

Chapter IV

Assimilation and Multiculturalism

Migration has been taking place since the historical past because it is a necessary and inevitable part of the development process. It leads to the mingling of cultures and it gives a set of perspectives about the relations between ideas and practices of different people and their culture. Displacement and migration have been the main factors that make people diasporic. Continuous flows of migration from all over the world into the Western countries have made many of them quite diverse in terms of ethnic origins of their populations. Since the main challenges of commonwealth literature are to explore and understand the bicultural vision of the immigrants, the writers of displaced community narrate the ethnic pluralism of different countries.

The significance of great literature is marked, when an author transforms the everyday experience into an immortal piece of imaginative literature that echoes the soul of readers. Migration, enslavement, indentured labour, settlement, invasion, conquest and colonialism are vital issues in exile literature. A movement away from one's home location and taking permanent residence in the target location characterize any human migration. Though all forms of dislocation are equally important, until a migrant enjoys residential status, he is considered an emigrant and thereafter an immigrant. While living outside their mother country, the migrants tend to evolve an idea of motherland in their imagination. It is closer to the prevailing cultural reality of their original place.

Migratory movements across countries and continents are the order of the day. Humans migrate for various reasons and on the basis of the reasons, types of migration

can be categorized. Political migrants are those who migrate for political reasons such as war, partition, invasion, etc., Economic migrants are those who migrate for economic reasons such as labour, employment and monetary gains. Religious missionaries travelling across the world for propagating their religions may be regarded as religious migrants. Literary migrants of one kind or the other happen to write about the abandonment of home, taking another's place, ontological change and facelessness in their works. The immigrants undergo the journey of exile in three phases. They are tender, strong and perfect. In the tender phase the homeland is referred as sweet; in the strong phase every soil is as sweet as one's native and in the perfect phase, the entire world is a foreign land.

Generally, people migrate from one place to another in order to fulfill their needs, demands and desires. Once the basic needs for a better livelihood are addressed, they begin to demand and assert their rights in the new nation which ultimately leads to assimilation with the new fold. Since assimilation is a continuous interaction of the immigrant with the dominant culture group, the immigrant writers feel that when two or more ethnic groups share a common geographical location, their sustained interaction and relationships would pass through a series of stages which would ultimately end in assimilation. Thus, during the past decade, many societies around the world have become multicultural in nature.

Milton Gordon who proposed the multidimensional approach to assimilation defines it as "a process in which a group of distinct and separate people come to share a common culture and merging towards the host society" (46). Robert Park, who was one of group of scholars who had a major hand in establishing sociology, argues that "assimilation is inevitable in a democratic and individual society" (132). He remarks that sometimes

assimilation would lose its importance when the host society continues to modernize, urbanize and industrialize in its own form. Since 'culture' refers to the distinct society, the concept of assimilation requires much patience from the ethnic neighborhoods in order to adapt to the new society.

When the immigrants happen to change from one way of life to another due to their own interest, they are susceptible to social change, which is individualistic and which confers a generous range of social freedom. Sometimes, the culture that the immigrants bring with them can affect the native culture even as it affects them. In spite of having all these constraints, the immigrants opt for assimilation. Is it because of the high rate of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, political disengagement and social isolation in the native place or is it their intentional assimilation? The basic purpose behind immigration is to access better jobs, education and other opportunities. In order to fulfill all these norms, the minority groups have to give up their traditions and sometimes they lose much or their entire heritage and learn the culture of the dominant group. Sometimes a willing immigrant cannot assimilate into a host society whose members are not receptive to immigrants or to particular ethnic groups. Hence assimilation depends on the adaptation of the immigrants in the alien land. The urge to survive and succeed is a natural human impulse especially among the diasporic people.

Researchers found that there are multiple ways in which newcomers are incorporated into their host society. John Berry has categorized the acculturation strategies as assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. According to him assimilation is

. . . a process of adaptation whereby the migrant or migrant group takes on the customs, values and social attributes of the host society to the

extent that the immigrant becomes indistinguishable from the majority. Integration may be defined as a similar process by which the immigrant or immigrant group becomes an active member of the host society, yet simultaneously maintains a distant ethnic identity. Separation occurs when ethnic minorities seek to maintain distinct identities, refusing active participation in the larger society and marginalization refers to when one neither identifies with his or her original background nor with that of the host society. (27)

There is a great deal of distinction between the process of assimilation and integration. As far as researchers and policy makers are concerned assimilation is the preferred acculturation strategy for the immigrants in order to ensure national unity.

Milton Gordon, a sociologist who made a major contribution to theories of assimilation in his book *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* points out the distinction between the cultural and the structural components of society. He describes that “culture encompasses all aspects of the way of life associated with a group of people which includes language, religious beliefs, customs and values in the existing society. At the same time, the social structure organizes the work of the society as well as connects individuals to one another and to the larger society”(62). Yann Algan, Albert Bisin, Alan Manning and Thierry Verdier have discussed Milton Gordon’s views on assimilation theory in their book *Cultural Integration of Immigrants in Europe* in the following manner:

First, diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture through a natural process along which they have the same access to socio-economic

opportunities as natives of the host country. Second, this process consists of the gradual disappearance of original cultural and behavioral pattern in favour of new one. Third, once set in motion, the process moves inevitably and irreversibly towards complete assimilation. Hence, diverse immigrant groups are expected to “melt” into the mainstream culture through an inter-generational process of cultural, social and economic integration. (2-3)

Culture is an integral part of a nation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Culture as “a particular form or type of intellectual development in a society generated by its distinctive customs, achievements and outlook.” Culture represents the way of life of an entire society and includes codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, social customs and folklore of a nation. Every nation has a distinct culture of its own. When an independent country becomes a colony, the native culture undergoes a radical change. The issue of multiculturalism has acquired importance, when people from different ethnicities and religions live together and thereby exchange vibrant multicultural practice. Multiculturalism represents the process of appreciating cultural diversity enabling the visible minorities to attain equity and social justice. It helps to evolve a pattern of social life in which diversity and tolerance of multiple ethnic groups are accommodated besides providing employment and social security for a secular, peaceful and progressive nation. In the West, migrants have achieved a number of cultural rights through the policies of multiculturalism.

