

Chapter II

Fragmented Identity

“I am neither I nor the other one

I am something in between.”

Mario de Sa-Carneiro

Under the influence of globalisation, economic liberalisation, novel communication networking systems and possibilities of multiple citizenship, the sense of identity has emerged as a recurrent theme in modern literature. In the early days, literature focused mainly on reuniting of legends and writing about personal experiences of people which gave a befitting expression to their thoughts and feelings, visions and aspirations. However, this lasted only for a few decades and the quest for identity and the struggle for existence have been popular themes in the diasporic literature. It has focused on the unsettlement or dislocation of an individual or race and consequent alienation. Gina Wisker in her article “Dialogues of Belonging” points out that the “theoretical and literary possibilities and potentialities of the Indian diasporic writers reflect on, record, imagine beyond and articulate the newly changed, merged, differently focused perspectives on their adoptive cultures and their position as writers with multiple roots in the history of several cultures”(21).

Literature can play an important role in human life, since it not only reflects persistent change in the society but also leads society to a better appreciation of its multicultural and ethno centred fabric. It functions as an important source of understanding the contemporary society and serves as a repository of social and cultural values. It makes the readers explore the sense of identity and belonging. All new literatures are preoccupied with the

quest for cultural identity and the plight of immigrant's life is a fascinating subject for the diasporic writers. They have given expression to their creative urge and have brought credit to the Indian English writing as a distinctive force. Some eminent creative writers have been accorded recognition, for their endeavour at home as well as abroad. The Indian diasporic writers start with the notion of 'homelessness' which symbolises a historical condition as well as existential predicament.

The dispossessed person's search for identity has become a perennial sustaining force for the immigrant writer. Uma Parameswaran is one of those diasporic writers in English who is constantly aware of the agonising problem of identity crisis. She unifies an essential Canadian sensibility with that of her Indian historic past. Like every immigrant writer, she attempts to grab the best of both the worlds to use her own phrase. As an expatriate, she is clear about her own identity and hence all her works reflect the sense of rootlessness and alienation which are mostly relevant to the Indian diaspora. Her voice is the voice of an immigrant caught up in the vortex of a multicultural world, trying to define an identity.

In Uma Parameswaran's works the protagonists face fragmentation, alienation, identity crisis and they are in search of their authentic selfhood. They do not realise what they are and how they should be. The question "who am I?" raised by the protagonists reverberates in all her works. The quest in some cases remains unfulfilled which results in fragmentation or even annihilation of the self. Her writings focus on the struggle of the immigrants who are frantically endeavouring in their state of isolation to establish their identity and emotional sensitivity in an impersonal and threatening social milieu. She stresses the need for self-discovery and self-identity leading to self-actualisation. In her work one

can find the individual's odyssey towards attaining the integration of the self by assimilating or discarding the social values of the community he lives in.

This chapter discusses the agonising problem of identity crisis experienced by the Indian immigrants in Canada. All the protagonists of Uma Parameswaran suffer from the loss of a sense of identity at one point or other. The immigrants do not enjoy the life in straight lines and smooth plains. Neither can they completely detach themselves from their past nor do they have any certainty about their future. As an Indo-Canadian writer, Uma Parameswaran expresses that the culture, mythology and rich traditions of India play a vital role in immigrants' life. She also tries to bring out the fact that life outside India no doubt shapes one's responses to India and the responses may vary depending upon one's own personality and values.

As a Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, Uma Parameswaran expresses her own experience in Canada. She admits that there is racism and under employment in Canada. Her struggle to identify herself with the new host country enables her to write from a wider and more exciting perspective. Generally, immigrants experience diaspora under three conditions – first they grow up in a foreign land with their migrant parents, second by virtue of their homeland, third, they exercise their conscious choice to go to other countries in order to pursue higher education or for lucrative jobs. Whatever the classification may be, they suffer in real life also, as they are caught between psychological problems of diaspora such as dislocation, unbelonging, marginalization and cultural dissonance that are common to men.

Today, migration is a movement marked by human propensity to greener pastures under the impact of globalisation. The immigrants' movement which begins as a journey

of adventure marked by the hope of a bright future gradually turns less and less adventurous because what they face in reality is an entirely different situation. Hence a conflict ensues which pushes the immigrant to suffer neurosis, an anxiety resulting in ghettoisation - a herd instinct, very much visible and prevalent in animal kingdom. This provides the immigrant the necessary impetus to chisel his identity resisting erasure into collective anonymity. Bijay Kumar Das in his book *Perspectives on the Poetry of R.Parthasarathy* says “It is not surprising . . . that writers in English are conscious of their Indianness because, at the bottom of it all, one suspects a crisis of identity” to be “the root cause of all problems” (44). Thus, South Asian writing in Canada is the resultant sign of such an exploration of identity.

With the advent of new technology, the whole globe has become a village and one's identity is no longer fixed. A person gets his identity by virtue of his profession, caste, religion and region, but the moment he shifts to another place, country and region he becomes marginalized. Identity becomes the net result of one's response to social experiences. Social identity is intended as a concept to mediate between social context and the action of human subjects. The social identity tradition is fundamentally oriented towards variability and possibility in human social behaviour, rather than towards singularity and constraint.

Every immigrant experiences injustice, inequality, discrimination, prejudice and a threat to cultural identity in the unfamiliar country. Adjusting with the social, economic, political, psychological and environmental changes is a challenge. The sudden change in the lifestyle, culture, status and society causes emotional and psychological problems.

