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‘Mother and Othering’ in the Diasporic Enclave: A Reference to Uma Parameswaran’s Poems

Abstract

With a population of around twenty million spread across a hundred and ten countries, Indians as entrepreneurs, teachers, researchers, innovators, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers and even political leaders, serve their host nations with distinction. Every member of Indian diaspora maintains his commitment to ‘bhartiyaata’ or ‘Indianness’ and make India to flourish and grow. The South Asian writer desires to preserve the collective tradition even though he/she writes about a particular world. Memory with its recollection of the scenes and elements of the past in the present becomes a central tool in this process and is more often than not the starting point for the process of re-creation of the scenes from the past. Uma Parameswaran is one of the promising writers living in Canada and has an Indian origin. As a writer, woman and diaspora, she had to face a lot of hardship in her life in the adapted land to achieve what she is now. Uma Parameswaran’s poems not only reflect the diasporic experiences of the author but also other Indo-Canadians collectively. Many of her poems are collected and published in two volumes namely, *Trishanku and Other Writings* and *Sisters at the Well*.

Key Words: Diaspora, re-membering, mothering, othering, immigrants, expatriates, cultural dislocation and acculturation.

Introduction

It is apt to mention that the Indian diaspora is so wide spread that the sun never sets on it because it spans across the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. In eleven countries there are more than half a million persons of Indian origin who form a significant proportion of the population of these countries. With a population of around twenty million spread across a hundred and ten countries, Indians as entrepreneurs, teachers, researchers, innovators, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers and even political leaders, serve their host nations with distinction. Every member of Indian diaspora maintains his commitment to 'bhartiyata' or 'Indianness' and make India to flourish and grow. Every overseas Indian is an achiever in his own way and when he succeeds India also succeeds with him. Still what gives a common identity to all members of Indian diaspora is their Indian origin, the consciousness of their cultural heritage and their attachment to India. Hence it is worth mentioning the observations of Anand Patil about diaspora here:

The New Oxford Dictionary defines "Diaspora" (noun) as the dispersion of the Jews after the exile Gentile nations; Jews so dispersed. Etymologically 'dia' means 'through' and 'sperio' means 'to scatter'. Now, it is being used in a more generalized sense to refer to the migration of a population or a section of it, along with their ways of life to the place of destination abroad... (66).

The Indian diaspora has a long history. Once Indians traveled to other countries as merchants and then as indentured labourers during the colonial period. Now, Indians travel to foreign countries as cyber employees. Presently, the Third World citizens who are free in the First World, make space for a Third World consciousness in the Metropolitan capitals.

These are people who never forcibly migrated from their land of origins. Dislocation is a matter of choice for them and there is no much pain associated with it. Still they experience a kind of loneliness and identity crisis besides their economic prosperity. This pain can best be distilled through writings, especially through poetry of Indian diasporic writers.

In a way all diasporic writings exhibit dual pulls. One leg is in the homeland and the other is in the settled land. The binary opposition between 'us' and 'they' and the land of immigration and the mother country are inevitable in their writings. Therefore, there is an attempt to homogenize 'Indian culture' and Indian cultural 'identity' in the use of the term 'Indian Diapora'. Who are these migrant writers? What experiences do they portray in their creative writing? What 'Indian culture' do they represent? How do they do it? How do they 'locate' their culture? What kind of literary discourse do they construct and what are the 'affiliations' of their texts? Such questions cannot be studied in pure 'literary studies' which are founded on a ruling class definition. A working-class definition of identity is accepted in 'cultural studies'. According to Anthony Esthope: "The effect of this debate is to problematize the pedagogic identity of the subject available between conflicting class identities while literary study imperceptibility subsumes that identity to a ruling – class tradition (170). So it is necessary to study the poetry of Uma Parameswaran under the light of the experiences of the writer which work across a non-correspondent series of conceptualizing the experiences.

The South Asian writer desires to preserve the collective tradition even though he/she writes about a particular world. Memory with its recollection of the scenes and elements of the past in the present becomes a central tool in this process and is more often than not the starting point for the process of re-creation of the scenes from the past. Most of this writing has a biographical dimension that introduces the reader to social, economic, historical and psychological realities of the diaspora, in both its past and present circumstances. The term

ethnic has a wide range of connotations like nation, people, custom, but with reference to the South Asian Diaspora, it relates to a community sharing similar physical and mental traits as a product of their corpus of writing revolves around the immigrant issues of exile and dislocation, discrimination and ‘visibility, language issues and duality, acculturation and assimilation.

The South Asian writers, who have migrated to Canada, negotiate the maze of memory and experience to re-create and re-shape their new identity. They work from a vantage point of distanced perspective in order to understand and come to terms with the past and from there to manipulate the present. Even though the Indian immigrants in Canada enjoy the privilege of dual citizenships, at times they face problem of uprooted conditions. The only solace for them is to remember their mother land and try to re-member their identity with the host land. M.S. Vassanji in his essay “South Asian Literature in Canada” explains the preoccupation of the past in the works that:

... need to create, mythify, and explain... can be traced to the two not unrelated factors: the rapid disappearance of a way of life, which was often held, in place and static, by the colonial government; and the rapid and continuing modernization of the Third World (252).