Culture helps to integrate intellectualism in society along with the way people dress, behave, speak and follow customs and rituals. People have their own cultures in places where they live; but diversity, migration and social integration and cohesion, coincide with increasing awareness. These are the chief characteristics of cultural

pluralism. It is inevitable that culture must undergo a drastic change at some point of time. When people interact with one another there is bound to be an inherent change. Ethnic differences and religious diversities lead to multiculturalism due to the interactions at the above levels.

The policy of multiculturalism is idealistically a genuine attempt to forge a new vibrant society which would embody the diversity of different cultures and yet possess a unified identity, like a patchwork quilt or a mosaic or a symphony. In practice, however, it did not work since it could not eliminate racism. In fact, by officially promising equal opportunity and equal status to immigrants it had, indeed feelings of economic insecurity, moral outrage and conscious superiority among certain groups. According to S. N. Eisenstadt and B. Giesen multiculturalism refers to the doctrine that “cultural diversity should be recognized as a permanent and valuable part of political societies” (85).

Multiculturalism means mosaic which esteems and values variances and pluralities. It is an ideology which advocates that society should consist of, or at least allow and include distinct cultural and religious groups, with equitable status. Karan Singh has expressed the idea of multiculturalism in his book *India and Australia: History, Culture and Society* as:

Multiculturalism is now becoming an important point around the world.

The old concept of ‘one nation’, one culture’ is beginning to erode, and we find that multiculturalism, which means multi-ethnicity, multilingualistic situations, multi-religious situations, cultural traditions that differ, all these are beginning now to assume increased importance. How we deal with

multiculturalism in our own country is one of the areas we need to explore, because we in India ourselves are essentially a pluralistic society (11)

Multiculturalism also refers to ethnic and cultural diversity, tolerance, acceptance and cosmopolitanism. It either connotes some mode of transnational interrelationships between the cultures of two or more countries or suggests in a more circumscribed manner, the broader dimensions of multiple cultural identities within the boundaries of a single nation. The term multicultural is often used to refer to non- European immigrant groups in countries such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Canada's experience with diverse communities distinguishes it from many other countries. Its thirty million inhabitants reflect a cultural, ethnic and linguistic makeup found rarely elsewhere. Diversity has been a fundamental characteristic of Canada since its beginnings. A broad framework of laws and policies supports Canada's approach to diversity which is based on the belief that the common good is best served when everyone is accepted and respected for whom he/she is, thus paving way for a harmonious and creative society. Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott in their book *Multiculturalism in Canada: The Challenge of Diversity* points out Canada's Multiculturalism Act which emphasizes the equality of status and opportunity that is being given to all ethnic groups which is quoted extensively to bring out a clear idea of the prevalent multiculturalism in Canada :

- (a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;

- (b) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future;
- (c) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to such participation;
- (d) recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development;
- (e) ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity;
- (f) encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character;
- (g) promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins;
- (h) foster the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures;

- (i) preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada; and
- (j) advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada.(285)

In general, multiculturalism does not imply the superiority of one culture over another. Devika Khanna Narula in her article “Introduction: The South Asian Diaspora in English Canadian Fiction” says, “. . . majority of Canadians believe that multiculturalism enriches Canadian culture . . . They also understand this to be a policy and an ideal that is aimed at respect and tolerance, at sharing and exchanging, and at integrating and building the Canadian identity”(23). The policy of multiculturalism worked well with the immigrants though it had its own critics. The minorities have welcomed the official definition of Canada as a mosaic of cultures, and the accompanying policy of multiculturalism which professes to allow immigrants to retain their inherited cultural identity within the mosaic, while enjoying the rights and privileges of full-fledged Canadian citizenship without losing their identity.

Canadians value diverse communities for enriching cultural expression and making daily life more varied and interesting. Multiculturalism encourages anti-racism activities and strengthens its support for other minority groups and help individuals to overcome the barriers in society. However, the diasporic writers believe that multiculturalism is just a tag which was necessary politically and is not practiced. There are people who feel that multiculturalism has diversified national and communal goals. Ethnic minorities have enriched the cultural heritage by immigrant writings. Though immigrants are still

attached to their home country, they tend to stick to their cultural identity and initially refuse to merge with the people of the mainstream and are thus at the crossroads.

Gradually, they come out of their cultural prejudices and enter into the veins of the country they live in. In this lose gain situation, the immigrants are able to discard some of their cultural baggage and gain entry into the society they are dealing with at present.

They have to learn to cope with the new environment and start afresh realizing that every struggle would be a victory. Ethnic groups hanker to be accepted and recognized in a foreign country. But they are the voice to reckon with today.

Diasporic writers have put forward their views and they have highlighted cultural diversities and propagated a better understanding of the same. People want to move to the West to carve a novel cultural domain and many end up being confused and alienated. Immigrant writers have analysed their experiences that are responsible for displacement. Canada encourages multiculturalism and live and let live attitudes among different races and diverse cultures. Rohinton Mistry in his novel *Tales from Firozsha Baag* says:

The multiculturalism department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of mosaic of cultures that's their favorite word, mosaic instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigners. (160)

Expatriate writers perceive multicultural scenario from personal experiences. They vividly weave day today situations as against different cultures that they face. Initially, they enter a new country with fear and awe and miss their native place. They follow the survival

of the fittest technique. They feel that they have to prove themselves at everyplace - at home and at the workplace. They join social and political groups. Once they secure a job, they join organizations within their ethnic groups. In spite of all these changes, the first generation immigrants find it difficult to merge completely with a new society. They may be able to adjust but regarding assimilation they have their own limitations. If the reception in the host country is hostile, then it would be impossible for them to assimilate. If one enters the host country at a young age, it is easier for him to assimilate. The length of the stay and exposure to plural cultures would make the process of assimilation easier and better. The older the immigrant, the longer it takes for him to adjust.

Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond in their book *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* points out that

The (political) rationale for the policy is that with the advent of the people of diverse cultures to Canada, comes into interaction social tensions and cultural riches. And multiculturalism tries to settle the space between the two. The motive quite admirable, yet the fiction and the conversion (with the writers of the Diaspora). . . show that even writers within the same racial or ethnic grouping often disagree on the function or success of multiculturalism as both policy and reality. (4)

From the first generation to the third generation, immigrants have vast changes in their perspectives. Everything appears to be new wherein the older generation finds it difficult to follow and the new generation has lesser strings and they are ready to adapt and assimilate in the host society. The first generation has to struggle hard to fit into an alien culture. They curse the environment and themselves for coming and settling down

in a country that has a different set of values. They struggle hard to fit into an alien culture and they cannot stand the racial discrimination thrust upon them. Thus, an immigrant is like a pendulum that swings from his own culture to an alien culture. Jasbir Jain in the book *Dislocation and Multiculturalism* says: “This global movement has led to the emergence of a new narration of travel, dislocation, displacement and uprooting . . . In these narratives, new themes, new anxieties and searches have been expressed that reflect the trauma and tensions of the displaced as they strive to recover a sense of self or construct a new self hood” (36).

In the last fifty years, writers from British colonies like India, Africa and West Indies migrated to European countries in search of larger audience for their writings in English. These writers keep multicultural and multinational commitments uppermost in their minds and try to reflect on, record, imagine beyond and articulate newly changed, merged, differently focused perspectives on their adoptive culture. The difference that they felt in the adopted country makes them express their ideas in their writings.

The process of acculturation is inevitable that cannot be escaped by an immigrant as he has migrated to a culture different from his or her own. The transplanted writers’ works reflect their expatriate sensibility – the experience of alienation, nostalgia and transplantation- that they undergo during the process of acculturation and acclimatization. Barry. J has expressed his views on acculturation as

. . . the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact. Cultural changes include alterations in a group’s customs and in their economic and political life. Psychological changes

include alterations in individuals attitude towards the acculturation process, their cultural identities and their social behavior in relation to the groups in contact. (24)

Canada is known for its multiculturalism. Critics often refer to the Canadian mosaic which esteems and values variances and pluralities. However, most of the diasporic writers believe that this is just a tag which is necessary politically. Like Indian literary heritage, Canadian literature reflects a regionally diverse and multicultural society. The wide variety of literature fosters the growth of a unique composite identity. The diversity of cultures has given rise to the emergence of various literatures, the most noteworthy being Indo Canadian literature. The last decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of new generation of writers, poets, dramatists and novelists who have achieved distinct identities like Bharathi Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Uma Parameswaran and M.G.Vassanjee. They often explore the crucial issues of racism, alienation and social tensions that crowd the world of an immigrant. The most significant factor that oppresses the Indian immigrant writers' psyche in Canada appears to be racism which results in their marginalization and ghettoization. The hostility of the majority community, the insensitivity of their behaviour, and the bitter stings of racism become the focus of their writing.

The immigrant experience is complicated as the immigrant finds himself perpetually at a transitional stage with memories of the original home which are at odds with the realities of the new world. Uma Parameswaran masterfully explores the themes of the complexities of the immigrant experience, the clash of life styles, cultural disorientation, conflicts of assimilation, and the tangled ties between generations. She paints the portraits of Indian families torn between the pull of respecting family traditions and the Canadian way of life.

Uma Parameswaran's short play *Dear Deedi, My Sister* highlights the multicultural aspect which is prevalent in Canada and its effects on various immigrants that ravaged the larger immigrant community in Canada. As India is a land of many cultures, Canada too is a multicultural land and the author Uma Parameswaran has done a good job of allowing them to speak for her. Life in the new land places them in an uncomfortable situation. They are overawed by the vastness of the new landscape and baffled by the new aggressive cultural surroundings. In the later stage they slowly transform themselves and become an inevitable part of the host society.

Mariella, a young woman from Nicaragua speaks out for her side "Your broad beach road where the polished tar, Flings mirages that vapour on the speeding cars, Your sands stretched out beside the sea, Where at my feet laps Eternity. . . the blind beggar's stare, Wreck of thirty ruinous years, When the sheep looked up and were not fed . . ." (64). She says that she is pledged to the land which her love has made their home. It becomes quite obvious that anybody who immigrates to any country should consider the new country as his/her home. Aziza, an older woman from Pakistan expresses her views about the kind of place that she lives in, "What kind of place you've brought me to, son? Where the windows are always closed, and the front door is always locked?" (66). The living condition in the alien place is challenging for the immigrants. Choi Chan, a middle aged man from Hong Kong, Chandri, a woman from Srilanka, Yokio, a woman from Japan, Sekoni, a young man from Nigeria, Wamahu, a young woman from Kenya express that Canada's fields are sown with gold and that their lives should be bright with golden sheaves of corn. Their dreams can come true if there is real understanding, love and

give- and- take attitude. They want to build their temple in Canada. Guuled and Sagal, an old couple from Somalia express their hope by adjusting to the new land:

Under a sky bluer than any we've seen,
 On snow whiter than ever we dreamed,
 We stand beside the Golden Boy
 Holding golden sheafs of corn
 Against a dawn heralding the joy
 Of years to come. (73)

These lines reflect the optimistic feeling of the old couple from Somalia which is based more on their inherent confidence than on concrete facts.