According to Ashcroft Bill:

. . . The question of diaspora has become central in charting the postcolonial situation and its debates on personal and national identity formation. The question of identity also cannot be dislodged from its spatial orientalism. This question does not arise when the questioner is ‘at home’. It arises only when (s) he is dislocated from home due to various reasons including migration. (8-9)

In postcolonial world, ‘Home’ is the axis on which the entire discourse of migrancy revolves. Homeland means being rooted in something or some place and person may be rooted in numerous things and several places. Sheobhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla describe the concept of home in their book *Migrant Voices in Literatures in English*:

Home is a very complex and multivalent concept. What is home for one maybe homelessness for another. For most people . . . home is where they are themselves, where they are at home and where their heart is and not where only their feet are. It is not just a building, a geographical location, a region, a religion, a nation, a cultural or spiritual or imaginative refuge. But it is a home that determines one’s identity, defines or redefines one’s belonging and endeavours. (8)

The term identity is defined by various critics in various manners. Duncan Kelly defined it as “Self reflective and self -conscious projection of shared and remembered symbols, myths, traditions, religion, history, language, food, clothing and such other factors. It is also an affirmation of difference because when I know who I am, I also know who I am not or how I am different from other” (32). In the article named “Memory, History and Homeland: The Indian Diasporic Experience,” Jasbir Jain points out that “Identity

is the external layer related to colour, race, class, social position, economic status, nationality and a whole lot of other outward indicators”(77). R.S.Pathak in his book *Quest for Identity in Indian English Writing* defines identity as “the process of creative self-realization” (21). Hence the question of marginalization related to identity and self has become the major source for the writers especially for the ones who are marginalized.

Identity may mean different things to different persons. To create an identity is a part of the essential business of an artist. For a writer, identity refers to the discovery and declaration of literary nationality which can be treated both as distinctive and rooted. Identity is a semantically loaded imprecise term that may mean any verbal or social emblem or equivalent personal salvation. It may be realized in various forms. For many people it is nothing but a desperate struggle, while others may scarcely be conscious of it. The efforts taken by the individual may be visible only to some observers and quite meaningless to others. It also refers to the spiritual moorings of people who are anxious to seek their roots. Dennis. H .Wrong in his article “Identity: Problem and Catch World” rightly suggests that the term “. . . identity and identity crisis have become the semantic beacons of our time, for these “verbal emblems” express our discontent with modern life and modern society and the term identity has become a value charged, almost a charismatic term, with its secure achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation” (23).

Identity can be realized through the discovery of one’s own self and not by the imposition of social expectations on the individual by the society. In general, when an individual finds himself in a fortunate position to satisfy his needs and is able to play consistent roles in society, his identity is thought to have been established. Identity crisis results from negation of these factors. The sense of identity and the growing awareness of

its loss have been treated variously by writers in their works. A creative writer's sense of identity, his efforts to seek it and the challenges he faces while exploring and affirming it are issues of considerable significance.

In the literary text, the displaced person's quest for identity is referred to as 'modernization', 'westernization' and 'globalisation.' It reflects the discontent he has with modern life and modern society. Hari Mohan Prasad in his work *The Indianness of Indian Poetry in English* expresses that "though quest for identity is a recurrent theme in modern literature, the poets and critics are aware of certain crisis which threatens to engulf their individual identity" (30).

Identity is no longer confined to the individual level; it can affect a group, an institution, a class, a profession or even a nation. Talking about various aspects of identity, Sudhir Kakkar in his book *Indian Identity* remarks:

An individual's sense of identity is neither completely conscious nor unconscious, although at times, it appears to be exclusively the one or the other. At some place, identity is referred as a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at others to an unconsciousness striving for continuity of experience and yet other places as a sense of solidarity with a group are ideal. (45)

The question of identity arises only when an individual or society is marginalized. In the early days, the individuals or groups were marginalized either in the name of religion, race, region, community, caste, gender, nationality or even ideology. However, with the dawn of social reality, the marginalized societies and groups or individuals reacted against

the suppressive practices in fictional forms. This process led to a plethora of questions of identity, identity crisis, imagining construction of identity reclamation, preservation and celebration of identity.

The identity crisis faced by children born to immigrant parents is too serious. They cannot identify with their parents' aspirations but at the same time, they are not accepted by the Whites as their equals. Donald Oken in his article "Alienation: Concept, Terms and Meaning" rightly points out that "the loss of identity results in alienation" (10). Hence, the distinctive formation of identities and their preservation are consequences of survival instincts that may lead to acrimony. The centre can marginalize voices, suppress them, be indifferent to them, but can never write them off until or unless they lack in conviction.

The question of margins related to identity and self has acquired a significant name as translated persons, skilled cultural navigators and hyphenated identities. They have crossed the borders of the homelands, imaginary or real, by a willing choice or under wilful compulsion and express their deep feeling of loss, separation, yearning for restoration and realizing their identity is the most favoured and fertile site for creative activity, especially that of literature. No wonder that the poetic sensibility or creative skill of a few great writers has been shaped by migrancy, by the sense of marginalization.

R.S.Pathak in his book *Indian English Literature: Marginalised Voices* expresses that :

The individuals or groups, other than these forces are marginalised either in the name of religion, race, region, caste, community, gender, nationality or even ideology. To sustain their relationship, these people (marginalised) constructed discourses in the form of the so-called shastra or ideology justifying the validity of their being in the centre so that they can continue

with their exploitative and suppressive practices. With the dawn of awareness of this process on the part of its victims, the marginalised societies and groups or individuals that were at the receiving end reacted against it and thought in terms of decentring the centre at least in fictional terms, if not in fact, then at least by voicing their marginalisation. The process led to a plethora of questions of identity, identity-crisis and imagining construction of identity, reclamation, preservation and celebration of identity. (10)

The terms ‘identity’ and ‘identity crisis’ are looked at from different perspectives relating to the issues of personal experience and the unhappiness of the immigrants in settling down in other countries. The distinctive formation of identities and consequences of survival instincts have become a perennial problem for the immigrants from time immemorial. It would be difficult to realize the magnitude of the problem, unless one bears in mind that loss of identity is the root cause of all problems.

