

The Problem of Immigrants and Nostalgia in *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* by Uma Parameswaran

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Abstract

Diasporic Writing has many dimensions. Writers who are geographically alienated and culturally deviated express their anguish and pain through their narration. The long history of diasporic writing starts from Jewish diaspora and culminates in modern self – exiled. The essence of diasporic writing is in its non – existential existence. This paper deals with the problem of immigrants and nostalgia in *Rootless but green are the boulevard tress* by Uma Parameswaran.

Keywords: diaspora, existential existence, self – exiled, immigrants etc

Uma Parameswaran works are proposed to study the problems of the immigrants at various levels and their struggles between the pulls of two cultures by a study of Uma Parameswaran's *Rootless but green are the boulevard trees*. She involved in the Indo – Canadian and Women's communities in Winnipeg.

Uma Parameswaran in *Ganga in Assiniboine: Prospects for Indo – Canadian Literature* identifies four phases of the immigrant experience to Canada:

- The experience of encountering the vastness and harshness of the Canadian landscape, which she believes the South Asian missed out totally because they went basically to cities (83).
- The strength of the immigrants to establish themselves in their own esteem and in society (83). Again, Parameswaran believes that South Asian hasn't achieved this totally because, despite being settled financially, they still feel unsettled (84).
- Second – generation Canadians of South Asian origin, realize that home is here, not elsewhere (85).

The host culture amidst the dilemmas and self – imposed ghettoisation is clearly seen in Uma Parameswaran's play *Rootless but green are the boulevard trees*. The dilemmas exist more in the parent generation than in the younger one. When the father distressingly points out the absence of roots, the son assures him that they can grow roots in their adopted land.

Rootless but green are the boulevard trees depicts real life like people in the Indo – Canadian community and the events, situations and experiences pictured are common and typical that occur in various; families of the immigrants in Canada. The play centers on an East Indian family living in the shrubs of Winnipeg. The character of the play belongs to three generations. The generations represent the various stages and degrees of change are the marriage of two cultures by their appearance, language and values.

The parents, Sharad and Savitri Bhave and Sharad's sister Veejala and her husband Anant Moghe represents one generation. These two households left India in their adult years after marriage, for different reasons. The Bhave and Moghe children, who are in their early twenties, represent the second generation. As they have spent first half of their life in India and Second half in Canada, their traditions and values are unique blends of the two. The youngest siblings in their adolescent years represent the third generation. These children Krish, Bhave, twelve and Priti, Moghe, ten have never been to India are exposed only to residual elements of Indian culture as expressed through food, clothing and language including the religious stories. They are deeply immersed in the culture of their peers in Canada.

Uma Parameswaran's description of these three generations of characters and the situations they are put in reveal how acculturation depends on the age of immigrant and his length of stay in the two cultures. Sharad Bhave, an atomic energy scientist in Trombay, India, had quit his job and now works in Canada as a real estate broker. His wife Savitri, she is a school teacher. She is more traditional than her husband. Her changing into saree inside the house, wearing kumkum, sitting next to the service window and looking after the needs of the family during the dinning times – all proves that she is still dominated by the Indian culture. When she is worried about her daughter's late night arrivals Sharad comforts her.

Savatri fights a tough battle and never allows herself any time to think about life in Canada and its inconsistencies. Jyoti reminds Savatri of the comforts she has lost in leaving India. Savatri is not worried about the loss of comforts. But she struggles to keep her spirit alive. She can't stand the idea of her spirit dried up in the cold of Canada. She is an Indian in spirit. She is unable to cut herself off from Indian ethos and sensibility. In the core of her being, she still remains an Indian though she got acculturated to Canadian situation externally. For example, though she doesn't prevent her daughter Jyoti from dating as an Indian mother would have done, still she cannot allow the father to know the escapades of the daughter. So she deprives Jyoti of the usage of her father's car but allows her to use her own.

Sharad feels sorry for having left India. He values family ties more and is shocked when he comes to know that Veejala is going back home resigning her job and leaving the family. He couldn't imagine any other reasons but some illicit relationship, being influenced by Canadian culture. Savatri, more balanced than Sharad blames the environment. But the real cause of Veejala's decision to leave Canada is racial and gender discrimination:

Asked if she felt she had been discriminated against because of her sex, Dr. Moghe said, 'I happen to be of the wrong colour as well'. (65)

The first – generation immigrants suffer a lot before they can root themselves in the alien soil. They face tough competition and racial discrimination wherever they go. The idea of assimilation seems a far – fetched one, when the immigrants undergo such hardships. Many people, like Sharad, bear it silently for practical reasons, but some rebellious spirit like Veejala prefer to suffer in their own country than in the alien soil.

Jayant is very hopeful of their survival in the alien soil. He compares the immigrants to the tall Ontario poplar trees that look evergreen and beautiful though planted in Manitoba. But Sharad reminds the truth that the one in their garden dried up and are told by their neighbor that they are not native to Manitoba and may dry up one winter just like that. Jayant and his friends are greatly disappointed when the truth dawns on them that the whites are not ready to accept them.

The host unwillingness to treat the immigrants as equals compels these people to give up their faith in assimilation and prevents them to surrender their ethnic identity, to merge with the cultural mainstream of their adopted country. In order to save himself from the psychological crises of his identity, the immigrant is compelled to cling to his own traditions and to mix with his own people rather than suffer from total rootlessness and alienation from both the cultures.

The argument between Jayant, Vithal, Sridhar and others drives home the emptiness of Canada's loud declarations and claim to multiculturalism. They feel that assimilation is not an allegiance to the rational, mechanical, achievement – oriented western culture, adhering to Whiteman's value system. Rather they expect Canada to become a melting pot where different people from different cultures and ideas co – exist on equal terms.

In *Rootless but green are the boulevard trees* the characters Jyoti, Jayant, Vithal, Swapna and such youngsters are the “flags” planted by Uma Parameswaran in the Canadian soil who are going to create a new culture, a third space which transforms and enriches Canadian culture, while they themselves have travelled a long way from “unthinking scorn,

unfeeling barbs, closed fists and closed hearts” to being accepted, appreciated and acculturated.

References:

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