

**DIASPORIC CRISIS: LANDSCAPE AND IDENTITY IN UMA PARAMESWARAN'S
MANGOES ON MAPLE TREE**

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Abstract

Uma Parameswaran, a prominent Indo-Canadian author, skillfully captures the diverse dimensions of cultural pluralism in Canada during its third phase of expatriation. Residing in Manitoba, she keenly observes the Canadian government's bilingual policy. As an ethnic minority writer, Parameswaran navigates the 'third space,' a concept evident in her works. In her debut novel, *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* (2002), she delves into the lives of two families, the Bhaves and Moghes, who have migrated from India to Canada. The narrative unfolds the diasporic crisis faced by these families in a foreign land, shedding light on the ethnic challenges encountered. The novel intricately explores the tensions within the families and the broader societal tensions they confront as minorities. Beyond the impact of the Canadian landscape on daily life, Parameswaran emphasizes the significance of socially constructed landscapes such as individual property, houses, and land in shaping human experiences. This article aims to articulate the sense of rootlessness and uprooted identity, highlighting the struggle for group consciousness among oppressed minorities. The focus is on portraying the complex reality of immigrant life, navigating both the geographical and socially constructed landscapes that influence the lived experiences of these individuals.

Keywords: Ethnic Minority, Group consciousness, Uprooted Identity.

Jean Paul Sartre the well-known French philosopher uses the term 'engagement' to refer to the process of acceptability among individuals for their actions signifying a political consequence. The same concept of 'engagement' can be applied in Uma Parameswaran's novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* where the main character Sharad Bhave decides to leave his homeland to settle in a foreign place. As a result, the family experienced a sense of loneliness which made Sharad to realize of his wrong decision and finally to establish a 'collective solidarity' within themselves through mutual support. The feeling of uprooted identity, rootlessness is one of the major issues concerned in the life of diasporans which Parameswaran also rationally records. The isolation and interdependence the immigrant family faces there and

the steps they take to resolve the existential problem by positively or consciously engaging in willed action is much reflected this novel. The place of living ie: the landscape of existence also plays a vital role in the life of people making them aware of the responsibility and need for survival. Thus 'Existential Engagement' is a term which insists on the issues related to political awareness and bad faith in the minds of people. Parameswaran also focuses on the impact of the vast and harsh landscape which problematize people or in some extent makes the people accustomed to it.

She herself writes in her essay:

Though the landscape around me has been cedar and spruce for the last twenty five years, the landscape I am most familiar with is treed with mango and jasmine. I can describe without effort the tender yellow blossoms and the hailstone showers that brought green mangoes to the ground but I cannot be as effortless when it comes to the pine cones I have been ranking off my yard for the last so many years. (104- 05)

Parameswaran compares the Assinboine of Canada to the Ganges of India and tries to break the cultural barriers of the both land. But the New-Canadians experiencing racial discrimination, disempowerment, and uprooted identity is also much reflected in her work. Kearns one of her colleagues observes in Parameswaran's works: A sense of community has steadily enriched her work, which deals with the intersection of different cultures and the adaptation of ancient traditions to life in new and unfamiliar circumstances. (2007, 7-8). Parameswaran traces the four phases of immigrant settlement in which the younger settlement are forcefully bound to experience disparate cultures.

Among the seniors there are of two types namely —those over middle age...those who have spent their working life in Canada, and those who come to Canada after retiring from India, to join their adult children (2007, 213). The first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is so busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is when immigrants start taking part in the shaping of Diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have —arrived and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (2007, 305)

Mangoes on the Maple Tree also deals with all the four phases of Immigrants exclusively their problems overlapping together. The Bhave family which migrates from Pune to Manitoba is a New Canadian family settles aiming to improve their middle class status through financial position. Sharad and Savitri with their children Jyoti and Jayant occupy a third space in the land

leaving their sparse comforts in their ancestral home. Sharad's real-estate business is an ironical hint on the man helping other man to occupy foreign land in the name of business. Sharad's reputation in the family also gets lowered because of his job. Jayant shows his unhappiness towards his father for leaving his engineering job in India which might have elevated his position higher. The writer herself introduce Sharad's character being adopted to the new culture as:

Forms, legal advice bribes just to get people to do their job. In order to expedite the paperwork, his father had legally renounced all claims to ancestral and paternal property. And now he was a real estate broker. Betrayal, his lifelong companion.
(109)