Identity is a much debated term in postcolonial literature. It refers to those who have immigrated to another country or who travel between adoptive countries and their original homeland; it could also mean the condition of being a little displaced, duplicitous, different, operating with a double personality and cultural identity. Postcolonial writers express that alienation has grown largely out of the wider and more significant phenomenon of ‘identity crisis’. Gina Wisker in her article “Dialogues of Belonging” expresses that the

Postcolonial people have migrated from the margins to the centres, they have settled in the Western countries and form integrated groups in those ex-imperial powers or in other ex-colonies – Canada, South Africa,

Australia and New Zealand. As such, they reconfigure any rather alien, wandering notion of what living in the diaspora might initially be thought to represent and change the places in which they make their new homes. (32)

Both Canada and India are former colonies of the British Empire and are now important members of the Commonwealth. The major part of Canada is peopled by immigrant Europeans who settled down in its vast land by waging a fierce struggle against the hostile landscape. There are also immigrants from other countries such as Japan, China, Srilanka, Pakistan and other South Asian Countries, though their number may be much smaller when compared to the European settlers. The Canadian society also has minority settlements of the natives who have become exiles in their own land. Hence, this immigrant's nation has its own share of problems and tensions which are exhibited through its long continuing question of national identity especially at the cultural and literary level.

Literature often functions as a signifier of identity of a nation or community. It re-creates, through its artifacts, the nation or community it belongs to. Commenting upon the affiliation between a literary text and the constitution of a nation, race or community, Edward Said in the article entitled "Orientalism and Postcolonial Theory" points out, "If the body of objects we study . . . belongs to, gains coherence from, and in a sense emanates out of, the concept of nation, nationality and even of race, there is very little in contemporary critical discourse making these actualities possible as subject of discussion" (215).

The literatures of immigrant writers, born on the Indian subcontinent is varied in content and form but common to all of them is a passionate faith in their own voice that is raised to express their Canadian experience. All cultural identities differ from each other in one way or other and every perceptive consciousness is rooted in its own

socio cultural, racial, class and gender identity. For the immigrant writers, the quest for identity has been a significant issue at the social, cultural, literary, emotional and psychological levels. Rohinton Mistry, Anita Desai, Uma Parameswaran and a host of other immigrant writers highlight this quest for national identity by defining, redefining, analyzing and exploring it from all possible angles.

As a creative writer, Uma Parameswaran depicts the immigrant society in turmoil and transition through the crisis of the protagonists in her works. Her exposure to other landscapes and other cultures has increased her understanding of her own particular culture in a wider sense. The confrontation between the East and the West, the strange love - hate relationship that exists between the two, the cultural alienation and the loss of identity faced by the expatriates and immigrants are some of the aspects that are presented with deep insight by her. Uma Parameswaran's work reflects the struggle of the immigrants who are frantically endeavouring in their state of isolation to establish their identity and emotional sensitivity in an impersonal and threatening social milieu.

Uma Parameswaran's works offer a special insight because she herself is a descendant immigrant Indian who is constantly aware of the agonizing problem of identity crisis. In all her works, she has discussed the issue of identity and roots. Like all migrants, she has not been able to shake herself free of the idea of roots. In her work, one can find the dilemma that an immigrant writer undergoes by creating an imaginary home for herself and reconstructs her roots. The ethnic, cultural and ideological circumstances prevalent in the alien and native societies enmesh the protagonists. They become the victims of despair and loneliness and they feel the people around them asking who are

you? Where are you from? Why are you here?. This perplexity of the protagonists caused by the binary opposition results in identity crisis.

The problems met by the immigrants in establishing their identity is an interesting starting point for research especially from an Indian point of view. The problem of identity crisis varies from individual to individual and they react to it in different ways. Sometimes they may find a solution and sometimes they may not. It depends on how the individual adapts to the situation and creates an identity for himself/herself. The basic desire of any migrant is to attain better prospects in the adopted country. In a nation like Canada, people with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds enter a cultural 'mosaic' with the expectation that they are accepted as they are, without any change in their identity. Uma Parameswaran's works move around the problems faced by South Asians and other minorities in Canada. The situations in her works have been so structured as the real happenings in Indo Canadian families. She enables the readers to understand the agony and trauma they are subject to and bring home to the reader the feeling of emptiness and exclusion felt by the characters.

Uma Parameswaran expresses that identity crisis started in Canada with the Komagata Maru incident. In 1914 the 'Komagata Maru' the Japanese steamer entered the Vancouver harbour carrying 376 potential immigrants of East Indian origin. The majority were veterans of the British army and all were British subjects. Though they had the right to enter Canada through their membership in the British Empire, they were forbidden entry by Canadian immigration officials. For the next two months the Komagata Maru lay at anchor. It returned to India in the fall of 1914, leaving behind only 20 passengers who could prove former residence in Canada. Hence identity crisis finds a significant place in the literary works of Uma Parameswaran.

Uma Parameswaran's *Dear Deedi, My sister* reflects the identity crisis which is prevalent in Canada. For this play the author won the first prize in "Caribe" play writing contest in the year 1989. This play focuses on the middle class people who immigrated to Canada from ten countries viz., India, Nicaragua, Kenya, Philippines, Nigeria, Pakistan, Hong Kong, SriLanka, Japan and Somalia. Each country is represented by different characters who face identity crisis that ravaged the larger immigrant community in Canada. Like India, Canada too is a land of many cultures. Each character has his or her own problems to face and deal with. Uma Parameswaran allows each character to speak out the various issues they face in Canada. Their views are based on individual experience, which interfere with the whole process of belonging and adjustment.

In this play, Uma Parameswaran discusses these issues in the mode of letter correspondence between two sisters, one living in Canada and other in India. Apart from these two, there are a variety of men and women, all immigrants from various parts of the world, settled in Canada. Life in the new land places them in an uncomfortable situation. They are overawed by the vastness of the new landscape and by the new aggressive cultural surroundings. Sekoni, a young immigrant from Nigeria seated in the bus, wonders

Who are these faceless people

among whom my life is oozing away?

each is so self- assured,

glancing swiftly but completely

through me, wordlessly asking:

Why are you here?

And the bus moves on, and we. (65)

This dialogue, with a few minor alterations, is found in Uma Parameswaran's novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* (30) and also in her poem *Trishanku* (50). This highlights the intense feeling of aloofness that the characters feel in a crowd which is an integral part of immigrant existence. When one lands on a foreign land, even food becomes an issue. One may not like the food which is available there. When Nayana, a young Gujarati woman from India returns from the big streets after buying vegetables is shocked to see "Toba, Toba, Deedi, whole hunks /of animals hanging from hook/ like we hang bananas, no?/ Ram re Ram my stomach churns and I rush out" (66). Since she is a vegetarian, she cannot bear a scene like this. These lines show how immigrants are uncomfortable in the alien lands.