Uma Parameswaran is one of the promising writers living in Canada and has an Indian origin. As a writer, woman and diaspora, she had to face a lot of hardship in her life in the adapted land to achieve what she is now. In Canada, every step at the social, political, cultural and psychological levels becomes an experience to her and that she could sincerely theorize in her literary works. She spent the first seven years in Canada by writing scripts for various events in the Indo-Canadian community. Her dance drama, “Meera” was only substantive result of those years. Uma Parameswaran’s poems not only reflect the diasporic experiences of the author but also other Indo-Canadians collectively. Many of her poems are

collected and published in two volumes namely, *Trishanku and Other Writings* and *Sisters at the Well*.

Critical Appreciation of Uma Parameswaran's Select Poems:

Trishanku and Other Writings is a cycle of poems consisting of about fifteen voices that cumulatively reflect the first quarter century of Indo-Canadian experiences in Manitoba. Indians first came to this province in 1960s, and the voices depict the varied landscape of memory set against the prairie. The poems reflect the theme of nostalgia for the old homeland comingle with an assertion that the prairie is indeed the new homeland where continuity and changes shall simultaneously shape the Indo-Canadian ethos. *Sisters at the Well* is a collection of poems written by Uma Parameswaran and has two powerful poems on the 'Air India Crash of 1985' in the beginning of it. In *Trishanku*, different voices capture the experiences in Canada which resonate with the speaker's diasporic memory and contemporary realities. Collectively the poems address various phases of immigrants' experience from nostalgia of the land left behind to the pains at the new environment through the realities of racial discrimination, pressures of settlement and struggle to strike the roots to find the affirmation that 'Home is where your feet are and may your heart be there too.' (Parameswaran)

The poems in *Trishanku* depict the diasporic experiences and angst of various voices in their twenty years stay at Canada. The poems cover a panoramic view of the uprooted conditions, resettlement, childbirth, childrearing, and education of the children of Indian diaspora in Canada. Although the poems are the voices of twenty Indian diaspora in Canada yet their collective and continuous experiences make each of the poems as a single voice. Uma Parameswaran has theorized the diasporic experiences of many of her friends and neighbours whom she knows personally. She went to Canada like many other Indian women

after marriage. Her educational qualification helped her to get a good position, Professor of English at Winnipeg University.

The poet, Uma Parameswaran following the Indian traditional poets invokes Lord Ganesha in the first verse of *Trishanku*. She painfully says that words do not come to her to write poetry as she is alien land and feels isolated. However when she remembers her homeland and her connection to the heritage of India, words come to her like the flood of a river. Now, she is able to put words one after another like her grandmother who joins beads to make decorative garland for the doorway:

Where should I begin?

There was a time

When words came to me

And I strung them

as my grandmother strung glass beads

to curtain her doorways,

The poet elaborates that feeling rises in her like the spring of Alaknanda and the same aroused poetic feeling makes a way to river Badrinath and floods the country. Images come to her carefully and she compares this to that of a boatman's cautious journey in river Narmada which has hurdling rocks and gushing water. In fact, the images hang like beehives on the hill side of river Narmada. She also feels that her inside opens and jumps in joy like the flood of Badrinath and Narmada, when she imaginatively crosses the space and reaches the motherland:

Then came a time

When feelings quietly rose

as the spring of Alaknanda

rises up from earth's womb

above distant Badrinath;
 And words rose, flowed over,
 Swept down carrying rocks and trees
 In their tumultuous wave.
 Images clustered
 like beehives from the cliffs
 that perilously overhang the Narmada

The poet says that at the same time, her feelings and languages turn inside into her and give her no imaginative impulse when she watches the monsoon rain of Canada. According to her the rain is like needlejets which really prick her and make her return painfully to her motherland in imagination. The blue-white glaciers of Athabasca also fail to kindle her imaginative impulses. They look like the scenery of a calendar picture. Moreover she feels that there is no life-giving force in the rain or the glaciers that she witnesses in Canada:

But now all is turned inside out,
 language and feelings
 I see the monsoon rain pour down
 like needlejets from showerhead;
 The blue-white glaciers of Athabasca
 Remind me of the calendar pictures;

However, she wants to invoke the Hindu god in her poem to give her strength and imaginative impulses and through which she can keep aside of all her odd experiences in the alien land, Canada. She invokes Lord, Ganesha by writing “Om Ganesaya Namaha” and believes that words will come to her automatically as she has invoked the god. Now, she has been charged with energy and she is hopeful that she can write the diasporic experiences of South Asian Diaspora in Canada:

Begin with his name

Vyasa's scribe

Who gives clear sight

And clear vision.

Om Ganesaya Namaha.

Diasporic experience is the experience of the individual who undergoes separation. There are economic diaspora and political diaspora, but these do not have any individual experience which develops a feeling of dislocation in individuals' mind. Therefore, diasporic literature deals with specific individual's experience in a specific time and situation. Every diasporic experience has a 'sour grape syndrome', - the alien land lures the individual for a green pasture but gives diasporic pain. Diaspora is like being ejected out of mother's womb and there is no return. It is a perpetual wandering without arrival. One can certainly find this with some Indians who went from India to Fiji and Uganda and then migrated to Australia, Canada and England without getting back to India.