In another situation, Sapna a young woman from India describes the issues one after another. She says that irrespective of the place, anybody is prone to die; death is unavoidable whether one is in one's motherland or in a foreign land. She says that their heart still yearns to touch the waters of the Ganga before it can go in peace to its eternal rest. "Gangajal" she said, "I need Gangajal to wash him" (71). She takes a cup size copper pot to hand over. Her hands tremble as she places it there when one of her dearest friend dies. Death brings people together and they sing:

We came together then, all of us,
 two hundred and more;
 and in the days that followed
 there was more love in every home,

more compassion, less grievances
 and gripes as each sought comfort
 in wedded arms . . .
 But death, till now a distance stranger,
 knocked on our door last month,
 and we had to lay out one of our dearest friends. (71)

The play at last has a chorus where all the above- mentioned speakers join together and
 Sing:

We are New Canadians
 Come from faraway places,
 The Alps and the Andes,
 Essequibo and the Ganges,
 Our memories, our faces
 Chiselled by ancient cultures
 Whose courses had been half run
 Long ere Cartier's had begun. (72)

Through these lines, the author wants to convey that as time passes by, the immigrants
 are ready to merge with the host society. The hesitation and the fear of complexity they had
 in the beginning slowly vanish and thereby they start being a part of the host society.

This idea is beautifully explained at the end of the play: "We must build our temple here,

here where the Assiniboine flows into the Red. And we shall bring Ganga, as Bhagirata did of old, to our land, our Assiniboine, and here shall be the groves where Uma shall dance with Parameswara” (73). When the immigrants are ready to merge with the host society they can live peacefully and harmoniously.

Though Canada has had an official policy of multiculturalism for many decades, racial discrimination is still a strong undercurrent in the Canadian society. The process of acculturation is an inevitability that cannot be escaped by an immigrant. Chand.M in his book *Diasporas as Drivers of National Competitiveness in Emerging Economies* remarks:

. . . immigrant groups are not always free to choose how to acculturate as their experience depends to a larger extent on the acculturation policy of the host society. This policy has a large impact on the diasporas feeling of being at ‘home’ and in its motivations towards the home and host countries. The host country might make certain restrictions and the choices for the immigrants to make. (46)

The transplanted writers explore the immigrant experiences and their works reflect their expatriate sensibility – the experience of alienation, nostalgia and transplantation – they undergo during the process of acculturation and acclimatization. This idea is explained by Uma Parameswaran when she describes the four phases of the immigrant’s life. First, wonder and fear at the new world around oneself and nostalgia for the world left behind; secondly an overriding impulse to survive in the new world that makes one immerse oneself in one’s profession or family, which often precludes political or social participation in

the larger society; thirdly, 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.

Though Uma Parameswaran claims that most immigrants reach the final phase, the question remains whether complete assimilation is possible. A merger into the cultural main stream of the host nation is very difficult for the first generation. The fact remains that the first generation immigrants might acquire a relative adjustment that is 'acculturation' but not 'assimilation.'

Uma Parameswaran's first short story *The Door I Shut Behind Me* reflects the multicultural aspect of the host culture. As a writer when she moves from one culture to another she has to relocate herself afresh in relation to the centre. Living on margins, trying to perform the role of an ambassador and a refugee, Uma Parameswaran seeks affirmation and reaffirmation in a new perspective. Being an immigrant she could relate more positively to Canadian culture, while retaining at the same time, her distinctive Indian identity.

In this play, Uma Parameswaran analyses the fact that the first generation immigrants are hesitant whereas second generation immigrants are ready to get accustomed to the host culture. Uma Parameswaran says, "Here they were, two men who came from the same country, saluted the same flag, worshipped the same gods, yet so alien to each other! Was the alienness due to individual differences alone?" (7). In another context, Uma Parameswaran describes that ". . . every immigrant transplants part of his native land in the new country and the transplant may be said to have taken root once the immigrant figuratively sees the

river that runs in the adopted place, not the Ganga or the Assiniboine as the Ganga, both of which imply a transference or substitution – the confluence of any two rivers is sacred” (17).

In this play Uma Parameswaran visualizes the immigrant’s experience is indeed a process towards the relocation of the immigrant’s identity. Though the new place baffled them with a sense of fear and wonder at the initial stage, as time passes by it becomes a readjustment, adaptation, participation and fulfillment for the immigrants. Here in this play the following lines show that the immigrants want to maintain their culture. “What were they? Indians or Canadians? They had not changed their food habits; the women had not changed their costume; apparently they were a close-knit ethnic group; still far from being assimilated into the general current of life around them” (11). They feel happy to see that the Indian families in Canada not only create ‘Little Indias’ for themselves but also prefer to live in the memories of India of their childhood rather than the India of today.

Uma Parameswaran portrays the multicultural aspect by saying that when they happen to be in their country, the immigrants never give importance to their people, but when they happen to be in the alien culture every Indian becomes important to them. Uma Parameswaran asks, “My People, my language . . . Could they never be one people unless they had one language? Was it? After all, only language that could hold a nation together in peace time?” (9). These lines bring out the multicultural ‘mosaic’ of Canadian culture. Throughout this play Uma Parameswaran writes of these same events with delightful difference, a difference that has its origins in the rich cultures and traditions of her homeland.

Devika Narula in her article “Confluences and Divergences: Short Story Cycles. South Asian Canadian Writer” says:

In a multicultural society 'recognition' becomes an important factor for all ethnic groups desirous of obtaining an equal status. This may be the reason that in the last decade there has been a sudden spurt of interest in diasporic writings and their objective of projecting the recent history of their race.

They present a chronicled account of the history of their community through a narration of their personal histories which recount the life that they lived in their homeland or in the land from where they migrated. These narratives present the cultural divergences of different diasporas but they also contribute to a better understanding of the other. (92)

Uma Parameswaran's *Trishanku* explores the varying responses to expatriation and its stages of adaptation to the new homeland. It is a sequence of poems spoken by various voices, where one finds an encounter of different cultures. This poem is startling as it is a powerful collage of the experiences of uprooting and resettlement, of the intermingling of personal and social histories and of many other human dimensions involved in transplanting an ancient culture to a new land. This poem reflects Uma Parameswaran's adeptness in transforming the everyday voice into poetry by depicting the fear, wonder, uncertainty, dilemmas, sense of loss, isolation and at the same time an overriding impulse to survive in the new environment.