Language is also a problem for them to survive in the host society. Nayana complains "but, it is hard for me to speak English"(66). The first generation immigrants are always concerned with keeping the socio cultural baggage, which consists among other things their religion, language, music, art, dress, cuisine etc., Conscious efforts are made by the diasporic communities to pass their traditions to the future generations. Hence, Uma Parameswaran suggests that one should think about the prevalent conditions before settling in the host society.

Next, the author introduces a school going boy Ilago from the Philippines who asks his mother to change his name to Jim or David or something like that because he faces identity crisis in the school. He says

Ina, I like school

It is such fun.

We play most of the time

And sing songs in French.

Ina, finger- painting is such fun!

So many bright bright colours

And we can use all we want.

Ina, if a crayons breaks

You can just throw it away

And take a new one!

Ma, you think you could change my name

To Jim or David or something . . .

When the snow comes, Ma,

I'll get less brown, won't I?

It would be nice to be white,

more like everyone else

you Know? (64-65)

The immigrants in these situations are forced to feel that they stand on the borderline, belonging neither to their maternal plane nor to their foster country. In their attempt to merge with the host culture while preserving their heritage, they develop a double identity and their culture becomes a sandwich culture. Regarding double identity Homi.K.Bhabha in his article on "Postcolonial Criticism" says:

a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once
 which makes it impossible . . . to accept the invitation to identity: 'You're
 a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different . . . It is precisely in that
 ambivalent use of 'different' - to be different from those that are different
 makes you the same- that the unconscious speaks of the form of otherness,
 the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement . . . (228)

Hence identities are free-floating and they are not limited by borders and boundaries.

Moreover, jobs are denied to the immigrants. Even in educational institutions, the
 children are discriminated against and they cry out in anguish,

It will not be easy, some said,
 And it has not, as we all know,
 Who have worked hard or worse still,
 Have no work at all, though willing
 And waiting for the break
 That would set us on our own . . .
 Have we come from the Niger and Luzon,
 From the Antilles and Hong Kong,
 To these vast empty spaces
 Only to see our young ones faces
 Slapped by unthinking scorn, unfeeling barbs,
 From closed fists and closed hearts. (72-73)

These lines describe how immigrants feel disillusioned. Every line of the play reflects a real-life situation and hints at the injustice in the system and the community. It reflects their pathetic condition in the alien society. They have no freedom to take leave or speak against the system. The instinct for survival is always the ultimate moving force but as time passes, there are series of mergers and divisions between the older and newer set of values. On the one hand, they long for home because of racism and hostility; but on the other, this longing is often counteracted by the fear of home because home means recognition of failed expectations and disappointment in oneself.

Uma Parameswaran's play moves around the problems faced by South Asian and other visible minorities in Canada. Aziza, an older woman from Pakistan laments over the cultural shock of the immigrants. In order to survive in the alien place, they have to follow their culture. She says,

Son, son it gives me great joy
to see you so well settled,
children and wife and all
Though my hairs do stand on end
when your wife hold hands with men
and you with other men's wives. . . . (67)

These lines show how immigrants are changing their lifestyle in order to survive in the host society. They aptly describe the transformation of their identity. For the first generation immigrant, this type of activity is a great cultural shock and at the end of the play Aziza says,

Open the windows, son,
 and let me go back
 to sun and air
 and sweat and even flies and all
 But not this, not this. (67)

In another context, Choi Chan, a middle aged man from Hong kong says,

Small comfort I find in these thorny spruces
 That grow bleak against this white.
 Where's the fire that can sustain us
 In this alien land of endless skies?
 Where the friend who'll lend a hand
 So we stand tall in our own eyes? (68)

Living on the margins, trying to perform the role of an ambassador and refugee, the diasporic writer seeks affirmation and reaffirmation in a new perspective. Related to identity, the immigrants of the first generation are ready to bear the insinuation whereas the immigrants of the second generation are not ready to accept it. Hence the parents are much worried about their children's uncertain future and at the end of the play all of them joined together and says

What we were not told, never guessed,
 Is written on our children's faces
 Furrowed with tears because of our race,

Or colour, or tongue that stumbles

Over words so alien to the many places

From which we've come. (73)

Immigrants' dilemmas, predicaments, contradictions, paradoxes, complexities, with ever increasing pace of scientific and technological advancement impinging upon the sensibilities are often contributing to widen the gaps between the people. Hence, the immigrants' problems have been a predominant idea in postcolonial writers as they seek emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class.

The *Door I Shut Behind Me* introduces Uma Parameswaran's saga of thematically related, intergenerational and intertextual immigrant experience in an alien environment. In general, migrant Indian writers living away from home are victims of the 'in-between' syndrome. Severed and moving away from one culture, they are grafted on the 'other' culture. Therefore, the feeling of 'in-between' or living on the periphery, not being a part of but almost being a parasite upon a society is generated. This in turn raises issues of ethnicity, identity, migration, cultural loss etc.,

In this story Uma Parameswaran expresses the pain of discrimination and how the immigrants develop the inferiority complex in the host society. The characters seem to be more self conscious and inhibited than the Canadians abroad. The stories do not give any solution for the problems faced by these immigrants. They just point out certain crucial moments in their lives and such moments indeed become moments of revelation for them. The purpose of migration may differ from person to person. People go abroad

as they want to get experience in their chosen field. In order to identify themselves in the adopted country, immigrants are ready to sacrifice certain things and grab more opportunities in the adopted country.