Uma Pameswaran in some of the poems in *Trishanku* depicts the experiences of other Indian diaspora in Canada. These voices, like the poet, feel the condition of 'ejected out of mother's womb' in Canada. The metaphor 'Trishanku' has been commonly used to define people who live in a state of 'in-betweenness' or more precisely it is the state of immigrants in the host land. Chander one among the Indo-Canadians expresses his state of 'death in life' in Canada. Chander says that his condition in Canada is like pushing a boat into the sea with the boatman and then caught in a storm all alone and searching for anchor to get hold of. Chander has come to Canada for pursuing his higher education and later he settled there because the country offers him good employment. Moreover, going back to the homeland is like a condition of 'getting back into mother's womb' which is not possible for any diaspora. He painfully commemorates in a letter written by his family members living in India. One

can understand the feelings of Chander's family members through this letter. Chander's sister writes to him twice in a year thinking that he will come to India either in Christmas holiday or in summer holiday. So she lists out in her letter the things that Chander has to get for her:

Bring a car, a blue Chev, and if possible

Postcards of your Boeing 707.

Later, all the Katy books, Enid Blytons,

Magic slates and if possible summer frocks.

However, Chander's father keeps on insisting him that he should not to come back, as he knows the economic advantage that his son is experiencing. The father strongly believes that economic affluence through good job can be attained by his son as he is highly meritorious. He adds that in India there is no life for the merit holders, because it is a country ruled by 'blackguards'. The politicians here are corrupt and 'swindling blaggards'. So the father writes back to his saying:

My father, in his large scrawl,

Writes every week, often ending;

Find yourself a job, Chander, and stay there;

This country is ruled by blackguards.

Chander's mother, perhaps, is different from his other family members. She has only affection and love for her children. She writes to him in 'Tamil', the language that she knows. The language itself gives Chander the feeling of seeing his affectionate mother and motherland. The mother blesses him and gives him advice through her letter. She also relates what happened in the neighbourhood. She wishes for her son to come back and so she writes "My, son, this is the land where the Ganga flows." Chander woefully says that that was the first and last letter that his mother wrote to him. He also adds that his father and sister treat

him as a machine which brings richness to the family. But his mother alone through her love and concern gives him comfort in the alien land and so is the nature of motherland.

Chander in another poem pathetically says that though he wants to come back to his motherland yet he needs to stay in Canada for the sake of the future of his children. Now, Chander like his father does not want to come back to India thinking that if he stays in Canada, he will earn more money. Still he comes to his place of birth, Chennai to spend a vacation. There, he feels secured and happy in spite of the heat and dust of the city. He experiences a kind of freedom in his homeland. Like a small boy who speaks innocently to his mother, he speaks to the city in joy:

I come

Home to you.

Dry throat unquenched

by heat cooled translucent cubes

from frost free no down payment white walled smoothness

I come

to your coconut milk motherness

waiting for me.

He glorifies Chennai for its long beach road which shows mirage due to summer's heat. He feels happy during the seven month stay at Chennai. The stay at motherland makes him to imagine himself like a hungry sheep which is not fed for years. He thinks that the entire life has become a waste as there is no sweet memory of Canada to relate it to others. Instead, he has a lot of painful stories which he could not share with any because that may bring dishonor not only to him but also to the country of his origin:

wreck of twenty ruinous years when the sheep

looked up and were not fed.

However, he is not selfish. He reasons out his stay in Canada. He realizes that if he does not find a suitable job for him in the mother country instead saying ‘I love thee’ to the homeland, then his love for the motherland soon turns into hatred and life becomes a waste. As a dutiful father he keeps aside all his likes and dislikes and wishes to go back to Canada for the sake of his family and children. He is now ready to accept any kind of humiliation, racial discrimination and existential perils at the alien land in order to give rich and bright future to his children. He believes that the future of his children lies in Canada and not in India. So with a heavy heart but with clear insight he goes back to Canada:

... I cannot bear thee.

I ought, you, ought, we ought love

love too soon hate becoming love

the land where we're born.

I fly super VC10 that leaves the sound behind –

louder the thudding guilt shame supersonic roaring

Stern daughter of the voice of god heart pounding –

Back to the land where my sons their roots shall find (27).

Chander also relates his first air travel experience in one of the poems of *Trishanku*. In fact, he happens to travel with Kishan Agarwal. Though the poem is humorous yet it depicts the experience of the fellow traveler who travels in a flight for the first time. The tone of the poem captures the trauma of snatching of one's root from his motherland. The poem depicts the parting pain of Kishan Agrawal who leaves his motherland. The pain, in fact, is common to any diaspora. Kishan Agrawal travelled to Canada in the international flight from India. That journey was the first travelling experience to him. Like a small child he was excited and was watching everything with awe and wonder. But soon, he cut a sorry figure

when he did not know how to flush the toilet in the flight. At the same time, as a grown up man he watched the bosom of the air-hostess lustfully:

Sure enough he didn't know how to flush
 The toilet in the Boeing 707. Sure enough
 He eyed the stewardesses lewdly, looking down
 The cleft of their bosom as they leaned over
 To serve lunch (28).

All his travel excitement had gone when he reached a hotel in Winnipeg. A kind of loneliness caught him in the alien land. He felt nostalgic. He was ready to give anything for going back to his village in Punjab. He felt that the rope strung cot, the sweet smell of cow dung cannot be matched with the cushion cot and the scented air of cozy lodge of Canada. Now Chander took pity on Kishan Agrawal who like any other diaspora lured by the green pasture of Canada and felt nostalgic. This kind of diasporic trauma can be shared. Both Kishan Agarwal and Chander got consoled by sharing each other's experiences about the adapted land:

He cried, tears unashamedly streaming down
 his ghee-fed cheeks,
 "I'd give anything to be back home
 on my rope strung cot under the monsoon sky
 in our courtyard plastered
 with sweet-smelling cowdung water"
 I envied him yes; yes I feared for him
 too, my uncouth innocent brother
 lured to this land of endless skies (28).

