mutual process. Comfort of the spirit can ensue when there is a feeling of acceptance, tolerance and security with regards to traditions and culture of the homeland. Reconciliation between the dual identities seems to offer comfort and in literature, evidently, it is writing that has the effect of catharsis. Indian
traditional motifs and themes and contemporary Canadian circumstances and society come together in Parameshwaran’s works.

Parameshwaran’s “Memory Poems: Vigilance” has the following opening lines:

We are new Canadians

Come from faraway places

The Alps and the Andes

Essequibo and the Ganges,

Our memories, our faces

Chiselled by ancient cultures

The poet is identifying and creating space for the immigrants in Canada whose heritage, physiognomy and cultures are diverse. Multiculturalism is endorsed automatically through the reference to geography. A similar image that suggests movement of the immigrants is that of the migratory birds by the poet Surjeet Kalsey in her poem titled “Migratory Birds” (37) whose vocabulary and phraseology—“thinking/we’ll fly back to our home/for sure”; “invisible cage imprisons us”; “drawn to our chain”; “No sun no earth/ where to look? What to look for?” indicate the feeling of rootlessness. The undertones of loneliness and desire to go back are visible in the literature by the first generation writers. A glance at the demeanour of Indo-Canadian writings reveals the fluctuating tendencies between Home and Canada. The generous use of images and metaphors from Indian traditions in literature;
and constant referring to them by the characters in literary pieces disclose the anxiety for ‘holding on’ to the past. A. K. Ramanuja states “just as our biological past lives in the physical body, our social and cultural past lives in the many cultural bodies we inherit—our languages, arts, religions, and our life-cycle rites” (qtd in Milton 90). The inextricability of cultural memories and remnants compel writers to embed them in their writings. Rohinton Mistry in his short story “Lend Me Your Light” portrays the feelings of the speaker who is on the verge of travelling to Toronto. He says “Half-jokingly, I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto…” (186); and “humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting me…” (201). Like Trishanku, Tiresias symbolizes the dilemmas and problems of the migrants to Canada. In the short stories of Mistry, it is Kersi who is voicing the predicaments. As W. H. New states “The stories Kersi tells serve the double function of engaging Canada with his parents and of engaging India with contemporary Canada” (268). The registering of the connections is obvious and relatable.

The difficulties associated with giving up one’s roots is perceptible and when past is seen as a ‘cultural body’, sacrificing or moving away from native traditions becomes at least partially akin to a kind of amputation where transplantation is painful with reminisces of the past. The preservation of language, rituals, spirituality and philosophy makes existing surrounding a comfortable and familiar dwelling place. This becomes a
much more enriching experience when it is streamlined with economic activities and
diplomatic relations.

The subject of bilateral association between Canada and India should not conclude but
in fact continue to be explored further because of huge benefits and stakes involved. With
huge investments made already, the future and the prospects of economic, cultural and
educational benefits look bright. Liberalization of policies and globalization go hand in
hand. Ramesh C. Kumar and Nigendra Narain describe the present Canada-India
connections as “bazaar relationship” because there is “shopping around for one-off trading
opportunities but lacking a sustained and diversified relationship” (169). The symbol of
the ‘bazaar’ and its implication is that the association between the two countries has been
rather lukewarm. The terrain is fertile but unused. Merely ‘looking’ at each other and
acknowledging each other’s growth and success is insufficient as pure mutual admiration
cannot help mutual growth. There is the need for greater vibrancy in trade—the kind of
vibrancy and excitement that is foregrounded in the diaspora literature.

The reasons why India and Canada should evince interest in each other and endeavour
to reinforce relationship with each other with respect to trade, culture, business and
education have been analysed in this dissertation in the context of the emergence of India
as a global player. It so happens that India has plenty of similarities with Canada and a
large diaspora in the country makes it difficult to overlook them. While diplomatic
relations are simmering slowly but steadily, there are discussions related to Indo-Canadian
themes in literary narratives too.
The coming together of people from various ethnic origins into India in the course of its history has enriched it. We find that in Canada also there is the conglomeration of people from various nationalities. Northrop Frye states “If Toronto is a world-class city, it is not because it bids for the Olympics or builds follies like the Skydome, but because of the tolerated variety of the people in its streets” (672). Three ideas come to the fore—that of Toronto, which is a vibrant city of Canada is “world class”, that there are people from several ethnicities and there is ‘toleration’ for them so that they can be a part of Canada.

The fact that multiculturalism and pluralism exist in Canada and India, is indicative of its capacity to absorb variety yet regulate them so as to maintain order in society. The large presence of Indians in Canada augments and necessitates chances of a stronger bilateral relationship between both the countries. There is also a lot of mutual learning and understanding that takes places on account of this “toleration ” (Frye 672). Uma Parameshwaran provides a telling imagery of the convergence of Canada and India in her celebrated essay “Ganga in the Assiniboine- Prospects for Indo-Canadian Literature”, wherein she says:

Every immigrant transplants part of his native land to the new country, and the transplant may be said to have taken root once the immigrant figuratively sees his native river that runs through its adopted place; not Ganga as the Assiniboine or the Assiniboine as Ganga, both of which imply a transference or substitution, but Ganga in the Assiniboine which implies a flowing into, a merger that enriches the river. The confluence of any two rivers is sacred for the Hindu ethos, perhaps because it is symbolic of this enrichment. (Parameshwaran 71)
Symbolically, it is the coming together of two diverse cultures and literary flows. The Ganga is a very important sacred river with religious and spiritual significance for the Hindus in India; and the river Assiniboine runs through Winnipeg in Canada that happens to be an important gathering place for people for skiing, swimming, boating and so on. The imagery of the union of two rivers belonging to the two nations epitomizes the intersection not just of literary streams but also the coming together of people of diverse cultures and economic interests. This can be extended to the political arena too and re-engagement between the two countries can take place with greater intensity. The emphasis of the rivers symbol is on the process of enrichment.

India won its independence from the British in the year 1947 and it is a matter of co-incidence that “The status of “Canadian citizen” as opposed to “British subject” was created in 1947” (Kilbourn 9)—the years marking disentanglement from the British in both nations is the same. The fact that there are co-incidences and resemblances between Canada and India are evident. Without economic opportunities, expatriation to Canada wouldn’t have been possible. Without manpower, economic opportunities are a waste of resources. Both are complimentary and through a strange co-incidence Canada and India have resources that can be given and taken underlining the need, possibility and necessity of a powerful bilateral relationship. Perhaps there is a greater need to engage the diaspora networks in the diplomatic relations. Cultural engagements are inevitable since it is impossible for people to forget their roots and they recreate situations for themselves that are reminiscent of their home.
It is clear that this area is fertile with regards to future research. Economics and literature have always provided new insights, possibilities, maps for growth and prosperity. Already plenty of positive events are taking place between the two countries and diplomatically they are moving forward. This has given rise to a lot of hope for future. At the moment, there seems to be a lot to look forward to in terms of business, trade and economics. Naturally, this will cast an effect on future movements of people from India to Canada and vice-versa. Therefore, this area of research is ever expanding and ever essential to continue maintaining a strong bilateral association between Canada and India. Literature, Culture and Economics form the basis of a strong diplomatic relation. Diasporas will continue to discover new trade and migration pathways creating new openings, challenges and propositions. Globalisation will further the trend of transnational movements. Therefore, the area that this dissertation takes up is replete with new possibilities. Future researchers can unearth innovative channels of research since new data, new literatures, not to mention new politics are an inevitable reality. The area hence is not static and provides a plethora of opportunities in future.
Works Cited