In this story *The Door I Shut behind Me*, the young graduate Chander goes to Canada and expresses his first impressions of being in a new country: “I don’t expect to be here that long. I just want to pick up some work experience and go back home” (10). But, for others, their intention is entirely different. They feel that they get recognition and individuality only in an alien land. In order to establish their identity they start thinking more about themselves. They say:

I alone am important, not abstract ideologies of patriotism and nation-building, go piss them away down the rivulets cascading down the Nilgiris where the eucalyptus leaves crackling underfoot spark boyish fancies that flame like the sun’s glorious spurt of blood before it sinks behind the blue hills where wafts the smell of coffeeshrubs between . . . and I metamorphosed into a hybrid way of life ostrichwise ignore the bonds that break one by one, and grow gray with renown and riches, and children who will never know their lost patrimony or knowing, hold it in contempt.(14 - 15)

In another situation when Chander’s friend points to an illustrated advertisement of a night club and asks him “How about going to one of these joints after dinner?”(5). Chander replies that he is not interested. This shows that the immigrants are not ready to enjoy the luxuries of life, though they get chances to do it. These lines show the positive attitude of the immigrants as well as their tolerance in the host society. When people move to other countries, they are leaving their aspirations, close knit family system, faith towards

religion and customs, traditional way of life, etc., To Uma Parameswaran, identity has nothing to do with being but with becoming. Immigrants shut many doors before they leave their country. In this story the author says, “When we leave our country we shut many doors behind us though we are not aware of it at the time . . . There are many doors ahead of us” (15). Here, the ‘door’ represents their imagination, aspiration, tradition, culture, aestheticism, belief in themselves and the hope to receive the same from the other side. Hence an ambivalent situation arises. Homi.K.Bhabha in his article on “Postcolonial Criticism” describes ‘ambivalence’ as “a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized” (232).

In *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* Uma Parameswaran discusses various issues like the question of identity of a diasporic person, nature of the new homeland, differences between the first-generation migrants and the second-generation migrants and issues of rootlessness, non-acceptance and racism. In this play Uma Parameswaran narrates her own experience as well as the life of an average Indo - Canadian family which migrated to Canada for better prospects. Sharad Bhave, a Maharastrian who was comfortably placed at home as an Atomic Energy Scientist, migrates to Canada with his family leaving a well-settled pattern of life. He talks about the purpose for which the migration takes place: “To live without tension and yet with dignity, to give our children good food, a liberal education, a healthy environment where, because the body doesn’t have to scrounge for sustenance, the Spirit can aspire to higher experiences than this sorry world allows” (77).

In spite of his ambitions and aspirations, he couldn't get a suitable job in Canada and hence ends up as a real-estate broker and encyclopaedia seller. His optimism gradually decreases as Sharad comes across many unpleasant situations leading to the loss of his identity. He visualizes the situation:

It upsets me profoundly to find myself in a crowd. All those alien faces staring at or through you. It makes me wonder. Makes me asks myself, What am I doing here? Who are these faceless people among whom my life is oozing away? Each so self-contained, so complete, looking at me as though I shouldn't be there. (103)

No doubt dissatisfaction with one's situation is a common human trait but here it becomes more intense in the face of unequal treatment and injustice and constant reminder of differences between the native and the alien. The next generation is caught between two worlds, two cultures and there is a struggle to carve one's own identity and find adequate space. An anxious sense of dislocation is characteristic of the next generation. On the one hand it is the pain of being second class citizen and on the other, there is an impossibility of going back. Children feel the sting of racism in their school environment and most of them choose the survival technique of downplaying it but all react to it individually.

Though the first generation wears traditional clothes and practice all the rituals and ceremonies which connect them to their home, the second generation finds it hard to practice whatever their parents do, because they are aliens to their homeland, of which, they have only images given by parents. They do not belong to their parents' place; they are rather comfortable with their 'new' homes. The sense of not belonging anywhere is tormenting to the immigrant children, as they are not accepted as one among the whites in

their 'comfortable' home. It is a sense of dual identity which troubles them throughout their lives. The play brings out the frustration of the younger generation; Jyothi, the twenty year old girl says to her brother Jayant, "I sure hope it gets into that thick head of yours that we are different, and no matter what we do, we are never going to fit in here" (98). The issues of oppression, subjugation, discrimination and also the dilemma of the immigrant families who feel the pangs of dislocation are also brought out clearly. They experience a state of turmoil and pain because they have not been recognised; they are individuals with their own psychology and biography, reacting to situations in their own individual manner.

In another situation, Veejala, Sharad's sister quits her job as Assistant Professor in a Canadian University because of the insipid academic scenario and the colour- cum-gender bias prevailing in the University. She has been discriminated against because of her wrong colour and she believes that nothing of significance could be achieved in Canada which is explained in the line, "her position from backwoods of India" (64). The immigrant has to adopt the organic process of gradual growth to create space for herself/himself.

In this play Uma Parameswaran gives expression to a vocabulary of resistance especially of the younger generation. In this dimension, parents are ready to bear the pangs of criticism whereas children are frustrated against it. In another situation, Vithal who is Veejala's son and Sharad's nephew expresses the fear of the minority through these words, "they want us out; we will be squashed like bugs soon. They have never wanted us and now we are a threat, we have to stay separate from them and stay together within" (74). The younger generation of immigration keenly feels that they have to face a lot of challenges in terms of appearance, race, faith, ritualistic practices, language and political power. They have no hope of assimilating with the Canadian mainstream, for the

whites do not want to mingle with them. In spite of all these difficulties the immigrants manage to survive by losing their identity. They develop the quality of adjustment and try to grow roots through self- transformation.

The problem of exclusion faced by the immigrant and the need to create space have been worked out subtly by putting together the question of homeland and lost identity. In this play Uma Parameswaran discusses the feelings of the immigrants when they are not able to get proper jobs to settle in their life. They lament about their future. The conversation between Jayant and Jyothi brings this out:

JAYANT. Let him. Time he knew he is never going to live his dreams through me. Jesus, just because he was almost, but never, Number one, he's been after me all my life to drive that crummy ball ping ping back and forth.

JYOTHI. No one can be so good at anything unless he enjoys doing it. I am glad you are pitching out, and I sure hope it gets into that thick head of yours that we are different, and no matter what we do, we are never going to fit in here. Take to the road, get high, sleep around but still and all. (76)

With a lot of hope and aspirations, the immigrants settle in their host society. But in reality they have to struggle hard to find a place in the alien country. In another incident, Jyothi says, "It couldn't have been easy for him to move out after he was thirty-five, and it is no bed of roses here, mowing the lawn and painting the house and a hundred menial chores which were done by servants in the luxury of family back home" (77). In the alien place when the immigrants travel in a bus, their identity has been threatened by the natives.