The diasporic literature reveals how immigrants strive to adapt to the new cultural environment in which they find themselves while struggling to maintain their sense of identity, native traditions and values. The immigrants find economic security and material advantage but have to trade his/her identity in exchange. These heavy suitcases go on growing heavier as they lug them around in the world of memory and nostalgia. The immigrant straddles two cultural, historical and geopolitical spheres. Diaspora has often impacted on migrants' status in the host country. While commenting on the literature of South Asian Diaspora Sudhir Kumar comments thus:

The literature produced by the South Asians settled in Canada has really come of age. The unmistakable richness, diversity and individuality of their voices have constantly been enriching the corpus of mainstream Canadian literature in English for quite some time. The South Asians, men and women have been writing poetry, prose-fiction and dramas with disarming ease and innovation. Writers like Uma Parameswaran, Lakshmi Gil, Nazeen Sadiq, M.G. Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry, Himani Bannerji, Surjeet Kalsey, Rienzi Crusz, Rahul Varma, Rana Bose and others are noted for their experimentation and de-radicalization of themes of immigrants, multiculturalism, feminism and survival under an alien environment.

The South Asians constitute a 'visible minority' in the mosaic of Canadian society and experience marginalization, racial hatred and violence which are but important factors in shaping their lives, politics and art (211).

Even though Canada is a land where one can find the mosaic culture, the white culture is predominant there. So the minority Hindu or Indian culture resides in darkness. So Indians in Canada struggle between the pulls of two cultures. Still their conscience does not allow them to trespass the Indian culture. Sharad is one of the voices of *Trishanku* who achingly relates the rituals done on the 'new moon day' by every Brahmin man in his house in India:

In our ancestral home

Every newmoon day
 Father, as his father before him,
 in silk dhoti
 vibhuti on forehead and chest
 sacred thread dipped in turmeric
 sat on a wooden plank
 facing the east
 to repeat the purohit's chant
 sprinkle holy water with darbha grass
 and call upon our ancestors (33).

Sharad who commemorates the 'tharpana', feels nostalgic when he does not understand the new moon day in Canada. He gets confused about the erratic movement of the sun and other planets in Canada. He wants to keep his cultural identity pristine. So he questions himself and wants to do the same in the host land also:

But here the sun rises southeast
 And the planets are all a-kilter
 And all my words questions (33).

Savitri is another voice who not only depicts the cultural cross-over of a fellow Indian in Canada but also the indifferent attitude of the white neighbor who keeps himself aloof by considering his racial superiority. In the host land the expatriate either adopt the culture of the host land or negate the culture of it. Savitri negates the culture of Canada and keeps her cultural identity intact. But Susie's mother who is Savitri's neighbor adopts the Culture of Canada and dates with many men. One day Susie had fallen off from her tricycle while she was riding on it. There were bruises here and there on her body. She started crying when she realized that her Barbie doll was caught up in the left wheel of her tricycle. Seeing this,

Savitri came for the rescue of the child, Susie. She silenced and comforted her saying that it was only a rubber doll and not a human being:

I swept Susie into my arms
 Where the great sobs hiccupped
 Incoherently into silence
 It is only a toy, baby, I said,
 Only a little doll, my darling,
 Only plastic moulded into human form (35).

The irony is that Susie's mother who like the Barbie doll was caught up in the mire of Canadian culture. She never cares about her little daughter. Susie's mother always dialed-up to men and went on dating with them every day. Savitri did not know who those men were and what their names were. She also felt that collecting this information was unnecessary to her. But Peter, one of the neighbors, silently watched Susie's mother's flirting nature and made fun at her coquettish nature. Peter is not an Indian to take pity on Susie's mother. However Savitri, one among the Indian diaspora in Canada could not bear the behavior of Susie's mother. She felt that Susie's mother's behavior was a shame not only on her but also on the country of her origin, India and its rich culture:

Susie's mother was dialing
 a date with the other man
 Whose name who knows and why?
 She picked them up and dropped them.
 Peter is only a man, neighbor,
 only a man who was fun till now (35).

Uma Parameswaran has used 'only' in the second stanza of the poem to reiterate the point that if a plastic doll is spoilt one can purchase another one, but if a human being is spoilt it is

impossible to recover from the deteriorated condition and the ultimate end is death. The poet has used 'only' two times in the third stanza to emphasize that Peter is only a neighbor and could not hesitate to comment when a woman from India flirts with many men.

Canadian culture is new and shocking to an Indian woman who is brought up in a rigid disciplined cultural condition. Generally, in India, it is the habit of a married woman to cover her face with the loose end of her sari. She is not allowed to show even her face to men except her husband. The Bihari woman who she goes to Canada and witnesses the Canadian woman in an almost naked attire gets shocked. It makes the Bihari woman remember her rich cultural heritage and she ridicules at them with contempt by saying they are 'she-dogs':

Jes look it these womens
nekkid almost as god made them
Why, my chaddi has more cloth
than their whole dress!
Shame shame
What she-dogs they be (37).

