

CHAPTER –V

ROOTLESSNESS AND ALIENATION

Identity Crisis.....Cultural Shock....Weakening Bondages of culture...Reflect the phenomenon i.e Rootlessness: Isolation; Alienation: Escapism From Rootedness.....

Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees is the symbolic play by Uma Parameswaran. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, the novel is the extension of the play - *Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees*. This play symbolizes the desires, efforts and pains of the immigrants. Jayant is trying to convince his father that in today's era people do not have roots, that is they need to continuously move to new venues.

“Jayant : Our people, our old country. Dad there's no *our people* and *no old country* for anyone in the world anymore. Least of all for us. This is our land and here we shall stay.

Sharad : Roots, son , roots. Can we really grow roots here ?

Jayant : Sure Dad [34]”¹

The sending of roots i.e. making efforts for assimilation with the new venue depends upon “the age and immigrant's length of stay in this cultures”.² Mrs. R. Vedavalli is right when she infers that “ the immigrant has to unlearn what he has learnt in his own culture and undergo the learning process in the alien culture.”³

Migration began with the dawn of civilization. Man was required to move from one place to another in search of food water and shelter. Finally

man had to give up nomadic life style to set up towns and cities. Due to various reasons, man had to settle and resettle. There were natural disasters, marauding warriors, food and water growing thinner driving man to greener pastures. Migration continued for the quest of knowledge, material gains, racial and religious oppressions, imperialism through military conquest and so on. There by a great number of diasporas came into existence.

The word *Diaspora* was used for the Jews who were forced to leave from their home land at the point of death. The Jews had to survive by moving all across the world, just like the seeds are scattered to be sown. Now, to come to the contemporary meaning of the word. Diaspora refers to the people of the same cultural geographical, political and religious background, living on foreign soil. These people leave their native lands and bond together in an alien cultural scenario. Subsequently, their mergence with the host country culture becomes the priority. Ironically the global migration has a unique trait, i.e. the people are highly educated, qualified and skilled professionals. This is not forced exile rather voluntary movement. The wise intelligentsia create their own Diaspora to survive in the hostile host country.

In India the ethnic and cultural roots are so deep that the migration from one state to another is difficult. It generates the feeling of rootlessness. No where in the world, we can imagine of *Interstate Diaspora* but in India one can. Unity in diversity is the right phrase for the vibrant, dynamic and deep rooted Indian culture.

In 1960's the search for newer and greener pastures began. Indians started migrating for educational and economical reasons. Uma Parameswaran belongs to the first generation of Indian who migrate to Canada. She had already experience inter state Diaspora while moving from Chennai to Jabalpur.

Uma Parameswaran has lived through an unique life. She has experienced the culture of North Indian dystopian society, flavour of South Indian family bindings and the identity crisis due to the mergence with cultural Canadian life. Her life experiences have created identity crisis many a times.

It is such a interesting fact that Uma Parameswaran calls herself 'Canadian' outside Canada and *South Asian* in Canada. She calls this “going beyond the hyphen without erasing it”.⁴

In the play *Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees*, Uma Parameswaran has presented three generations. The first generation is of the parents who migrated to Canada in mid thirties. Second generation is of the children in their twenties, who have lived in India for some time, the third generation comprises of Krish Bhave, twelve year old and Preeti Moghe, ten year old, who were born in Canada. The characters and situations reveal the assimilation process.

Sharad Bhave an atomic energy scientist in Trombay, India moved out at the age of thirty five. Many a times he regrets being a real state agent. His wife Savitri is a school teacher. They represent the hardships, racial discrimination and tough competition of first generation. They can not go back to India. But Sharad is shocked to know that his sister Veejala, a scientist in Canada prefers to return to India.

