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**Diasporic Dissonance: Analysing Inter-Generational Conflicts in the Works of Uma Parameswaran**

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**Abstract:**

This paper endeavours to examine inter-generational conflicts in the works of Uma Parameswaran. The depiction of conflicts in Parameswaran's diasporic writings illustrates that assimilation is contingent upon age and duration of residence in both cultures. Second-generation immigrants are resolute in establishing their identity in the host country despite societal and parental pressures, while first-generation immigrants continue to yearn for their homeland and seek to alleviate the cultural conflicts encountered in their adopted land. Parameswaran's works poignantly illustrate the divide between first-generation parents and their second-generation children. A disparity exists between societal norms and parental values for children from immigrant families.

**Keywords:** Trishanku, Assimilation, Homeland, Host land, Collective memory

**Introduction**

The literature of diaspora vividly projects a double vision; one is the yearning or longing for the past and the other vision is of looking forward. The works of Uma Parameswaran reflect the longing for a homeland and a deep sense of remorse for the lost native land in their first-generation immigrant characters. While her first-generation immigrant characters lament the loss and exhibit nostalgia for their lost land, the second-generation characters show distancing from it. Since they are born and brought up in America or Canada they look forward to creating a multicultural space in their adopted land. Hence, we find the first-generation immigrant characters yearn for their homeland in the diasporic writings. The works, that are written with this theme of cultural conflict usually, carry expatriate sensibility in them.

These works have been attributed to the labels of "Neither Here Nor There" and "Trishanku" images made popular by Uma Parameswaran and Sujata Bhatt. Migratory sensitivity is a complex state of mind and spirit. It involves a quirky longing for the past, often considered a symbol of the ancestral home. They oscillate between two different worlds. Neither they belong to their own country nor do they adapt to the alien land.

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—Uma Parameswaran presents the view that it is easier for second-generation immigrants to culturally assimilate in the host land as compared to the first generation. Every displaced person is touched by the collective memory. In 'Trishanku', Parameswaran vividly projects the angst of the immigrant characters in Canada. As she says:

“Born under one law, to another bound  
 What will you say to me, Fulke Greville, to me or for me  
 Who was born under two laws and bound to a third?...  
 And what shall I do now? Fulke Greville, And what?  
 Shall I hang myself in the sky as Trishanku did off, old?” (Parameswaran 22)

The first-generation immigrants feel alienated. There is a sense of not belonging to the host land, though the new land can give materialistically a bright future. The old home, the mangoes, and the environment are recalled by them. This becomes palpable when Chandrika in 'Trishanku' says:

“I have been there, my brother  
 The land is green, but my heart was barren,  
 Warm are the people, but my heart was lonely,  
 Money flows in rivers, but my heart is dry.  
 Bereft of want and tensions  
 Bereft of sorrow and pain Bereft of comradeship  
 My heart lost its voice, my brother.  
 It is not the land for you and me.” (Parameswaran 51)

The costumes, language, cultural environment, comfort, food habits, weather, people, customs, shops and schools all seem alien to them. Tara in 'Trishanku' is very puzzled in the new country. She is unable to speak English well. She gives an account of her experiences in an alien land to Savitri behan (sister):

“Toba Toba behn, whole hunks  
 Of animals hanging from hook Like we hang bananas no?  
 O o o is hard for me to ispeak Ingleesh.” (Parameswaran 54)

Tara's mother-in-law is equally baffled and finds it difficult to assimilate into the new culture of Canada. She experiences culture shock in an alien land. She complains to her son

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 about the advanced atmosphere of Canada. When your wife holds hands with men and you with other men's wives" (Parameswaran 61).