Jayant says, “It’s a strange, eerie feeling, all those discreetly questioning eyes that make me ask endless questions”(103). As far as Uma Parameswaran is concerned, the immigrant spaces are homogenous; they depend on how they adjust and adapt to the new environment and nation. In due course, the immigrant feels the danger of a sort of pseudo complacency creeping in and creativity getting stilled and the ethnic identity getting erased.

Since the immigrants want to identify themselves with others, they are compelled to adopt the culture of the host society. This is clearly brought out in the conversation between Jayant and Jyothi:

JYOTHI. As for dating local style, we have to change with time. Haven’t we been in the closet long enough? I don’t mean just girls. All of us.

JAYANT. (Half mockingly) Say, that’s profound, ain’t it? We have to change. Sounds so good when you say it, and yet you know What? Just the other day someone said just the opposite and it sounded even better. “Take to the road, get stoned, sleep around but you’ll never become one of them. Why anyone would want to become one of them beats me,” those were the words. (97)

Here, Uma Parameswaran says that not all immigrants are ready to change their nature just to become friends with the whites.

The identity crisis faced by children born to immigrant parents are too serious. They cannot identify with their parent’s aspirations, but at the same time, they are not accepted by the Whites as one among them. Since the immigrants face difficulty in coping with a new culture which is entirely different from theirs, the immigrant children or rather the

second generation immigrants find it difficult to get along. The first generation immigrants suffer a lot when they foot themselves in the alien soil. They face tough competition and racial discrimination wherever they go. The idea of assimilation seems a far-fetched one, when the immigrants undergo such hardships. Many people, like Sharad, bear it silently for practical reasons, but some rebellious spirits like Veejala prefer to suffer in their own country than in the alien soil. “Asked if conditions were better in India, she said they were not, but she would feel better wasting her life in her native country than wasting it in the backwoods of Canada” (115). But the younger generation tries to adopt a compromising attitude as Jayant comments, “Dad there’s no our people and no old country for anyone in the world, any more, least of all for us. This is our land and here we shall stay” (125). This shows the mindset of the new generation to form a hybrid society which they hope would bridge the gap between East and the West. ‘Hybridity’ is one of the most effective strategies of postcolonial theory.

S.Sujatha in her article “Shifting Identities: Problems and Possibilities-A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction” has commented on the views of Homi.K.Bhabha regarding hybridity :

Hybridization is a kind of negotiation, both political and cultural, between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha considers hybridisation of cultures as the focal point of post colonialism. This hybridisation which is ever existent in our society has been dealt extensively by the diasporic fraternity.

Hybridisation is an important part of our contemporary life and literature and a cause for fragmentation either at the individual level or at the social. (145)

Like Bhabha, Edward Said also underlined the importance of ‘cultural hybridity’ and it has come to stay; it also makes it clear that no amount of effort can completely separate the East from the West.

The youth want to establish their identity rather than fall back upon the old memory and nostalgia. Jayant wonders during his conversation with Sridhar:

JAYANT. Why should we fall on the neck of bastards who’d be way out of our orbit in India? One makes one’s friends for their qualities, as you yourself said, not for their skin colour. Face it, man, we don’t have anything in common with the other half of the Indians here. Why the hell do we have to rub shoulders with them simply because we happen to come from the same political entity? That’s all India is, a political entity that came together as a nation after a zillion years because the British made it so. (118-119)

The dilemma the younger generation encounter in their relationships shows their affiliation to the western culture. People of the second generations are neither satisfied with the wishes of their parents; nor do they follow the values and ethics insisted by their parents. The parents can never let go of their old culture and values and are nostalgic for their homeland. As far as the immigrants are concerned, they want to survive in the adopted country with confidence and unity among themselves even though they are rootless. Everything looks green and beautiful in the adopted country; yet they have hurdles in achieving their target. The following conversation between Jayant and Sridhar explains this:

JAYANT. What does it matter? How long it stands? The point is that it is there, beautiful and green for the length of its life. A day, a

hundred thousand days, it is a question of what we do and are, during that time. This evergreen doesn't have one Christly use - it isn't even good as firewood - but it is there and it is green, it is beautiful.

SRIDHAR. And rootless.

JAYANT. Yeah, rootless. Let's face it, Jesus, no one, but no one has roots anywhere because that's the way things are in 1979 A.D. But we can stand tall, man, and live each day for all it's goddamned worth and ours. (142-143)

In this play *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Tree* the inner conflicts felt by common minority group have been worked out and the writer has suggested several ways of self-assertion and belonging. Vijay Mishra has very subtly equalized the memory of lost identity in his work *Diaspora and the Art of Impossible Mourning*: "Without memory, without a sense of loss, without a certain will to mythologies, life for many displaced people will become intolerable and diaspora theory would lose its ethical edge"(46).

Thus a search for new identity, a loss of home and memories of the past are felt not only by the characters but also by the writer herself. Uma Parameswaran has handled the problem of exclusion and discrimination meted out to the South Asian immigrants and the settling of the Indian community in Winnipeg through her affirmative vision. She portrays this situation ". . . by planting Ontario popular trees in Manitoba, all setup overnight around the new apartment block, appearing green and flourishing but which gradually take roots" (75). This shows the state of anxiety and the condition of in-betweenness of the immigrants in an alien place.

Uma Parameswaran's creative writings comprised of different genres that comment on the frustrations of the immigrant community. *Trishanku* is a long narrative collection of poems written in different voices, where one finds an encounter of different cultures. It is a powerful metaphor for the migrants offering better insight into the fluid subjectivities of those who have crossed borders. Fascinated by the condition of the immigrants Uma Parameswaran was inspired to write a cycle of poems under the title *Trishanku*, a work which is an archive of migratory experience. In the article entitled "From Trishanku: Part I" Uma Parameswaran observes ". . . members of diaspora live in a luminal world, a *Trishanku* existence, as I call it in my poetry"(332). This kind of Trishanku existence is referred by Sura P.Rath in the work on *Home(s) Abroad: Diasporic Identities in Third Spaces*: "I will propose that *Trishanku*, the character from the Indian epic Ramayana who went 'embodied' to heaven but had to settle at a place midway between the earth and the Paradise, serves as a metaphor for the modern expatriate\ immigrant inhabiting the contested global-local spaces . . ." (8).