“Asked if conditions were any better in India, she said they were not, but she would feel better wasting her life in her native country than wasting it in the backwoods of Canada”[64]⁵. Sharad remains in deep dilemma “Why else would any women leave her husband and home ? At her age, too, Gods, help us , she is crazy” [63]⁶. He even assumes there is some illicit relationship. Savitri rebukes Sharad and reminds him that it is the impact of culture, they imbibed

that makes him presume so. “ I wonder , if we aren't being brain washed by our environment ? That we can think only of illicit relationship at the root of all troubles” [63].⁷

Anita Desai in *Cry, The Peacock* asserts the feminine will to be recognized, same is the desire of Sharad's sister Veejala, who wants to move back to India to search her identification. “Maya, the central figure, the wife of a lawyer, devoid of progeny, finds it difficult to exist in Gautam's world. Maya is possessed by the prophecy made by an astrologer, Death.... To one of you”⁸. Like Maya, Veejala is in a dilemma of a choice, she wants to permanently leave Canada.

Uma Parameswaran is an exponent of the concept of *Rootlessness* in most of her literary forms be the plays, short stories, novels or poems, this experience lingers. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* the very name is suggestive of the theme of *Rootlessness*.

While Jayant prepares *Sundae* along with his friends, he gives the following instructions “don't ever use maple syrup because both are too overpowering, Mangoes and Maples don't mix” [58].⁹ Uma Parameswaran is very clear in highlighting that assimilation of the cultures *Indians* settling on Canadian soil will, inevitably create strange diaspora.

Uma Parameswaran's plays and novels reflect this phenomenon very clearly. Probably, she has experienced it deep rootedly, the exquisite and subtle tension, that went in the shaping generations and continents. It must have been a plethora of emotional compromises in between

The escapism from rootedness has the following features :-

- Ø The phenomena is a universal struggle.....

Ø It is an attempt to extricate ourselves

From the Past

From the Family of Origin.....

From the Curse of History

Ø The generations experiencing the guilt and liberation

Ø Contradictory feeling and emotions are superfluous but dominant.

Once such thought can always cross in our minds. *It is death to sleep on foreign soil and living death to sleep on our own soil.* i.e. remaining unemployed or unsuccessful in our own motherland. At times, the venues are searched for fulfillment also. Uma Parameswaran is the representative playwright and novelist of the so called phenomena i.e. *Rootlessness*. She provides *a typical insight* different and unique, into generational differences.

“Roots son, roots. I often think of our plantain trees back home. Each plantain tree leaves a young sapling , before it dries up [....] It is a symbol of continuity and usefulness ; you know how every part of plantain tree - flowers, leaves, trunk - is put to good use. Can we really grow roots ? [.....] And if an Ontario polar can't survive in Manitoba soil, what do we have [22].”¹⁰ Says Sharad.

Continuous, mention and explanation of Mango or Plantain trees symbolizes perfectional survival. It is in contrast to the Canadian trees and soil. The basic question that arises is *will the sense of belonging! be ever felt* It closes emotional connection to his homeland.

Ben Okri has presented the landscapes which are surreal. In a world where there is lot of suffering, where due to the lack of identity, is typical postcolonial and reflects *Rootlessness*. The landscapes like the trees have

certain timeless quality. Even a river becomes a road that devours its travelers. *The tree*, the landscape and the river are the metaphors to explain the search for belongingness. In the Famished Road, the character recollects “I could still hear the voices in passionate garden... I saw delicious girls dancing tarentellas in fields.... Then all I was left with was a world drowning in poverty... a long darkness before dawn”¹¹

The figure of the Tree once again comes up , There is a celebration of “..the Cancellation of [Jayant's] departure for destination unknown.” [175]¹². Both of them had bought a christmas tree. The Little brother Krish asked “what was christmas tree doing in the yard, so long after Christmas” [175]¹³. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*.