The cultural impact on male and female children in Canada is different which can be noted in this novel. Savitri toils hard as a schoolteacher worrying about Jyoti's adolescent behaviour. The royal treatment at their grandparent's house being replaced by harsh racial discrimination in Canada makes Jayant decide to leave home in 1976 Pontiac car to California for a year. Jyoti's love with Pierre a White Canadian and her thoughts on expecting her parents to accept her marriage with "...not someone of _our own kind" (9) clearly emphasis the cultural calamity. Sharad's sister Veejala a scientist also settles in Canada along with her family following her brother. Her son Vithal reveals the prejudice towards the Canadians same way as Jayant: "They-white Canadians- don't want us to assimilate. They want us out. We'll be squashed like bugs soon" (81). However his love for the white girl Donna who according to him "...is like us, very Hindu in her values more so than many of us" (92) show his mentality to accept the new situation. Vithal also supports Jyoti's love for Pierre while her brother Jayant resists because of his immersed greatness for his ancestry. He remembrance then and there about their families proud history which had passed on him through bedtime stories make a strong feeling of dislike towards his father.

Uma Parameswaran herself adopts the technique of using Hindi and Marathi words without a glossary or textual explanation to identify India in Canada. This kind of multiculturalism makes the novel an engaged literature. The author's preoccupation with Indian landscape and culture and her inability to drive away her mental mapping of the Indian soil can be very well observed. Veejala resigning her job, her decision to return to India where her freedom and liberty can be exercised shows the repatriate nature of immigrant settlers in common. Savitri who first wonders at her sister-in-law's decision to return back later accepts telling "But why not? India had moved on, would move on" (140-1).

The complicated part played by these immigrants is by getting accustomed to the newer way of living in their migrated land. The two women characters Savitri and Veejala show a

compete contrast in their belief and way of living. Savitri finds Winnipeg to be "...a friendly place of warm, hardworking people and large, closely-knit families"(22). But Veejala on the other hand shows dilemma in her decision towards living in a migrated land. Her dislikes towards Canada and yet not wanting her children to be reminded of their past life at Pune "...you have only bad memories of Pune...Besides, this is home to you, and one can have only one home at any given time" (47) show the writer's confused state in presenting the character of Veejala. Anant accepting Veejala's decision of leaving for India and happily dropping her at the airport further validates how Parameswaran gives a male voice to hold her women characters position.

You shouldn't worry about the house, he said, smoothly deflecting it from himself. ...You should go ahead with your plans, get away from housework and, for heaven's sake, away from guilt feelings. (212). Anant, having realized the pressure exerted by social norms for a wife leaving the family, consoles Veejala for her guilt conscience and explains "I decided to stay because you decided to go away" (214). Such an understanding between a husband and wife shows the societal cruelty in an alien country. Jyoti's attraction towards two men namely Pierre and Sridhar and her justification to Donna "...if she, Jyoti, wanted to play around with two men and not let go of either, why shouldn't Donna" (208) shows Jyoti's complete surrender to premarital sex with Pierre. Uma Parameswaran as a transplanted writer present the first generation settlers being nostalgic of India and the second generation settlers being initially analytic and critical of their position and finally accepting and acknowledging the new land as a source of their survival. The allusion to Indian tree and the uselessness of evergreen trees are metaphoric and philosophical in Indian terms.

Jayant thinking about his mother land yet his opinion to help the country during flood purely shows his readiness to accept the land where he lives, "Our people, our old country...Dad there's no our people, no old country for anyone in the world anymore, least of all for us. This is one land and here we shall stay" (30-1). Jyoti confirming the mixture of two cultures pangs the solution for immigrant life:

We will plant evergreens and oaks with roots...And grow mangoes on maples, and jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces. God willing, we shall...Krish and one of those little Indian girls born here, Romona's sister may be, Vithal and Donna, she and Pierre or...whoever it was to be (221).

Uma Parameswaran mixes up both Indian and Canadian landscapes while using analogy and metaphor in describing the life of her narrative. From Vithal's observation "...Mangoes and maples don't mix. And whisk" (74) and Jayant's observation, "you should make every effort to merge, since you are here to stay...this is your country. You have to try to assimilate ...The

Canadians would appreciate that” (81), Parameswaran’s confused transcendent nature in presenting the diasporic problem is revealed. When the news of flood arrives everyone thinks in terms of their possible means to help for a common cause. Savitri’s words proves the helpless condition of the settlers in an immigrant land but even then a single unified identity as Canadians to extend their hand while crises is revealed: “Sad isn’t it that there has to be such a disaster before people will come together...on the other hand, it is comforting to know that people do help out at such times. Just think how terrible it would be if we got so hardened that even disasters didn’t make us human again”(176). Thus landscape and place of living determines the final condition of the immigrant people making them adopt accordingly. Uma Parameswaran also had differentiated, highlighted and stressed on the importance of landscape in her work. At last the new land makes the people of differential thoughts to get united as one without minding their past identity.

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