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The first-generation immigrants fundamentally experience the feeling of alienation and cultural shock as is evident from the example of Tara's mother-in-law. She admits that her son is materially leading a comfortable life in Canada. She gives an account of her lifestyle in Canada. She stays in a house fully air-conditioned, has all the corporeal comforts, and has the most comfortable gadgets, yet she longs for her homeland:

“Open the windows, son, And let me go back  
 To sun and air  
 And sweat and even flies and all  
 But not this, not this” (Parameswaran 62)

Another character Chander Lal Dwivedi in ‘Trishanku’ shares the same feeling of wonder and amazement in the land as he says:

“At first  
 I thought this was rakshasa land  
 Where everything is opposite  
 Where people monstrously huge.  
 Make night day and sleep till noon  
 Where women chase men  
 Like Surpanaka of old ”(Parameswaran 72)

### Problems of Diaspora

Jayant in ‘Mangoes on the Maple Tree’ is an atomic energy scientist in India. He quits his job to settle in Canada as a real estate broker. Jayant suggests that Sharad does not enjoy a good status in Canada. Jyoti mentions the difficulties he had faced, “It couldn’t have been easy for him to move out after he was thirty- five, and it is no bed of roses here, mowing the lawn and painting the house and a hundred menial chores which were done by servants in the luxury of the family back home” (Parameswaran 15).

Uma Parameswaran in her short story ‘What Was Always Hers’ vividly portrays the fear and grief of old Indian parents whose son Niranjan had died in Canada and who were unable to even see their son for the last time. The narrator vividly portrays the fear of Niranjan’s parents, who are miles away from their son. As she says, “To lose a son in a faraway land, never to ever see his face before... to lose a son” (Parameswaran 27).

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 Most of the Indo-Canadian characters project feelings of alienation, of remembering their past, particularly the first-generation immigrants. Sharad in 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' reveals to his son the reason for avoiding public transport: "All those alien faces staring at or through you. It makes me wonder. Makes me ask myself, what am I doing here? Who are these faceless people among whom my life is oozing away? Each so self-contained, so completely looking at me as though I shouldn't be there. It's a strange, eerie feeling; all those discreetly questioning eyes that make me ask endless questions." (Parameswaran 30)

The problem of being not assimilated into is relatively more among the first-generation migrants. Sharad has doubts but sees some hope when he mentions that "rootless" trees can also grow and flourish: "That would be a most reassuring analogy, Jai, if our poplar hadn't died... Looking at them, who'd think one of them, was dead? ... And if an Ontario poplar can't grow and survive in Manitoba soil, what chance does we have?" (Parameswaran 31)

James Gerein in his review of 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' asserts, "One of the major themes of the novel deals with how the Bhave family and many other people in the expatriate Indian community feel rootless and not particularly at home in their new country" (Gerein 91).

Past memories of their homeland deeply haunt the immigrants, e.g. In *Trishanku: A Cycle of Voices*, Chander, who is an immigrant in Canada, remembers his first love, Usha. He sees her everywhere in Canada and records his experience as:

"The stars shimmered above me  
 The frozen masses roared below  
 And I on black grass  
 I saw her in the distance  
 As I always knew I would  
 A little older than when she'd stand  
 On the terrace drying her new  
 Washed hair long and wavy." (Parameswaran 25).

He reminisces about his childhood home, the Indian summers, the mangoes, and the surroundings. There is a continual effort to replicate the homeland in the new territory. The Vedas, temples, native language, and film music all epitomized the homeland. William Safran posits that the preservation of the concept of homeland is a defining trait of diaspora. Certain immigrants endeavour to reconstruct the life of their native community through memory by employing rituals.

The immigrants reference ancient Indian myths and recount various interpretations of the narratives from the great epics. In "Mangoes on the Maple Tree," the second-generation immigrants recount the Mahabharata tale in which Krishna visits the Pandavas and Panchali in the forest and requests sustenance. In "Mangoes on the Maple Tree," Jayant reminisces about the Sharad Purnima nights spent in their ancestral home, where his grandmother sat in the courtyard. He recalls the bakul tree, jasmine, raat ki rani, neem, and curry leaves, contemplating how "Hinduism has a place for everyone and everything" (Parameswaran 103).

Maru in 'Maru and the M.M.Syndrome' recalls a story from Hindu lore about God teaching a proud Brahmin how to get out of the stranglehold of caste. The immigrants often nostalgically recall their visit homeland. Jayant tells Vithal "...Our summer in India... that was the best time I've ever had" (Parameswaran 88).