In this poem, Parameswaran touches upon the different aspects of immigrant existence like the diaspora suspended between two lands and two cultures, alienated from both, seem to belong to nowhere, the impossible struggle to adapt and yet to retain one's identity and their poignant nostalgia which are informed through the Indian myths, folktales and beliefs as given in the poetry "Shall I hang myself in the sky, As Trishanku did of old?" (43). This *Trishanku* serves as a powerful symbol for the diasporic space. It is a figure from Indian mythology, who with the efforts of the 'rishis' was pushed to heaven but was denied entrance into heaven by the gods. With both the forces working simultaneously in

opposite directions, he could not belong to either place and stayed in between two worlds. Shanthini Pillai in her article “Indo-Malaysians: Suspended Identities or Citizens of a New Selfdom” explains:

. . . neither here nor there implying nowhere situation has been emotively catching and writers have been tempted to express it through other variant metaphorical expression without worrying about their applicability and authenticity. This *Trishanku* metaphor is so favourite of migrant writers and critics looked on with admiration and used this term whenever they speak about their suspended identity, halted midway between the motherland and the adopted land. (255)

Trishanku addresses the issues of racism, identity crisis and the hopes and despair of the immigrants. Each character expresses the vivid sense of life through their memories, dreams and present reality of each speaker. The aspects of the fear, wonder, uncertainty, dilemmas, sense of loss, anger, isolation and despair are expressed through the different characters like Chander, Usha, Chandrika, Dilip, Savitri, Sharat and Jayant – all of them caught in between the worlds like *Trishanku* and trying to create a third space in order to survive in the new environment.

Chander, who is a successful professional is uncomfortable with many of his fellow Indian immigrants and says,

He travelled with me

Mister Satish Mundhra

as he introduced himself

pumping my hand in his *bania* chubbiness.

That said it all; Mister Satish Mundhra

Sure enough, he didn't know how to flush

the toilet in the Boeing 707 . . .

It was so easy to hold him in contempt

I did, and do (35)

Chander is afraid of his innocent fellow Indian who has landed in the new country because his wife has already given a number of incidents where the children and adults of the immigrant community suffer at the hands of host society. Though immigrants are getting all sorts of benefits, they are not able to identify themselves in the host country.

Chandrika says,

I have been to that land, my brother

It is a good land

Where one can be honest and free,

Can work hard and reap the fruits thereof.

But it is not the land for you and me. (56)

The same idea is echoed by Chandrika in another situation:

I have been there, my brother

The land is green but my heart was barren,

Warm are the people but my heart was lonely,

Money flows in rivers but my heart was dry,

Bereft of want and tensions

Bereft of sorrow and pain

Bereft of comradeship

My heart lost its voice, my brother.

It is not the land for you and me. (57)

All the characters in Uma Parameswaran's works face identity crisis in one way or other and they are forced to change in accordance with the social demands. She places her characters in delicate human situations which help them to embark on self analysis. Through this self - discovery they very often come to know more about their alienation which leads to agony. Thus the mental and emotional agony and anguish of man as depicted in her work expresses the complex and traumatic nature of reality of life in the modern era. The task of handling such a difficult situation however, is not an easy one either for the individual or for the group as the experiences are often nightmarish in character. The relentless struggle for survival nonetheless goes on.

Uma Parameswaran enables the reader to understand the agony and trauma they are subjected to and bring home to the reader the feeling of emptiness and exclusion felt by the characters. Charu Sharma in her article "Of Rivers Going Back to the Mountains" says:

Uma Parameswaran relishes this in-between space – the discomfiture on the part of the diasporic community in riding two horses simultaneously or their awkwardness in handling a mix of new and old currency of identity tokens- because creativity lies in this difficult choice between 'to be' or

‘not to be’ as Shakespeare would have liked to put it. No wonder, the poetic sensibility of Parameswaran has been shaped by migrancy by exilic experience, by the sense of the loss of homeland. (103)

In *Mangoes on the Mapple Tree*, Uma Parameswaran discusses the life of immigrants who have undergone the sense of identity crisis and how they change themselves and get accustomed to the new culture with a positive note. In a nation like Canada, people with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds enter a cultural ‘mosaic’ with the expectation that they are accepted as they are, without any change in their identity. Canada has embraced in its generous bosom humanity in diversity-of different languages, stock and culture. This makes the migrants to accept the new nation as their own and created a holistic development in all aspects.

In this novel Parameswaran deals with the life of an Indian immigrant family- the tensions within the family and also the tensions as they deal with the greater part of society in which they are a minority. Sharad Bhave has migrated from Pune to Manitoba in order to improve the financial condition of his family. His wife Savitri has left her school teacher job and comes along with him renouncing her ancestral paternal property. She says “And now he was a real estate broker, betrayed his lifelong companion” (39). The royal treatment they received in their ancestral home is replaced by harsh racial discrimination in Canada which makes the family in a fix. He says “. . . the white Canadians don’t want us to assimilate, they want us out; we’ll be squashed like bugs soon” (81). Sharad’s sister Veejala, who is a scientist, settled in Canada along with her family feels the same way as Bhave. The norms, expectations, preconceptions and misconceptions had a way of exerting pressure, forming a malignant tumor that has grown unfelt and burst unawares to poison the whole system.

In a casual discussion regarding politics one of the students, Jayant points out the fear that the immigrants have. He remarks: “We have to change . . . Just the other day someone said just the opposite and it sounded even better. Take the road, get stoned, sleep around, but you’ll never become one of them” (110). This statement is an emphasis of the fact that the migrants land in a new nation with a lurking fear that they may or may not be accepted as one of the local inhabitants.