The title *Trishanku* implies that the immigrant parents may be suspended between the past and the present, between the homeland and the country of adoption; however the children claim Canada as their own, wearing Canadian clothes and speaking Canadian English. As far as they are concerned, India is not their home but a place wherever they can discover things about themselves. They feel that they may be pulled but they will not be torn.

The most striking feature of *Trishanku* is the vivid sense of life created by the memories, dreams and present reality of each speaker. The collective memory touches every person who is physically, culturally and emotionally displaced. Through this poem Uma Parameswaran wants to say that time and space are artificial constraints that can be overcome when people carry their God within them. She feels that a Hindu Temple can be raised on the banks of Red and Assiniboine rivers and the Indian holy Ganga can be brought into Canada. This shows that Uma Parameswaran is a firm believer of multiculturalism.

In this poem Uma Parameswaran provides a new perspective based on gender to the whole discourse of diasporic writing. She says that women are able to adapt more quickly and to accept and love two homes. “It would be nice to be white / More like everything else, you know? I can do everything on the Jungle-gym, that Petey can” (32). At the end of the poem, Uma Parameswaran analyses how immigrants have started taking roots in Winnipeg and the readers can see the attitude of immigrants who could see unity in diversity.

Uma Parameswaran says that children born in Canada are different from those who come to Canada in childhood; it depends on the parents’ economic, educational and cultural background and also the time of their leaving India. The place of residence changes configurations in immigrants life. Uma Parameswaran has cited her friends’ life as example. She says that when her friend was growing up in a rural community, her family was considered Indian. But, when her family moved to the city, her family becomes part of the larger stream and the whole world has become Indian though regionally affiliated with the culture of the State from which they had come. It shows

how youngsters feel trapped by the parents when they are forced to keep the old ways and how they find it difficult to balance between the cultures. At a later stage they may start appreciating the host nation and become aware of their own rights. They expect Canada to become a melting pot where different people from different cultures and ideas co-exist on equal terms.

Vimal Dhawan in his article “Multiculturalism: The Immigrant’s Dilemma” comments on multiculturalism :

. . . if clinging to one’s cultural baggage proves detrimental in one’s journey towards acceptability at a wider level, it is better to shed some of it. One has to give up some of one’s distinctive cultural identity in order to gain acceptance. One need not give up one’s parent culture, but it needs to be redefined in the context of the adopted culture. (86)

Uma Parameswaran makes the readers to see the poetry behind the lives of people and one can see their own distinct voices which complement one another. The range of experiences that Parameswaran addresses in *Trishanku* is extensive, and suggests the interdependence of the individual and the community.

In the play *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees*, the expression made by Jayant, son of Sharad “When I take a bus downtown I Love it”(82) reveals the casual way in which the younger generation merges into mainstream Canadian society because they have fewer inhibitions, fewer memories and less desire to preserve their ancestral reports. Jayant protests when his father keeps referring to “our people” and “our country” and reminds him that Canada is now their country.

Savitri, Sharad's wife is another first generation immigrant who leads a dual life. She is a Canadian only at the surface. This is emphasized in her manner of dressing also. She dresses up like any other Canadian – in boots, coat, pant-suit; but when she is back home, “she has kumkum on her forehead ... (and) comes in, tucking the pleats of her sari at her waist. She looks different now, very brown, very Indian” (79-80).

Like Sharad, Savitri also faces challenges in the new country but they are of a different nature. One of the challenges is the behaviour of her daughter Jyothi who has adopted the ‘Canadian’ mannerisms. Savitri finds it difficult to accept that her unmarried daughter has an active sexual life. When she comes to know of the matter, she reacts vehemently and says

We are supposed to treat you as rational adults even when you behave like beasts. . . I don't know whether you want to prove something to me or whether you meant to flaunt this to your father or what, but I don't want this to happen in dad's car . . . I'll take you to Dr.MacRae and put you on the pill . . . if you haven't already, of course. (90)

The above reaction reflects her partial assimilation in the given condition. She is enraged and upset to know that her daughter is sleeping with her boy friend but instead of pursuing her for discontinuation, she wants her to be safe “on the pill” and does not want “this to happen in dad's car”(91).

In this play, the second generation migrants – Jayant, Jyothi, Krish, Vithal, Prithi, Arun , Dilip, Rajan and Sridhar discuss the important issues like racism and multiculturalism in Canada. All these second generation immigrants have studied in the Canadian schools, speak and dress up like other Canadians, have similar hobbies, but still they are treated

as aliens. They find it difficult to maintain a balance between what the society expects from them and what is expected of them by their families. Moreover, the second generation migrants feel that their home is in Canada and not elsewhere in India. The difference in perspective of the first-generation and second-generation migrants gets reflected in a dialogue between Sharad and his son Jayant.

JAYANT. Our people, our old country, Dad, there is no
 “our people” and no “old country” for anyone
 in the world anymore, least of all for us.
 This is our land and here we shall stay.

SHARAD. Roots, son, roots. Can we really grow roots here?

JAYANT. Sure, Dad, just look outside. The monstrous new
 apartment block out there—they have twenty - foot
 trees around the patio and there are five - footers
 inside the quadrangle, all setup overnight and
 flourishing like crazy. If anything, the pollution in
 the air seems to have acted like pep pills. (83)

These lines show that 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. The second generation migrants cannot relate to the homeland in the same way as the first-generation migrants do. They identify themselves with the Canadians and not with the Indians. In fact, the second generation immigrants desperately want to belong to Canada. They rarely show any urge to go back to India. They are willing to

change with the time. Though they are 'rootless' in the new land, they want to be green and want to flourish. All the second generation immigrants suggest that there is a need for change. Jayant says, "We have to change with time. Haven't we been in the closet long enough?" (97).

The level of assimilation in the new land gets manifested in the language the characters use in the play. There is a difference in the language of the first generation and the second generation migrants. The second generation migrants like Krish, Jayant and Vithal speak in English and their speech is filled with jargons like "howdee"(75), "Bug off, bozo" (75) and reference to "Jeesus." On the other hand, the first generation migrants in the play, like Savitri and Veejala, use a lot of words from their mother tongue like "beta". This difference in their language brings out the fact that the first-generation migrants have assimilated only partially and are keen to maintain connection with their native language and life.