The immigrants by maintaining strong ethnic group consciousness, insist on maintaining their culture and traditions and remain connected to their homeland. Cohen in his *Introduction to Diasporas* aptly asserts, "A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate." (Cohen 17)

The Bhave family is shown to have Indian dishes like pulav, mutter paneer, raita and puries. The characters in 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' enjoy Indian food much more than Canadian food. In the short story "Maru and the M.M. Syndrome", Maru cooks idli, sambhar, aviyal and delicious masala dosai for their guests. They also remain connected to their native language and life. The first-generation migrants in 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' use a lot of Hindi words like beta, poories. In 'Maru and the M.M. Syndrome' words like Namaskaram, Amma, Rashika, and PallanKuzhi have been used. Whereas in "*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*", words like Vilayati baba, rakhi, jamun, charpai, dhobi, raat ki rani, chunam, kabaddi, tulsi and shehnai have their presence.

The first-generation immigrants in "*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*" speak in their native language Marathi. Veejala sings a song from an old Hindi movie when massaging Jayant's head: "Sir jo tera chakraye, ya dil dooba jaye,...( Parameswaran 34). Savitri repeats an old Hindi proverb: "Daane daane pe likha hai khane wale ka naam"(Parameswaran 112). Thus, this way the migrants remember their homeland and get connected to it. Tara's mother-in-law is disgusted when she finds:"no rangoli design on porch steps / to say please come in" (Parameswaran 66).

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—For an elderly woman like Tara, rangoli is part of her life and cultural heritage which seems absurd in Canada. The processed food in Canada is unpalatable to her so she usually cooks Indian food and tells her son about:

“The leaping aromas  
Of turmeric and green coriander and mustard seeds popped in hot oil  
That flavour food,  
Not stink up the air.” (Parameswaran 66)

She complains that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and health, will not bless them if they have stale and stored foods in cans. She complains thus:

“She the lotus-seated consort of him who reposes  
On the primeval ocean of milk  
You think they'll bless this food  
Three days old  
You store in cans and ice cupboard?”(Parameswaran 66)

The novel 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' depicts an East Indian family residing in the suburbs of Winnipeg. The play's characters span three generations: the parents, Sharad and Savitri Bhave; Sharad's sister, Veejala; and her husband, Anant Moghe, represent the first generation. The children of the Bhave and Moghe families, currently in their early twenties, constitute the second generation. They have divided their lives equally between India and Canada. Krish Bhave, aged 12, and Priti Moghe, aged 10, have never visited India and are solely acquainted with the remnants of Indian culture as manifested through cuisine, attire, language, and religious narratives. Their engagement with Canadian culture is profound.

Uma Parameswaran illustrates that assimilation is contingent upon age and duration of residence in the two cultures. First-generation immigrants often encounter challenges in assimilation due to experiencing racial discrimination linked to their Indian heritage. Sharad Bhave, an atomic energy scientist in Trombay, India, resigned from his position and now resides in Canada as a real estate broker. His daughter Jyoti depicts his vulnerable situation:

“It couldn't have been easy for him  
To move out after thirty-five, and it is no bed of roses here, moving the lawn, painting  
The house and a hundred different things Done by servants in the luxury  
Of a family back home” (Parameswaran 14)

~~Savitri, the first-generation immigrant finds it difficult to assimilate the idea that her unmarried daughter has an active sexual life. She is enraged and upset to know that her daughter is sleeping with her boyfriend. Savitri reacts vehemently when she discovers an open condom pack in Sharad's car which was taken by Jyoti the night before. She scolds her daughter. As she says: "We are supposed to treat you as rational adults, even when you behave like beasts. I don't know whether you meant to flaunt this to your father or what, but I don't want this to happen in dad's car, ever... I'll take you to doctor MacRae and put you on the pill... if you haven't already of course."~~(Parameswaran 90-91)

The immigrants often go on nostalgic trips and remember their homeland in various ways which Rushdie calls "Imaginary Homelands". They refer back to the old Indian myths telling and retelling many versions of the stories from the great epics. Krish and Priti, the youngest second-generation immigrants in the play, like to listen to these stories. They want to hear the story of the Mahabharata. In this way, they keep connected to the past, of their old homeland. In a talk with Vithal, he recalls his visit to India: "...Our summer in India... I thought we were packed off there for Granddad's sixtieth birthday just to please the folks back home, and I hated leaving Winnipeg. But Jeez, that was the best time I've ever had" (Parameswaran 88).