The categories in diaspora are fluid and unstable and have multiple layers of meanings. Diaspora is not merely a scattering but an experience made of collective and multiple journeys and an experience determined by who travels, where, how and under what circumstance. Homeland and even the lands of adoption, crop up between the imaginary and real. The 'present' the 'here' and 'now' are not singular but shaped by the dynamics of social life. Loneliness, ghettoization go hand in hand with success, affluence and recognition. Self is constituted through the multiple pasts and the co-existing present. The condition of separation, the state of schizophrenia and friction provide a background for a sense of identity.

Self, the deeper core is constituted through cognitive process, reflection, memory, education and so on. Self is affected when there is identity crisis. In fact, identity is the external layer related to colour, race, class, society, status, and nationality. So there are two aspects of the diasporic experiences – positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that it reflects Indianness, history and identity and negative because it acts like a buffer, its greater visibility renders an invisible. Diasporic vision at times becomes culture-blind, distant, prejudiced and sometimes becomes frozen and static. Prosthetic identity of self is evident when the diaspora suffers from a state of schizophrenia and existential perils.

Sharad who is one of the voices of *Trishanku* suffers from a fractured identity in Canada. He hates the people of Canada because they are not real which means that they are true to the natives and mingle with them open-heartedly but they show a different attitude to the other ethnic minorities. So he feels that his life has become a waste and it gets oozing away in the alien land. Thinking about his motherland he realizes that the ‘self’ of him suffers from fractured identity. He raises a question to himself why he should be in Canada:

Who are these faceless people
 among whom my life is oozing away
 Each is so self-contained
 glancing, swiftly but completely
 through me:
 why are you here?

And the bus moves on, and we (44).

Chander in one of the poems relates the diasporic condition to that of loss of his mother. He says that the pain caused by the sudden death of his mother can be compared to the slow-dying of his ‘self’ in the transplanted conditions of Canada. One day, Chander received the news of his mother’s death when he was in Canada. The death was so sudden to his mother.

The shock of the news of his mother's death taught him to bear the agony of living in the alien land. The death came to his mother as there was no premonition, no warning by the family doctor. Nothing worked on his mother's body to take her back from the clutches of death. Chander, now compare her life to a river which flows and at last ends into a sea:

There were no premonitions, no tell-tale spasms

Auguring the end of Spring's ecstasy,

No warning you'd be launched on the river

Which must flow down to the sea.

There was no doctor quietly studying charts

And turning with a professional smile

"Let us bring this runaway horse to book."

"Nothing that drugs and diet cannot set right."

And later still, professional quips,

'She'll live to eighty, despite me and you'(67).

The 'self' of Chander experiences the turmoil of 'other land' and he compares them to a new-drug which has a thorough working on his 'self'. Like many other he also with all enthusiastic laugh, work and dream about his future forgetting the fact that his life is like a river slowly flows into an inexorable sea of the alien land, Canada. He says that there is no god of seven hills or no god of roadside shrine found in Canada for getting consolation in his heart to alleviate the pains of parting his mother and motherland. Like a sinner, he stretches his hands wide and asks for redemption to his god, mother and motherland in his heart. But his mother's death makes him understand the pains and pangs of life in Canada. He imagines that he is slowly dying in the alien land bearing the diasporic pains. There is no drug to be given to him to cure his psychic tension. So he silently accepts all humiliations, racial discriminations and identity crisis:

And we laughed and worked and dreamed

Almost forgetting that the river

Inexorably flows to the sea.

.....

By dying in one short night, Mother,

You spared me all this pain.

But not for long.

I burn in the hold

Of a slow, slow death (67).

The positive attitude such as unity at time of crisis is echoed through one of the voices, Vishal. When the Indo-Canadian could not bear the racial discrimination exercised on Indians in Canada, they openly at the same time with confidence threaten the native people of Canada. He feels that though Canada is known for its mosaic culture, the racial discrimination is very much evident here like other countries of the west. The voice reprimands the Canadians saying that all the Indo-Canadian will collect together for their self defense as there is no more energy to withstand the heat of racial division exercised on them. He feels that Indians also have the same right like any other Canadian because these Canadians were once belonged to either England or America or France and now enjoying the racial superiority. He, at the same time says that Indians are not fools to experience the same policy, “divide and rule” for one more time:

Look, you guys, we've gotta show them,

Yeah, show the bastards we've as much

Right as anyone who's come here

In the last three hundred years.

Yeah, show the sonsobitches that we

Stand together, and they ain't gonna

Divide and rule

No more (76).

Vithal is another voice who goes to the extent of saying that Indians have courage to build their temple at the bank of the river, Assiniboine. He strongly believes that there would be no set back if all the Indians collect together to establish their 'identity.' He scolds the Whites by saying that the energy of the Whites lies in their body and not in their mind. But the Indians are very strong with their will power to overcome whatever be the hurdle that comes on their way. He says that theirs is a successful story in Canada and not a painful one as they have the strength to overcome the racial discriminations:

We shall build our temple

Where the Red meets the Assiniboine.

Let us swear to stand together

And there can be no fall.

Those pissed off whites can hang a moon.

Yeah that's where their energy lies

Not in their head (77).

Uma Parameswaran, in the poem "December 6, 1993" appeared in *Sister at Well*, strikes the theme of 'remembering' her homeland and at the same time she tries to 're-member' herself through memories. Diasporic pain can be much associated to psychic tension than physical torture. Once, the Indians as indentured labourers experienced more physical and psychological pain in the hands of the Whites in Canada like alien land. But today, they experience more psychic pain than physical wounds. Yet their diasporic pain is not lesser than that of their grandfathers and they feel out of mother's womb. According to Murugaiyan:

... memory or remembering is making accurate references to events of the past and using them in many ways if they are present; it is knowledge of an event or fact with the additional consciousness that we have thought or experienced before... (48).