Another situation finds Priti, the niece of Jayant stranded at Polo Park. She always longs for the company of Jayant and she calls none other than Jayant to her rescue and on their way home she freely talks about her mother’s wish that he should look after her when her mother leaves for India. As soon as he hears the information, he cancels his trip to California: “Have to cancel all plans” (197) he says. Through this Uma Parameswaran shows that only an Indian can be a solicitor for another Indian. Amongst the immigrants also, there are differences of attitudes. Some Indians get angry because they emotionally identify themselves with every brown face they see, whereas some others are more detached.

When Jyothi visits her friend, she comes across two small boys who have come to make a collection for relief fund. At that time one of them looks at her and says “Paki house” (21). This incident deeply disturbs her. It is her first encounter with overt racism.

Uma Parameswaran explains:

Of course there was no doubting that racism existed. She had read of it, and discussed it in her sociology courses, but this was her first encounter with it face-to-face. . . She couldn’t even begin to sort out the feelings

that had rushed through her . . . the uncontrollable spasm of fear and shock at the word 'Paki' flung at her. There was something about the encounter that frightened her far more than the actual incident warranted. (124-25)

The world is moving at a fast pace and people are exploring possibilities of settling down in various continents with the intention of satisfying their intellectual, psychological as well as emotional needs. Sometimes, the transition and displacement bring about a feeling of insecurity in children and there is a feeling that they are "in the eddies of a whirlpool all their life" (94). They soon overcome it, accept not only the new place but also the customs and habits associated with the adopted country and celebrate Christmas in the customary manner with a Christmas tree and gifts. When one of the children makes an observation that the Christmas tree does not have roots, another child opines very passionately: "We will plant evergreens and oaks with roots Krish and grow mangoes on maples, and jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces. God willing we shall" (221).

This observation of the child of grafting their own native trees with the ones available in the country to which they have migrated accounts for fantastic possibilities beyond imagination. It is associated with the thought that the migrants are like transplants - rootless like the Christmas tree which has been brought home for the celebrations and has to be discarded sooner or later. It shows how immigrants lead their life with no hopes of getting rooted and work towards a collective goal of survival. They just believe in the present without any dreams of the future and their living condition is compared to the Christmas tree:

That's us, Dad. Not just you and me with memories of another land,
another life, but all of us in this modern world in the year 1997, 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 radius, this evergreen does not have a Christly use, it isn't good even as firewood, but it is there, it is green, it is beautiful and therefore right.(221)

All characters experience some aspect of identity crisis at one level or the other. In fact the Canadian experience of identity is significantly different from the Indian experience. The tension and paradoxes of immigrants' lives are very well articulated in Uma Parameswaran's writing. Though growth is painful it is part of the immigrant experience. In other words, it is recognition of doubleness or 'fluid identity.' It is really a positive way forward, where people can take from each other's cultures and redefine their hopes and aspirations.

The diasporic identity has its own limitations because of living on a dual plane of straddling two worlds; of looking both the ways of trying to forge an identity with the new land yet continuing to look back with a lot of nostalgia and regret. All this leads to a sense of alienation, a displaced sensibility, a hyphenated, decentred and fractured existence, of having a belief in the restoration of their sanctified ancestral home and a definition of self by identifying with their homeland.

The strategy that accounts for cultural shock of a migrant is that he tries to construct multiple identities and develops a hybrid vision which eventually becomes an ongoing process of adaptation. As postcolonial critics emphasise on marginality, plurality and perceived 'otherness' seen as source of energy and potential change, it helps in strengthening bonds between various countries and they begin to relate through historical, cultural, social, traditional and economic ties.

To sum up, people migrate and hop from one culture to another with a lot of aspirations, but sometimes the adopted place falls short of their demands and aspirations. What surfaces in diasporic experience is the underlying trauma in this act of displacement. It activates the diasporic writer to their frequent mental visits to their home through literature so that their homeland reappears to them as a series of objects or fragments of narratives. As a result, the writers have always the dual feeling of the sense of wonder and adventure at the sight of the new landscapes and simultaneously the nostalgia for the world left behind. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar in his book *s Indian Writing in English* comments that “. . . the quest for identity refers to the spiritual odyssey of the modern man who has lost his social and spiritual moorings and who is anxious to seek his roots” (10). Emphasising the need for roots, Iyengar says: “Only a tree that has driven deep roots into the soil could put forth ample foliage and yield abundant fruit” (12).

Oscillating between the polarities of the experiential tremors of a sense of banishment from the native land on the one hand and an exilic existence in another country on the other hand, Uma Parameswaran has articulated her deep sense of rootlessness. Somdatta Mandal in his article “The ‘Desh- Pardesh’ Syndrome: Texts and Contexts of Diasporic Indian Writing in English” talks about the transitional and hybrid nature of identity which is quoted extensively here:

The idea of home as an ambivalent location shows that identities are not fixed but stay in transition, drawing on different cultural traditions. At the same time it may be tempting to think of identity as destined to end up in one place or another, either returning to its roots or disappearing through partial assimilation in a hermeneutic “fusion” that is possible because of the supposed

translability and commensurability of different cultures. Caught between nativist traditionalism and a postcolonial metropolitan assimilation, the migrant culture of the “in-between” Homi Bhabha dramatises precisely the activity of cultural untranslatability. These hybrid identities are metaphorically located on borders and boundaries where the world of capitals and of Universalistic assumptions is subverted by interpenetration and reversals of different cultures, where subjectivities are shifting, epistemologies are questioned and homogeneity is replaced by heterogeneity. (45)

Through this Parameswaran emphasises that settling down requires surrender, change and assimilation on the part of the immigrants.

Thus Uma Parameswaran treats the issue of identity crisis comprehensively in her works. All her protagonists suffer from a loss of sense of identity at one point or other. In some unfortunate cases, the sense of identity and its significance never dawn on the mind of the person concerned. Her success in achieving a compromise between her Canadian life and Indian life is reflected in her work. Through her writings, she suggests that the migrants could survive in the alien culture with the nourishment and strength of family ties and with an extended arm of assimilation.