Uma Parameswaran's work focuses on the disparate cultures within the diaspora where children born in Canada are definitely different from those who come to Canada in childhood. Among the seniors there are two types namely those over middle age who have spent their working life in Canada and those who come to Canada after retiring from India, to join their adult children. On the other hand, compared to the first-generation migrants, the second generation migrants have assimilated to their new environment in a better way. Sometimes they undergo problems of different nature. They do not have the vision of 'homeland' and 'past' in the same way as their parents have or identify themselves with the Indians; the fact that they are not accepted as Canadians also makes them angry and frustrated. This quality is visible in the characters of Jayant and Vithal.

Uma Parameswaran portrays multiculturalism through the voices of Dilip, Rajan and Sridhar. Dilip believes that as one is in this new land, he\she should try to assimilate.

Assimilate my ass . . . We have to stay separate from them and stay together within and we've got to show them that we have as much right to be here as the pissed-off whites who've bullied their way into this county these last three hundred years. We've got to stay apart, stay together. That is the only way . . . Ghettoes is right . . . Look at the Jews . . . Only in ghetto can unity thrive . . . now they don't get pushed around any more. They are top of the world. (98)

Rajan rejects this and expresses: "Now that they (Jews) are tops now that they are accepted and all that, do you see the writing on the wall? They are disintegrating, just melting into the sea of society" (98). Multiculturalism as a state policy of Canada is a pretence. Rajan ridicules it: "Each group stays together and once a year there's three ring circus, a zoo called Folkorama where everyone visits everyone else's cage. Hula Calypso, bagpipes and all. Just wait for the mela. I'll take you around" (98). The resolution of the conflicting views of Dilip (who professes attempt to assimilate) and Vithal (who prefers ghettoes) comes in a friend's speech. "We have got to stand tall. And by God we shall. We shall build our temple at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine and then we shall say Okay, we are ready to assimilate. Not here not now. Now it will be bootlicking, apple polishing" (98). Hence, the attempt 'to assimilate' should follow 'living in ghettoes'.

Another solution comes from Sridhar: "Why does it have to be "them" and "us" all the time, why not just you and me, an individualistic approach; the best bet is to let time take its course, and come a couple of generations everything would be more even all around, within the community and outside; we'd have a lot more brown-white kids"

(101-102). It is symbolically pointed out by the flourishing beautiful green boulevard trees though they are rootless. “But it is there and it is green, it is beautiful” (123). Through these lines Uma Parameswaran analyses how multiculturalism paves the way for understanding the immigrants way of life, their customs and traditions in the host society. The life of the immigrants gets transformed, when it comes into contact with different multicultural facets of host nation and thereby leads to cultural hybridity.

What Ania Loomba says about Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is quoted by Bijay Kumar Das in his book *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*: “Homi. K. Bhabha’s usage of the concept of hybridity that has been the most influential and controversial within recent postcolonial studies” (364). It recognizes all cultural relations as ambivalent, subversive, transgressive and hybrid. Hybridity challenges the cultural encounters which establish hierarchical dominated relationship. What Bhabha seems to stress is that both the colonizer and the colonized are interdependent. Not only are they present together but also act on one another and there are many reversible reactions between the two.

In her first novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* Uma Parameswaran maintains objectivity in portraying the several facets of multicultural Canada. According to Uma Parameswaran, Canada is undergoing the third phase of expatriation where the policy of the government is multiculturalism in bilingual framework. She represents ethnic minority writers in Canada whose cultures and languages are neither English nor French. As a transplanted writer, she is confused whether to present the constricting problems of the immigrants with a sense of pity and loss or to highlight the liberating advantageous position enjoyed by the immigrants in the new land. In this novel, Sharad Bhave has migrated from Pune to Manitoba hoping to improve his financial position; his wife Savitri

and their children Jyothi and Jayant also go, leaving their sparse comfortable living at their ancestral home. The royal treatment at their grandparents' house and the proud family history has been passed onto him through bed time stories reveal the adaptation of ancient traditions to life in new and unfamiliar circumstances.

In this novel, Veejala, Sharad's sister who is a scientist settled in Canada along with her family recollects Sharad Poornima nights in the ancestral house and wonders how hinduism has a place for everyone and everything. Her memory includes things that are very much Indian, "Ajoba's library, Aji's jasmine-scented Saris, the stop sign across the street, Jyothi's denim jacket, the smell of camphor in the niche of the tulsi tree, the ridiculous oversized billboards on Pembina Highway advertising Stanfield briefs and Congar boots"(113). By this way, the second generation immigrants associate themselves with their ancestral Indian past that gives them power to face the painful present. They gain stamina to survive in the new land by the way of adjustment and later by assimilation in the new culture.

Not only the immigrants but also the author herself has adopted the technique of using these expressions without glossary or textual explanation to identify India in Canada. This kind of multiculturalism shows the author's preoccupation with Indian landscape and culture. Jayant's aunt Veejala resigns her job as she does not want to continue her professional life as a scientist in a male-dominated world. She decides to go to India, where she can enjoy more freedom and liberty. She would like to relive these moments at her mother's place when she had been a rebellious child. Savitri wonders at her sister-in-law's decision to go back:

Veejala, who had lived almost as long outside India as in who in appearance, dress, accent, food habits, outlook and every variable one could think of, was at home in the western world, was returning to India, where as they would continue here, with their old ways, old values, old everything. But why not? India had moved on, would move on, and people such as Sharad would be left behind no matter where they were. Life was easier here than there. (140-41)

What is considered to be painful in the beginning of diasporic living is found to be easier as the migrants get accustomed to the newer way of life. It is also possible that there are people who would get disgusted with diaspora though they had an initial preference for willing migration. While Savitri is an example for the former, Veejala can be cited for the later type of diasporians. Savitri is definitely an assimilated diasporian, for she finds Winnipeg to be “a friendly place of warm, hardworking people and large, closely knit families” (22). Though Veejala dislikes Canada, she doesn’t want her children to be reminded of their past life at Pune, for as she says, “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).