In the poem “December 6, 1993 Uma Parameswaran vehemently chides the behaviour of native Indians for their indifferent attitudes towards the secularism of India. At the same time, she views the pathetic plight of expatriates in the adapted land. In this poem, Uma Parameswaran portrays the tragic event of the demolition of Babri Masjid in India by Hindu fundamentalists. It also indirectly refers to the deaths caused by fanatics belonging to Hinduism and Islam in the aftermath of the demolition. There is also a vehement attack on expatriate Indians’ attitude who have the habits of visiting their motherland only when it burns. The lines of the poem clearly indicate this mentality of the Indians:

O my sisters, my loves,
 can we come together only in grief
 and never in joy? (*Sisters* 29)

The poet uses “candles” in connotative terms to show religious significance; “walls” to indicate the division between the Hindus and the Muslims. In lines such as “though the Mother’s eyes still mile on me/ from intergalactic space” the poet expresses that the Mother India lies in between the “intergalactic” space of India and Canada. Even though the poet has regret for the Indians who make their appearance in India at the time of crisis, yet as a little child she was happy to have an opportunity meet her relatives once again in the land of her birth. This nostalgic feeling is very clear in the lines:

that I could have reached my arms across the stars
 and touched the Mother’s face and said,
 I am home at last
 among my sisters, my loves,

with whom one day I shall meet in joy

as I meet here in pain. (*Sisters* 29)

The expatriates' experience of this kind of 'otherness' often make them to re-stitch themselves to their motherland through memories. The memories of homeland and the life in the new region disturb the psyche of the settlers in terms of defining cultural identity. In order to assimilate into the new space, the expatriates need to adjust every aspect of life. This very experience of the settlers is voiced by the writers through their expatriate sensibilities. The expatriate often makes mental visits to home to refurnish his emotional and cultural loss. The act of displacement activates the diasporic writer to their fragment mental visits to home through their dreams and literature so much so that their homeland reappears to them as a series of objects or fragments of narratives. It is thus the writers retain their contact with their homeland relieving themselves through their memory.

Uma Parameswaran artistically depicts the plight of the immigrants and the pangs of alienation through her poems. She strongly believes that even though the expatriate experiences economic affluence yet their psychic tension for the loss of homeland remains a scar forever in them. Uma Parameswaran painfully recollects the experiences of immigrants through her writings. She analyses the four phases of expatriate experiences thus:

The four phases are - first wonder and fear at the new world around oneself and nostalgia for the world left behind; second an overriding impulse to survive in the new world that makes one immerse oneself in one's profession or family and often precludes political or social participation in the larger society; third, after one has found job security, a turning towards organizational activity within one's own ethnocentric community; and finally, an active participation in the larger political and social arena outside one's own immediate community (123).

The above said analysis of immigrants' attitude helps one to probe very deep into the themes of Uma Parameswaran's poems. If one makes a critical evaluation of Parameswaran's poem, "Hollyhocks" one can find how she remembers her motherland and re-members herself in the alien land. In the poem, "Hollyhocks" she explains her experiences in the foreign land. As she stated she was caught in a kind of fear. She strongly believes that the foreign land also has a duty, provide security to the expatriates. She personifies the alien land as her cruel lover and she tightly held him immediately after reaching the foreign land. There was no mother or motherland to give her comfort. So she and the alien land (in personification as a lover) soothe each other's pains through mutual caressing:

And I want to put my arms around him
And cradle him against my breast
as he has so often cradled me
through homesickness, pregnancies,
through illness and workplace blues
over the years. (*Sisters* 20)

The mutual caressing melted as the fear of the new land and new people in them melted away. At this point, a kind of dejection crept into her heart and a loss of something is felt in her mind. A void is set in her life. She writes thus:

We lie still in my strength
until it melts
in our mutual fears
our helplessness
and we cling, not in peace
but in silent panic. (*Sisters* 20)

Uma Parameswaran thinks that the man (the host land which is personified by the poet) received her in the foreign land made her experience “the fieriest cave of the all-circling hell wherein I live.” The man at the same time believed that the wound of ‘otherness’ would automatically be healed when she slowly accepted and adopted the alien culture:

In time everything will pass, you say,

Give Time time

to close wounds

to seal memories

to heal heal heal. (*Sisters* 22)

Even though Uma Parameswaran adapted herself in the alien land she feels that she could not adopt the alien culture as it is the case with any such first generation immigrants. She thinks that she has to pay a heavy duty in a form of diasporic *angst* for her sustainability in the foreign land. Hence she prays to Lord Krishna to give her strength not to adopt the culture of foreign land in order to keep her homeland’s culture high above everything:

Krishna, dark-hued as the clouds of June,

Lord of Maya, in whom all opposites converge,

Grant me the strength to betray myself

So I betray not my home. (*Sisters* 22)

“Memory is a Thresher” is yet another poem in which Uma Parameswaran theorized the expatriate experience. The poem is written in such a way that two Indo-Canadians are sharing their experiences about the host land, Canada. One of them believes that memory of motherland is like a thresher and one can live with the memory of motherland which holds the golden grains of ‘happy hopscotch hours’. The memory of mother land unties the reef-knot and slipknot of one’s self through Morse-code and gives him/her the excitement of a newborn baby who catches its mother’s breast for its ultimate and utmost safety:

Memory is a thresher, she said,
 who flails the husk and stores away
 From nibbling Time the golden grains:
 Happy hopscotch hours
 Learning of reef-knot slipknot morse-code,
 The newborn's clutch upon your breasts,
 The thousandth phallic touch so much richer than the first (31).