### **Inter-generational Conflicts**

Uma Parameswaran depicts the conflict between first- and second-generation immigrants as in 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree.' The Canadian or American-inflected jargon, taken up by the young generation reveals their adoption of and belongingness in Canadian youth culture. The parent generation still speaks their native language Marathi at home, whereas Jayant and his siblings speak English in order to assimilate with the Canadian culture.

The second-generation immigrants believe that in order to assimilate into Canadian culture, inter-racial marriages should be promoted. As Danesh hesitantly suggests integrating when the young crowd wonder why so many Indian girls date whites, "But you should make every effort to merge, since you are here to stay. Jayant, I mean this is your country. You have to try to assimilate, don't you think the Canadians would appreciate that" (Parameswaran 63).

The title of the novel 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' is a metaphor for the hybridization of cultures. It refers to the blending of different cultures. As Hall suggests, "Each culture enriches the other and forms something new" (Hall 57- 58). The first instance of such hybridization is given right at the beginning of the novel when Jyoti is looking at:

“One of her childhood crafts that her mother had proudly placed by the side of a framed peepal leaf painting. The leaf had been painstakingly dried and painted upon by a pavement artist on the streets of Mumbai. The mangoes that hung from a brown branch looked so real and three-dimensional that one felt like picking the fruit right off the leaf and tearing through the red-yellow skin with one's teeth to feel the sweet juice on one's tongue. Her own handicraft consisted of her attempts [...] into dry a red maple leaf with a white polar bear on it.” (Parameswaran 1)

The above passage sheds light on the novel's title as well as the lives of the immigrant characters. The piece of craft that Jyoti made consists of a genuine Peepal leaf. It is now dried and framed. This leaf is a symbol of an immigrant family. It represents the lost connection of the family to their ancestral homeland. It projects that the connection of immigrants with their motherland is now 'dried up'. The family has been torn off from the tree of India. Thus, while the leaf no longer is alive, it has been painted upon mangoes that make you taste and feel them in your mind. It refers to the family that has migrated to Canada to live in the diaspora. While their connection to India might not be as strong anymore, they still live happily in Canada. They are making their existence productive by adding new influences, new people and new insights into their lives.

Jyoti's painting of a maple leaf with a polar bear on it serves as another instance of hybridization. It refers to the adaption of immigrants to the new environment of Canada. Her mother has framed both paintings and placed them next to each other. It shows her attempt to adapt to the alien environment of the host land with no regrets about having left her homeland.

Jayant and his friends have bought a Christmas tree to celebrate "the cancellation of [Jayant's] departure for destinations unknown"(Parameswaran 175). His little brother Krish wonders as to what the tree was 'doing in the yard so long after Christmas' (Parameswaran 175). Jayant explains it as being an evergreen tree, without any roots. It would fall as soon as the snow melts. This planting of a rootless but evergreen tree can be regarded as a metaphor for the struggle of immigrants to make a life abroad. Having lost their roots, their homeland, they have not lost their hopes but found it to be a space of new, evergreen possibilities.

It also reminds us of the play 'Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees.' Passing a boulevard lined with green trees while the sun is shining means seeing patches of shadow, followed by patches of light. When diasporans, up-rooted or rootless, first recognise the shadow of a dried leaf, their experience might be followed by or changed into a patch of sunlight, a creative space of hybridity where new possibilities emerge and new identity positions can be taken up. This positive stance of the future, regarding their cultural backgrounds not with a pang of regret as a source for hybridity, as a third space, is illustrated in the utterance of Jayant talking

to his younger brother Krish that they will cultivate evergreens and oaks with roots and grow mangoes on maples, Jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces.