The character of Veejala is presented as if she is in a confused state. That is why there is inconsistency in her choice of diaspora. Her husband Anant takes her decision of leaving for India in a lighter way and says “You should go ahead with your plans, get away from housework and, for heaven’s sake, away from guilt feelings” (112). As a loving husband, he could understand his wife’s feelings and broods, “. . . in another hundred years, may be, he said, women could get out of the bind, but now to be born a

woman was to be born with all kinds of guilt complexes. The two of them had an even tougher time because of their hopping between cultures” (113). Through these lines Uma Parameswaran brings out her opinion of women’s position in diaspora through a male voice.

In another context, Uma Parameswaran describes how the Bhave family follows typical Indian habits and customs. Sharad would narrate stories from Hindu mythology and would say that no one should leave anything in their plates and that all the family members should be at home during dinner time so that family matters can be discussed. Thus, Parameswaran presents the first generation settlers being nostalgic of India and the second generation settlers being initially analytical and critical of their Trishanku position and finally accepting and acknowledging the new land as a source of their survival. Jayant thus talks with a newly earned wisdom:

That’s us, Dad. Not just you and me with our memories of another land, another life, but all of us in this modern world, rootless but green for the length of our life, long or short; not a plantain tree that leaves a young one in its place, not an Oak tree with its roots stretched a mile radian, this evergreen doesn’t have one Christly use, it isn’t good even as firewood, but it is there, it is green, it is beautiful and therefore right.(221-22)

For a second generation settler like Priti, home is Canada and her relatives in Canada are her countrymen. She need not worry about being accepted by the white community. Probably she is at the fourth phase of immigrant life where she tries to become the citizen of the country by active participation and sincere contribution to the corporate living. She brings in a Christmas tree and deliberates, “It is an evergreen tree...is a thing of beauty...And a thing of beauty is a joy forever” (221). The metaphorical

meaning is that their life is also an evergreen tree without roots in Canada: however, they will survive until there is snow, which is again a metaphor referring to the trials and tribulations they have to undergo in the new land. And the snow is going to continue forever with beauty. Jayant is thus definitely acculturated and assimilated. Jyothi also adds to this confirming that the mixture of two cultures could be the only solution for their pangs of immigrant life. “He will plant evergreen and Oaks with roots . . . And grow mangoes on maples, and jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces. God willing, we shall . . . and one of those little Indian girls born here, Romona’s sister may be, Vithal and Donna, she and Pierre are . . . Whoever it was to be” (232).

In this play, Uma Parameswaran uses her own personal knowledge of the land and the environment and tries to mix up the Indian and Canadian cultures. In the multicultural society food is used to reconstruct the host culture. When Jayant’s friends visit their home, mango juice is served; at that time Vithal rightly observes, “. . . Mangoes and maples don’t mix” (74) and he asks for puris. Danesh, another friend of Jayant observes, “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). However, the Indians feel that they need not merge with the Canadian culture, for they can remain Indians in the salad bowl culture of Canada. This shows the author’s concern for her homeland and culture. Sridhar also very much interested to know about the Canadian history. He remembers well at the time of crisis all Canadians support each other. They shrug their Indian identity in order to be recognized as Canadians instead of Indo-Canadians, because the hyphenated identity is highly humiliating.

In the alien land, the practice of Indianism offers a solace to the diasporic souls who are longing to be comforted. When Savitri talks about premarital and extramarital relationships which are quite common in the Canadian context, she says “Sharad would kill me if he heard me say this, Jyoti, but it is as sound a piece of advice as one needs for living in this age in this country; jump into bed as many times as you wish, but don’t jump into matrimony” (216). Though it is a cultural shock to Indian readers, the author has justified the presence of biculturalism in the life of Indo-Canadians. This leads to a hybrid society on which the postcolonial writers focused.

In fact ‘hybridity’ conjures up the notion of ‘in-betweenness’ which is further extended by its meaning as ‘diaspora.’ Though ‘diaspora’ evokes the specific terms of displacement, it loses its poignancy due to the effect of ‘hybridity.’ This notion of ‘hybridity’ bridges the gap between West and the East (i.e. the colonizer and the colonized). Because of this, many immigrants are inevitably influenced by global culture. For the immigrant ‘home’ is a contradictory site of nurture and also dark, decomposed element. The newer world offers professional opportunity and financial betterment and also insists on assimilation and acculturation, a rejection of old habits, traditions and a conditioning and a merging with the culture of the new context.

Adjustment, adaptability and acceptance are the key terms which the immigrants have to follow in the host society. If they take all these on their own accord there would not be any unnecessary tantrums. They should accept life as it comes to them in a practical manner without being hypocritical or indulging in propaganda. In order to merge into the host society, the immigrants should leave some of the cultural baggage which proves to be detrimental in their journey towards acceptability at a wider level. They have to give up some

of the distinctive cultural identity, in order to gain acceptance in the host nation. It does not mean that they have to give up their parent culture, but it has to be redefined in the context of the adopted culture. Uma Parameswaran remarks that in order to gain something, one has to lose something, but in this aspect the loss is worth it.

In her work, Uma Parameswaran discusses that a merger into the cultural main stream of the host nation is very difficult for the first generation. The fact remains that the immigrants, definitely the first generation, might acquire a relative adjustment that is acculturation but not assimilation. Acculturation is the adoption of changes in external behaviour for the smoother acceptance by the new society, whereas the assimilation is the ability to react instinctively and emotionally to a culture. The degree of assimilation is in direct proportion to the degree of friendly reception by the host society. The age and the length of stay of the immigrant in the two cultures also count in this regard.