On the other hand, the other Indo-Canadian compares memory to a sieve which holds only the unwanted grit. Moreover she addresses the former as 'self-deluding dolt' and compares memory to a photograph which remains in the basement boxes of the house, toys which are untouched due to the sudden death of siblings, many miscarriages that caused wastage of blood, many unanswered questions, spiritless statue, and many deserted friends. Here, the poet compares the memory to an old bitch with dry tits from where once the dead pups drew their food. The poet through the second lady tells that diasporic pains cannot be alleviated only by remembering the motherland. Thus, Uma Parameswaran portrays the different approaches of different individuals who are in the diasporic enclave:

Seal your lips, woman, for Memory
 Is an old bitch wadding thru the dumpyard
 Flapping her dozen dry tits
 At which pups long dead once drew sustenance (31).

In the poem, "Calvary," the speaker elaborates that living in Canada as an expatriate is like bearing a heavy crown on his head. Even the act of 'Christ' who carried the cross on his back for redeeming the mankind from his sin will not wash off the heaviness of his diasporic pains. He consoles himself saying that he has to work on his own way to overcome the

diasporic *angst*. No one can do penance for his pain to be relieved. So he questions himself how he is going to do penance for his salvation from this world of unending sky:

I am tired with the weight of this crown

And Christ carrying crosses to cavalries

Will not light me.

Each must work one's own salvation.

He worked his, how shall I mine? (34).

Migration that leads to separation may be seen as rebirth, rebirth in a new place marked by a new culture, different flora and fauna, new adjustments and so on. But if migration is reincarnation it takes the memory back to the earlier birth and the migrants have to build a new world only to lie in hope and dread. This condition of the immigrants is compared to that of a ship without sail, birds without wings and Draupadi without her sari. The speaker of the poem, "Hope", refers to the mythical figure 'Pandora' who was the first mortal woman sent to earth by Zeus with a jar of evils and she opened the jar letting out the evils and leaving only 'hope' to lie inside:

Would that Pandora had closed the lid

on the wretched broken-winged mite

that crawled out last.

Just when the body lashed by frustration

gives up all its desires and lays itself

down to resigned silence,

Hope comes worming its way (34).

He wants his hope to be nourished in him. He says that he feels weary and gives up all his desires to live influentially in the alien land. Now he becomes so silent after experiencing all sorts of humiliations. During this time 'hope' worms up into him. Immediately he grabs

and nurtures it in his bosom using his lifeblood. It makes him to thrive in the host land at the same time it rekindles his desire for going back to his mother country:

As I would a weeping waif I take it up,
Nurture it at my breast, feed it my lifeblood,
And it thrives, rekindling desires, promising
The earth (34).

But his bad fate works before he thrives up with his flickering hope. So he coils himself when his hope fails to bring him the solace. The hope in him fizzles out like a poor rocket that ends its course by drowning into the sea:

But when the time comes, this wretch
Which has absorbed all my strength abandons me
To shrivel up like a rocket shot off distant Canaveral
Fizzles out into nothingness (34).

Dilip is one of the voices mentioned in Parameswaran's poem. He is a little boy. His excitement at the school in Canada is similar to that of a village man who for the first time visits a fair. Dilip elaborates to his mother about the experiences that he gained at his school in Canada. He says that he likes his school very much. Songs are sung in French. He says that he is thrilled with the finger-painting session. He says that when he breaks a crayon he need not to use it but he can just throw it away and can use another new crayon. He says that he also loves the recess time during which he can climb up into a tyre swing sitting inside in it:

Amma, I like school.
It is such fun
We play most of the time
And sing songs in French
Amma, finger-painting is such fun

So many bright bright colours
 And we can use all we want.
 Amma, if a crayon breaks
 You can just throw it away
 And take a new one! (47).

His little mind does not know the racial difference exercised severely on Indians in Canada. His little mind could not find any oddity associated with his name. When he pronounced his name, other white students in the class ridiculed at him. So he requests his mother to change his name as either Jim or David which are names of other boys in his class. Thus the little boy wants to associate himself with other boys in the class. At the same time he does not know why his skin turns little brown during winter. Still he is happy enough to find himself similar like other White Boys and look like them. Thus, the little boy finds his identity by equalizing himself with other native Canadians to overcome the racial discrimination:

Ma, you think you could change my name
 To Jim or David or something?

 When winter comes
 I'll turn less brown
 Won't I, ma?
 It would be nice to be
 Like everyone else, you know? (47).