This indicates that the second generation is resolute in establishing their roots in Canada, a notion that Sharad challenges. The younger generation is poised to establish a third space of hybridity, not merely combining mangoes with maples but developing a novel cultivar that possesses maple leaves while producing mango fruits. Jayant's concluding impassioned address is aimed at his father; employing the metaphor of trees, he asserts that both generations can navigate the challenges of the diasporic experience and that their presence is justified. Ultimately, he arrives to demonstrate to his father that Canada can serve as a home and that a connection between ancient rites and universal gestures is attainable.

The problem is greater for the Indo-Canadian girls who are expected to follow the Indian values at home but outside the expectations are different. For this reason, Jayant, Jyoti's brother feels uneasy after the discovery that his sister slept with her boyfriend Pierre in the short story 'Darkest before the Dawn'. Jyoti is unable to handle the pressure from her Indian parents and her Canadian boyfriend. Her unsuccessful attempt to fit into the present environment is the real cause of her melancholy.

James Gerein in his review of 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' opines, "Jayant sees racism everywhere he looks and wants to build a temple- a sort of mini-Allahabad- at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers." (Gerein 91).

Parameswaran's characters successfully adapt to the alien atmosphere of Canada. They optimistically face the harshness of the new land. As Cariappa in 'A Cycle of the Moon' says, "When we leave our country, we shut many doors behind ourselves, though we are not aware of it at that time." Chander's reply to Cariappa presents Uma Parameswaran's message conveyed through her works, "There are many doors ahead of us" (Parameswaran 99).

Both Jyoti and Jayant find a way of dealing with their status as others, creating for themselves a new, a third, space of hybridity by identifying with both cultures. Jyoti though engaged to Pierre, who represents the colonizers, feels drawn to Sridhar and thus identifies with both cultures. Jayant, having abandoned his plans of taking to the road with his friends, also arrives to convince his father that it is possible to strike roots in Canada while not forgetting those of the home country. He opines that it is reasonable to put the two pictures of the Peepul and the maple leaf next to each other. It denotes the intermixing of two cultures. Jayant displays in his final performance, through the metaphor of the evergreen tree that mangoes can grow on maple trees.

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Diane Mc. Gifford aptly sums up Uma Parameswaran's works: "Uma Parameswaran insists on her cultural heritage, not because she disavows the one she found here, but because it is hers; because she trusts that a union of Eastern and Western traditions will reconcile her people to Canadian society and enhance its culture." (Gifford 307)

### Conclusion

Uma Parameswaran in almost all her works lays much emphasis on putting down roots and becoming a part of the dominant culture, while simultaneously she does not let go of one's ethnic, cultural and mythological moorings in the old home. She firmly believes in the transformative power that is generated when two generations of immigrants unitedly combat the challenges of immigration by understanding the problems of each other in adjusting to the environment of the host land. Rather, she envisions a time when the entire corpus of Canadian archetypes and allusions would swell with the inclusion of archetypes and images from the various immigrant cultures and diaspora calling Canada their home. She creates a "third space", a new Canada where there is real understanding, a give-and-take attitude, and mutual love between the immigrants and the natives. This "third space" would pave the way for further growth of both nations. This constructive co-existence is the need of the hour for universal peace and the oneness of the human race. She affirms through her works that people of different cultures can co-exist peacefully to form a global cosmopolitan world.

Parameswaran sees the Ganga in the Assiniboine, which implies the merging of two cultures. She presents her cosmopolitan view by suggesting that immigrants should assimilate with the host land. "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" is the mantra of life for Parameswaran's characters. The Sanskrit phrase "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" means that the entire world is but one single family. For Parameswaran's characters, the whole world is their home.

As Uma Parameswaran suggests, "Home is where your feet are and we had better place our heart where the feet are." She undoubtedly resonates with Paul Gilroy's phrase, "It isn't where you're from, it's where you're at."

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