Jayant explains *The tree phenomena*, he says *the tree will fall as the snow melts*. Here is a Metaphor. Diaspora struggle to settle down on the foreign land. Indians have lost their roots, their homeland, their connection in search for green and new pastures. Indian are searching for *Evergreen* possibilities. Uma Parameswaran's play *Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees* has the similar theme. Which is again expressed in a Metaphor. As one walks by a Boulevard, with the rows of green trees, one experiences the sun shining. There are patches of shadow followed by patches of light. The Indian settled in Canada are diasporas uprooted or rootless. There is recognition of the shadow of a dried leaf, their experience of loss of identity, might be followed by patches of sunlight i.e. a creative space of hybridity. New possibilities or identity positions can be taken up. The second generation is some how determined to grow.

Jayant : “We will plant evergreens and oaks with roots [.....] grow mangoes on Maples and Jamuns on birches and bilves on spruces. God willing we shall.” [176].¹⁴ This is the desire of second generation to survive.

Jayant makes a final speech “Dad, not just you and me with our memories of ‘another land, another life’ but all of us in this modern world in the year 1997, rootless but green for the length of time, long or short! not a plantain tree that leaves a young one in its place, not an oak tree with its roots stretched a mile radius , this evergreen doesn't have one Christly use it is not good even as firewood but it is those, it is green it is beautiful and therefore right”[177].¹⁴ A definite autobiographical touch.

Every Playwright has autobiographical touch in his writings, just like Uma Parameswaran has. While discussing the metaphor of tree, she becomes conscious of nationality. C.L.R. James underscores the role of a writer and the literary text to the nationality. “The writer exercises an influence on the national consciousness which is incalculable. He is created by it but he himself illuminates and amplifies it, bringing the past up to date and charting the future.”¹⁵

Similarly, some where down the lane, there is nostalgia of the author, Uma Parameswaran. She is settled today in Winnipeg, Canada, so is the Bhave family. Sharad, the father is deeply touched. His son has brought home to him a certain fact. “The trees could and would with stand even this eternal country winter in Winnipeg, which was not god forsaken after all because no place graced by man can be god forsaken” [177].¹⁵ Therefore , Canada can also be home. In the present era, there is an requirement to make the connection between anxiety roots and universal growth. Hybridity is a strange term that refers to “Global Mixing of cultures and identities”[10].¹⁶ This *global mixing*

was resisted by Diasporan Indians. Probably Uma Parameswaran herself did so. But, today she is an international literary figure promoting Indian English Drama.

Being the recipient of Smit-Mundt Fulbright Scholarship. She moved to the United States of America. She took deep interest in American Literature and studied at Indiana University. She took her Masters in creative writing and Ph.D. in English at Michigan State University in 1972. In 1966 she shifted to Canada. She took up teaching at the University of Winnipeg. She is currently a retired professor of English University of Winnipeg. Ever since she settled in Canada, Uma Parameswaran has devoted her writing skills and efforts to the literary field i.e. creative and identifiable South Asian Canadian Diaspora. She devoted her writing skills to Research that revolved around evolving post colonial literature ; Women's Literature and South Asian Canadian Literature. Her research area was also tilted towards English Romanticism. It has been more than twenty five years, that she is actively involved in raising Indian culture and heritage to the International Recognition.

Probably, Uma Parameswaran did live through the experience, recognize and bring to the literary expression, the Phenomena of Rootlessness. Various questions come up in the minds of the characters such as these “Can the first generation of immigrants ever really feel at home in their adopted country ?? Do the second generation of immigrants have anyways of ??? *finding themselves* , If they go back to their parents homeland ? How long will it be until someone is considered just Canadian???”¹⁷ Will being Non-white always be a barrier to assimilation [12].

Uma Parameswaran did bring to the world, the concept of Post Colonial Literature and through her poems, short stories and dramas. She has been

actively working to promote, right of minorities, rights of women, ethical development; morality growth, checking racial discrimination and has been promoting common wealth literature.