In the poem, "Race" as an expatriate, Uma Parameswaran shows her anguish over the racial discrimination that she and her family members encountered in Canada. She ridicules the word 'race' and feels sorry for their present connotative meaning in the alien land. Once,

she said to Himani Bannerji "... the word Race just meant sporting events when we were growing up in India" (*Sisters* 63) but here it gives a different connotation when she and her family experience its meaning in Canada:

I never thought that one day I would wait
in this lovely land of endless skies
for my little ones to return safe
from school, unharassed by boys ...
thrusting their fist into Krish's face,
no accident, pelting stones and eggs
by summer light on windowpanes.
My children, sack, potato, three-legged, relay, marathon,
one hundred, two, four hundred metre dash,
that's what race once meant
and only that. But, for you
that simple childhood word never was. (*Sisters* 62, 63)

Many Indians in overseas have revisited and researched the history and culture of their ancient land and produced works of great historical as well as literary merit to help us understand India with its baffling contradictions; its discords and divisions; its tolerance of religious diversity side by side with the painful apparition of bigotry and intolerance even evinced in barbarous violence; its message of one reality and no other, *evamevadvitiyam*, as well as its distinctions of caste and class despite their categorical repudiation in the scriptures and by the saints and sages of so many reform movements. That message of monism, of universal unity, of indivisible humanity, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, finds expression in the writings of many Indians born abroad and influences the world around them with their views.

One of the voices in *Trishanku* is an orthodox Indian, Chaman Lal Dwivedi. He is a professor who elaborates and explains the nuances of 'The Vedas' and many Indian languages to the White men. He is a green card holder and often visits America but basically settled at Canada. He is not like many other Indians who could not resist the pull between the motherland and the other land. The Vedas that he learnt have given him the worldly wisdom and mental strength to face the hard realities of life. So he is able to make a thorough adjustment wherever he is:

I am Chaman Lal Dwivedi.

Learned in three Vedas

Though my name says two,

I made my sons send for me.

What else are sons for?

I have a green card for America

And am also landed immigrant here.

Everything is possible if you know how.

I give lectures on philosophy

And in languages.

Though I never stepped into college

Being third class matriculate

I am called now to talk to students,

White men. True worth will tell.

Everything is fine here.

One must make adjustments

Of course (72).

However, his Indianness works in him. He says that when he first came to Canada, the cultural differences between Canada and India created a shock in him. He once criticized that Canada was a land of rakshasa at where everything was just opposite to India. He compared women of Canada to Surpanaka and men to rakshasa. He has a total aversion for the country of his settlement:

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 (72).

In the beginning it was difficult for him to eat meat and drink liquor, because he is an orthodox Hindu Bhramin who eats only vegetable food and practice austere principles of Hindu religion in his life. Yet he consoled himself saying that in those days even the rishis ate meat and drank liquor. Hence he said to himself that he was not a rishi but an ordinary man who teaches ‘The Vedas’ and would not be punished when he trespassed his religious and cultural bondage by adopting alien culture. He took an oath in him by swearing that he was ready to adapt the food culture of the alien land but not the way-of-living, because he was a believer of the word of god, ‘sruti’. He was ready to adopt the food culture, smriti, which will change from time to time. The difference between sruti and smriti made him to be very stubborn enough not to give up the rich Indian culture:

It was difficult at first

To eat meat and drink liquor –

But the rishis did both
In older days; sruti, word of God,
Unchangeable, smriti, customs
That society accretes and sheds
For change for times.
I, well versed in both, know this,
For I am Chaman Lal Dwivedi
Learned in the Vedas (72).

Thus the words and behavior of Chaman Lal Dwivedi give encouragement for other Indians in Canada. The poem highlights the point that one who has the philosophical blend of mind can overcome the diasporic *angst* easily. However many Indians in abroad suffer from diasporic pains due to their inability to see life from a philosophical point of view.

Indian marriage culture is unique. Marriage is considered holy in India. The wed-lock, the chanting of mantras, putting *sindhoor* on the forehead of the bride by the groom, going around the Agni for three times or seven times are some of the rituals meant to Indian marriage and these ritual have their own meaning. So the husband and wife are united in India in the name of god. The principle ‘a man should have only one wife throughout his life’ is prevalent in India. The marriage bond is so pure in India and so break-up is considered as a curse on the couple. The family system in India is created through marital bond. Such rich marriage cultural heritage makes India high above any other countries of the world.

In the poem “Veejala” the mother advises her daughter Jyoti not to give the Indian culture as Jyoti needs to settle in Canada. Jyoti like other Canadian teens wanders with Andre, a Christian Canadian, in the name of love. As Jyoti’s mother was born and brought up in India, imbibing the rich cultural heritage of India warns her daughter about the dangers lurking behind the adolescent thirst of her daughter. The mother allows her daughter to move

with other men like any other girls of her time, but with a restriction. The mother juxtaposes the Indian and Canadian cultures and advises her daughter to be cautious enough for not to lose her chastity. She still elaborates that marriage in India is a security to a girl, 'like earth to a seed.' Such security in marriage can be sought by the mother to Jyoti. So she advises her daughter not to dally with the White man and give food to her hungry adolescent skin:

I heard about you and Andre.

Right on, Jyoti,

Here's advice for your age

Your time

.....

But not no way into matrimony.

Jyo, not that.

I born in another age

Another land

Know marriage is for keeps

And so can claw back

Shout down

To kingdom come.

But not for you

That security

Natural as earth to seed (74).

Conclusion

Thus Uma Parameswaran articulates the experiences, memories, pains, trauma and economic independence of many Indo-Canadian and herself in many of the poems found in

Trishanku and *Sister at Well*. She has collected the experiences of the expatriate Indians in Canada and made them into a white bundle of light in order to split them into variegated colours. Like a prism her poems spilt the experiences of the Indo-Canadians into various forms and themes. The poems faithfully show the psychological tension of many Indo-Canadians. The mental trauma of 'mothering and othering' is explicit in many of the poems. Though 'mothering' is soul to the immigrants in Canada yet the 'othering' make them to live this worldly life with economic independence.

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