Assimilation is a two way process. The adopted country must be ready to accept the outsider as one of them, the genuineness of the attempt to assimilate and the psychological impact of the clash of cultures should give the outsiders a positive attitude so that they can move on to fresher pastures to try their luck there. In the process of acculturation and assimilation, every immigrant has to unlearn what he has learnt in his own culture and undergo the learning process in the new and alien culture. The old order has to give way to the new. The process of transplantation is relatively easier for the younger generation immigrant who has not got his roots firmly fixed in the culture of his birth. There is a question of preserving one's hybrid identity. The older generation finds it difficult to carry out the chores that were carried out by domestic helps in their home country.

In fact through assimilation, the immigrants and the native communities are given freedom to practice their racial, cultural, traditional and religious practices with due respect for other communities living together. S.C.Sharma in his article “Perspectives on Indian Abroad” expresses that there are three different trends of adaptation of Indians abroad that have been identified.

They are assimilation, cultural preservation with economic integration and ethnic polarization for pursuit of power cultivation. The most predominant pattern found among Indians abroad is the cultural preservation with economic integration. When immigrants do not assimilate or integrate, but adopt only few aspects of culture of the host society they develop double identity and their culture becomes ‘Sandwich culture’. The societies where people with different social and cultural background do not mix with each other, such societies have been called ‘Plural Society.’ Immigrants are called ‘Sojourners’ if they do not mix in the host society and maintain their separate identity. (50)

The women who are confined to their homes cling to tradition and thrust it down the throats of the younger people who find it difficult to adjust to the traditional mores of their parents. Indian women in such circumstances are under the spell of Indian culture. But their indomitable spirit helps them to live in an alien country and mix around freely with their counterparts. Through Uma Parameswaran’s works, one can envision Canada, as a mosaic of cultures. Vimal Dhawan has quoted Bharathi Mukherjee’s statement in his article “Multiculturalism: The Immigrant’s Dilemma” as “. . . immigrants are conquerors. They are all minor heroes because they have the guts to sail the oceans and make new

lives. They are not failures even though they have disappointments. Adventure can dent one in many ways but bruising is a trophy” (87). In fact Mukherjee’s statement totally reorients the perspective about the immigrants.

Uma Parameswaran handles the theme of migration and depicts the psychological impact of losing one’s country, language, and culture. Cross-cultural interaction of various characters, crossing the cultural and geographical borders makes multiculturalism and transculturalism a reality. Uma Parameswaran’s characters reflect the immigrant experiences which force them to undergo identity crisis as they encounter doubleness of identity. Since globalization leads to the loss of one’s identity, the immigrants learn to assimilate seeking liberation and fulfillment. In fact, multiculturalism helps the immigrants to be free from cultural and political repression. Vimal Dhawan in his article on “Multiculturalism: The Immigrant’s Dilemma” has quoted Neil Bissoondath’s views on multiculturalism as : “ . . . adjustment is essential in every society. I don’t think we should expect the greater society to adjust to our ways . . . immigrants have to make a certain adjustment, just as society has to make an adjustment too” (86).

Multiculturalism fosters a more open attitude towards immigration in the host country. It also creates a more tolerant attitude towards immigrants in Canada. Because multiculturalism is seen as a defining feature of a distinct Canadian, as opposed to a British or French national identity. In recent years, there has been a debate on whether to allow multiculturalism or to urge the various ethnic groups to assimilate with the Canadian mainstream. If various ethnic groups are given equal rights and opportunities, as enjoyed by the whites, they can definitely realize their potential and prove themselves. While retaining

their own ethnic identity, the ethnic groups can come together and feel the 'Canadian identity' on important issues, thus effectively contributing to the 'Canadian cause'.

There is no doubt that living in a multicultural society the effect of the western world is visible in an immigrant's life. However, the first or second generation migrants nurture a strong sense of nostalgia and homesickness; the descendants of the diaspora of indentured period are perfectly at home in the adopted land as it draws nourishment from the land of its adoption. In the course of time, they do not feel completely alienated or isolated, frustrated or depressed living in a land, which is not the land of their origin. Nevertheless, they feel proud of their Indian origin and keep a keen interest in the political and economic scenario of their motherland.

The younger or second generation immigrants, due to their weak links with the land of their origin are sometimes influenced by the glimmers of the western world and show a tendency of snapping their roots with their cultural traditions. The ancestors with their conscious efforts have kept the culture and tradition alive in the adopted country. They exert their influence on the youngsters directly or indirectly so that they would remember their rich tradition and do not despise themselves for their Indian origin or feel ashamed of their dark skin and suffer from racial inferiority.

In fact, multiculturalism makes the immigrants to be self sufficient and brings solidarity among the global citizens. Postcolonial theory follows the same idea because it is also transnational in dimension, multicultural in approach and a movement beyond the binary opposition of the power relations between the colonizer/colonized', and 'centre/ periphery'.

Multiculturalism promotes tolerance and mutual acceptance and thereby contributes to a better world of peace and harmony among different communities. As an ideology

multiculturalism emphasizes the significance of the 'other' different groups having their own peculiar behavioral patterns and attitudes, their ethnic authenticity, their 'difference' and individuality. Hence, by implication, the multicultural act promulgates the virtue of tolerance and respect. Considering the globalization movement being propagated at present, whether one acknowledges it or not, all countries are gradually becoming multicultural since there is a constant flow of different communities from one country to another. In fact, multiculturalism is an ideology that makes a nation realize the progressive values of the diversity of cultures, languages, religions and ideologies; it creates an awareness of 'otherness' and 'differences.'

Multiculturalism appeals as a kind of cultural globalization to non-western countries with its apparent liberal democratic contents. Canadian society is a multicultural society, where all ethnic groups are recognized as equal in status. This is a statement often seen in books commenting on ethnic writing by immigrant writers settled in Canada. Hence multiculturalism has become an obsession with literary authors and critics who claim to 'decentre' the hegemony of the West.

No doubt, multiculturalism recognizes both individual human dignity and the social dimension of human existence. On the whole, Uma Parameswaran's narratology unfolds the complexity of diasporic life in terms of the variations and diversities as also the contrasts and contradictions of human experience in diverse perspectives. Her voice is the voice of an immigrant caught up in the vortex of a multicultural world, trying to define an identity.