She is presently the regional representative in National Council of the Writer's Union of Canada. Her previous engagements have been :

- Ø Chair, racial minority writer Committee, writers Union of Canada.
- Ø Chair , states of women writers committee, writers Union of Council.
- Ø Chair, women focused Research, University of Winnipeg.

Hence, there is a creation of a Diaspora of identifiable South Asian Canadian Literature in which the rootlessness and Alienations are clearly understood by the readers across the world.

Uma Parameswaran had written *Sons Must Die*, a play on theme of Partition of 1947, while she was in India. It was in the year 1962, the *Sons Must Die* was written. *Meera*, another of the play was written in 1971. In *What was always Hers* [1999], Parameswaran explores homo sexuality with resounding success. She does write with a lesbian sensibility. *Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees* [1990], a play and *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* [2002] a novel is nothing but love for repetition. The play, *Sita's Promise* was written in 1981. Uma Parameswaran has beautifully used the famous India Epic to show the Rootlessness and Escapism from Rootedness.

“Uma Parameswaran states that the play *Sita's Promise* belongs to the first connective phase of Indo-Canadian experience, though in the personal chart. it falls on the third phase.”¹⁸

Sita's Promise has characters same as Ramayan, the epic. Rama, Sita and Lakshama. They are the ideals for Hindu population of the world. These characters Rama, Sita and Lakshama had been developed by Tulsidas, centuries ago, these iconic characters lived through the process of Rootlessness in Ramayan. Hence Uma Parameswaran has taken this further to explain the concept of Rootlessness.

During their exile Rama, Sita and Lakshama in *Sita's Promise* find a Wounded Artic Tern. They took a resolution to reach it to its home.

Jatayu, the scared eagle carried them to The Himalayas, where it had lived. Rama and Sita with Lakshma travelled to north, through India to reach the wounded Artic Tern to its home. The sacred Eagle carried them through the primeval ocean, called Lake Agassize.

Finally, Rama and Sita had to leave for their native land i.e. their Enrooted Land, the native children danced around and requested Sita to stay with them. Sita was so enamoured that she made a promise.....

“Sita Promise is symbolic of Uma Parmeswaran's vision of Canada, as a mosaic of cultures.”¹⁹

Sita's Promise constitutes testimony to Uma Parameswaran cultural rootedness. Perhaps the best way to survive the suffering of hybridity is to keep contact with one's roots.

“to this lovely land of lakes, the skies and snowI, through my people will surely come again and we shall build our temple and sing our songs with all the children of all the different countries who make this their home”.²⁰

Sita told them that she would not be able to stay and she *must go*.

Sita's Promise is a bridge between mythological India and modernized Canada through Myth and Dance. Uma Parameswaran's literary works basically *Meera* and *Sita's Promise* are initiatives set to celebrate Indian art and tradition.

Uma Parameswaran was an avid reader. She drew inspiration and motivation extensively from the Epic Poetry and The Greek Theatre. It was through her schooling that she had read Greek Literature. The India-China War 1962 had a deep impact upon her. She had identified the experiences of people affected by partition (1947). These experiences touched her heart and life. They left lingering empathies.

Dear Deedi, My Sister in 1989 had secured first prize in the Carbbe Play Writing Contest and many literary works were collected and published into a compiled edition of *Sons Must Die And Other Plays* in 1988 as a part of the South Asian Canadian Literature Series.

Uma Parameswaran compiled the experiences of Indo-Canadian writers ; their literary efforts and acknowledges their unique style. The literary output of the Canadian writers born on the Indian Subcontinent (India, Srilanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) is typically different in the Content and Form. One factor that is common to them is a *Passionate Faith* which has been raised through their stay in Canada, a definite Literature with *Expression Of Rootlessness*. These literary genius bring through their literature, racial discrimination and contemporary history.

Sons Must Die is the play that brings to the readers a distinctive progression. It is very clear as Uma Parameswaran's literary works contain the increasing *Fluidity in Language* and the *Choice of Subject Matter*.

Their material sensibility transcends political boundaries. The women are seriously accepting their own sacrifices and the worse is that they are

mentally prepared for the tragedies taking place. Their sons die is in the background theme of *Rootedness* and *Rootlessness*. The people are displaced in the name of patriotism and domination of religion in 1947.

The progression of Uma Parameswaran is contained in the highest degree of dual cultural sensitivity in the plays. The sense of rootlessness is very dominant in the character of Sridhhar which is supported by Jayant, who quotes “: ... rootless, Lets face it , Jesus , no one but no one has roots anywhere that's the way things are in 1979 A.D. But we can stand tall,.... and live each day for all goddamned worth and ours [127].”²¹

Manjula Padhmanabhan is the writer of international claim. Her plays deal with issues, which may be imperceptible or may be seeking valve orientation. Being a post colonial writer, she is definitely, the builder of cultural heritage, which was disfigured by colonialism. To re build the cultural heritage, the literary artists like Amitav Ghosh, Hanif Quershi, Bharti Mukherjee, Uma Parmeswaran and Manjula Padhmanabhan have to bring about *Race Retrieval*. The post colonial writers job is to create the consciousness.

And that has to be done to recover the hidden, lost, repressed, denigrated identities which we have denied to our selves. “It is an axiomatic fact that the impact of early childhood and condition/ mores rampant during that formative period makes an indelible impression on any human being’s psyche. But when the person goes to a land of entirely new cultural patterns, ways of life and unfavorable working environment he/she every time looks at his/her past and gets the feeling of nostalgia for that salubrious land, a kind of ethnic consciousness. This principle of lost land to their children born or brought up in an alien environment because they got themselves totally acclimatised.....”²²

References :

1. Parameswaram, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, New York , Lincoln, Shanghai, iuniverse. INC, 1998, p.57.
2. Vedavalli R. Balachandra K. *Critical Essays on Canadian Literature*, [http:// books google.co.in](http://books.google.co.in), 2002, 27 April, 2015.
3. Ibid.
4. Parameswaram, Uma. *Writing the Diaspora Essays on Culture and Identity*. Jaipur Rawat Publications, 2007, p.28
5. Parameswaram, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, New York , Lincoln, Shanghai, iuniverse. INC, 1998, p.64.
6. Parameswaram, Uma. p.63.
7. Parameswaram, Uma. p.63.
8. Desai Anita Cry, *The Peacock. Delhi : Orient Paperbacks*,1980. p.30.
9. Parameswaram, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, New York , Lincoln, Shanghai, iuniverse. INC, 1998, p-22.
10. Parameswaram, Uma, p.175.
11. Okri, Ben, *The Famished Road*, New York Doubleday, 1991, p.308.
12. Parameswaram, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, New York, Lincoln, Shanghai, iuniverse. INC, 1998, p.175.
13. Parameswaram, Uma, p.176.

14. Parameswaram, Uma, p.177.
15. James C.L.R, *The Artist in the Caribbean, in The Future in the Present: Selected writing (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill),*1997, p.185
16. Parameswaram, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, New York , Lincoln, Shanghai, iuniverse. INC, 1998, p.12.
17. Balachandran, K. *Critical Essay on Candian Literature*, [http:// books google.com.](http://books.google.com), 2002. 2 May, 2015.
18. Ibid
19. Balachandran, K. *Critical Essay on Candian Literature*, [http:// books google.com.](http://books.google.com), 2002. 2 May, 2015.
20. Parameswaram, Uma. *Sita's Promise*, (ed) Uma Parameswaran, *Sons Must Die* in other Place, New Delhi, Prestige.
21. Parameswaram, Uma. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, New York, Lincoln, Shanghai, iuniverse. INC, 1998, p.127.
22. Mahesh, Mahesh , Sangeeta. *Negotiating Identities between India and Canada. A Reading of Select Plays of Uma Parameswaran.* Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies Vol.2 2010, 28th April 2015