

Chapter III

Alienation and Nostalgia

“The fact that I did not really come here to get here,
I sort of drifted here to get away from there” (35).

Gita Mehta

The words cited above, spoken by one of the “instant nirvana” aspirants in Gita Mehta’s *Karma Cola*, exemplify the basic problem of the diasporic psyche: of not belonging anywhere, of feeling dislocated and being without any roots. Expatriates, exiles or emigrant settlers who find themselves displaced from one country or culture and aspire to accept the new identity of the alien land into which they have moved into will constitute the diasporic community.

Since exile is a part of the human experience, writers of displaced community express the inexhaustible imaginative resources through writing. The act of displacement activates the diaspora writers mentally to visit their home frequently through dreams and literatures, so much so that their homeland reappears to them as a series of objects or fragments of narratives. They record the theme of displacement and self-fashioning and connote a dispersion, scattering or decentralization of national or religious groups living outside their homeland.

The memories of homeland and the life in a new region have disturbed the immigrants both in terms of defining cultural identity and also to assimilate into a new space. Writers who have left their homeland for settlements abroad have voiced this new experience. The strategic concern underlying this diasporic writing is the search for

home. Hence, the writers always have the dual feeling of the sense of wonder and adventure at the sight of the new landscape and simultaneously the nostalgia for the world left behind. Alienation could be best understood with reference to the identity crisis and the survival instinct of individuals and also the nation as a whole. Omendra Kumar Singh in his paper “Reinventing Caste: India’s Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*” has quoted `Salman Rushdie’s views on the condition of immigrants :

Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are humbled by some sense of loss, some way to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt . . . if we look back we must also do in the knowledge which gives rise to profound uncertainties that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the things that loss. (56)

Caught between conflicting cultures, the immigrant writers often dwell upon the themes of dislocation, survival and loss of identity. The feeling of nostalgia is heightened if the writer happens to be a coloured immigrant in a predominantly white society. Writers of the Indian diaspora in Canada – Bharathi Mukherjee, M.G,Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry and Uma Parameswaran often explore the crucial issues of racism, alienation and the confused social disparities that are found in the world of an immigrant.

Etymologically, the word ‘alienation’ is derived from the Latin term ‘alienatio’ having ‘alienere’ which means to snatch, to avoid, to remove, to make a thing of others etc., In the present day literary world, this term has acquired a very complex and multidimensional

character. The eminent French writer Rousseau has used this term to denote man's detachment from his "natural self" and "natural form" from the various pressures of his mind and heart (67). Erich Fromm defines 'alienation' as:

A mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and the world outside productively. (111)

According to Friedrich Schiller, a German dramatist, "alienation is indispensable for the purpose of cultural development and synthesis" (42). Modern sociologists discuss alienation in terms of 'loneliness', 'exile' and 'rootlessness'. The concept of alienation is outlined in the *Encyclopedia Britannica in Social Sciences* as the state of feeling estranged or separated from one's milieu, work and product of work or self. In the twentieth century, 'alienation' refers to 'estrangement', 'isolation', 'exile', 'distance' and these terms are extensively used in a number of academic, literary and philosophical disciplines namely literature, psychology, sociology, theology, philosophy, anthropology, education, economics, political science, and management studies. The pamphlet *Upanishads* published by the Ashram Publications points out the cause of alienation:

The real cause of alienation is man's separation from the Brahma, the almighty and all pervading power, right when man is born. i.e. before birth of the individual soul is part and parcel of the super soul, the Brahma. i.e.,

the birth separates man from Him and the feeling of alienation sets in. When man starts getting involved in the world around, the 'real self' within man remains rehabilitated to any place, any time. When he forgets his 'real self' the feeling of alienation starts raising its head. When man's mind is calm, he can realize his 'real self'. For example. When a mirror is coated with dust, it can't reflect the image. But, when the dirt is removed and the mirror gets clean, it shines and reflects the image again. The same is applicable to mind. ie when man's mind gets coated by worldly involvements, he fails to see his 'real self' and it causes restlessness. But when mind becomes clean, he can see his 'real self' and feel from any sorrow. (45)

Whatever the definition may be, the term alienation refers to the feeling of deprivation, frustration, anguish, agony, loss of identity, disillusionment etc., which may have a positive impact in the form of affirmation, assimilation, catharsis, realization and acceptability of the reality of the situation.

In the twentieth century, particularly during the post Second World War period, the experience of 'alienation' has been very intense and widespread at all levels of human activity both in the East and the West. The concept of survival, though not as complex as alienation has yet a distinct and unique meaning in the Canadian context. The significance of this term 'alienation' is expressed by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature:*

What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else.

Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately; we need to know about because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture shared knowledge of their place is not a luxury but necessity. Without that knowledge, we will not survive. (18-19)

Alienation, sociological or psychological is often the consequence of the loss of identity. Binda Sah in her article "Dynamics of culture and Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*" points out the different stages of alienation:

The immigrants face different stages of alienation like Physical, Social and Psychological. The most apparent is the physical alienation caused by the loss of root or homeland. The memory of home hinders the process of acclimatization in the host land leading to a fissure between cultural values. This fissure causes the social alienation of diasporic existence. Immigrants are not able to forget the past and adopt the present; the present which presents a new set of values and living, the diasporic existence is somehow accused with an unfathomed sense of isolation which enters their psyche in the long run. The ultimate psycho-social alienation of the diasporians transfers them into a spatio-temporal solitude whereby creating a metaphysical sense of alienation. (143)

The migrant writers bank upon their individual memories which to some extent hinder them from settlement but also render strength to express their feelings. These writers have a huge bank of memories of their homeland which they draw from their

experience. The idea of homeland gets frozen in their imagination in a way that is more natural to their situation. Amar Nath Prasad describes the process of alienation in his book *Indian Women Novelists in English* :

The process of alienation and rehabilitation involves three tier operation viz., construction, deconstruction, reconstruction. For example when a man is ready to emigrate, his beliefs, responses, attitudes, behavior patterns etc., have already had a shape according to the system of the place to which he or she belongs. This is constructional phase. Then he or she emigrates to the new place which has its own life style. Hence immigrant has to first deconstruct what is constructed and then reconstruct according to the life pattern of the new place. These three changes can also be seen as follows: firstly, the departure from the root place and arrival at the new one secondly, recognition and reassociation with the new place; thirdly rehabilitation and re-assimilation with the new place. Sometimes there will be some obstacles in the process of rehabilitation and if the situation works favourably the rehabilitation is smooth and complete. (53)

Canada is predominantly inhabited by immigrants from all parts of the world. The problem of adjustment with the new environment is not an easy one, especially in view of the harsh and hostile nature of the physical landscape which has to be subdued in order to make one's survival, a reality. Margaret Atwood in her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* says, "a shared knowledge of the place became necessary for survival" (18). The inner conflicts felt by common minority group have been worked out and the writers have suggested several ways of self-assertion and belonging.

In Canadian literature, the concept of alienation is 'survival' which could be best understood with reference to the identity crisis and the survival instinct of individuals and also the nation as a whole. The questions relating to 'survival' 'existence' and 'being' have been examined and analyzed from several angles, all leading to the uniqueness of the Canadian experience as coherent and composite whole.

Like the Canadian people, Canadian literature has also focused on the identity crisis. For Canadian writers, it becomes a leit motif of their writings; but the other half of the story is not ignored. The identity crisis arises chiefly from the inadequacy experienced by the protagonists to come to terms with their past (inherited and ancestral) and recognizing its link with the present to combat the self-destructive attitudinal patterns of disjunction, disillusionment, disharmony, incompatibility, self-deprecation, self-hate etc., As Edmund Fuller points out “. . . man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin but from inner problems . . . a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence” (3).

In the twentieth century, the common man encounters diverse experiences of alienation and affirmation because of his hopes and aspirations, fears and apprehensions. Dislocation and displacement brought about by the rapid and tremendous growth of industrialization, technological development, urbanization and modernization have given birth to the new theories of 'mass society' and 'supplanted culture.' The themes of estrangement, alienation, survival and affirmation are neither the product of the twentieth century; nor are they confined to the literatures of that century alone. Loneliness, anguish, rejection, loss etc., are present in the ancient oral literatures of all countries, in the ancient

epics and even in religious texts such as the Bible. Similarly, the suffering, pain, hopelessness and moral dilemmas of Oedipus, Dr. Faustus, King Lear, Hamlet, Brutus, Macbeth and Ahab are striking in their intensity.

Moreover, alienation or isolation is a fundamental human condition more concretely and conspicuously perceptible in the post Second World War era. In fact, it has served as an embryo for the germination of complicated situations such as physical exiles and exiles of the mind, rootlessness and diaspora, dehumanization and degradation of man. These traits have arisen out of the cumulative impact of various forces at the political, social, economic, cultural and philosophical levels which are largely responsible for the discrimination based on caste, creed, race, gender, direct and indirect colonization etc.,. The consequence is the widespread fear of the loss of 'selfhood' and 'identity' causing ruptured psyches and mental blocks at different levels of human relationships that find expression and articulation in the works of the artists and creative writers.

The issue of exile has become one of the most frequent topics in postcolonial literature. Almost every major postcolonial author has highlighted this controversial issue in his work. Edward Said's *Identity, Reflections on Exile* describes the condition of exile in the following manner:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift, forced place, between a human being and native place, between the self and its true home; it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's

life; these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (173)

As postcolonialism has brought an utopian version of the homeland and projected a static picture of the society, the writers of displaced existence are often preoccupied with the elements of nostalgia, as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. They write in relation with the culture of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land. Yasmin Gooneratne in her book *Diverse Inheritance: A Personal Perspective on Common Wealth Literature* has made an observation in the postcolonial context: “The true strength of Indian Writing is perceived when writers confront their inheritance boldly and accept its complexity” (36). This can be applied to diasporic writing also. The sense of fragmentation arises, when a writer experiences a chosen or forced exile. Krishan Das and Deepchand Patra in their book *Postcolonial English Literature* say: “In postcolonial theory ‘exile’ has been deployed as a concept beyond simply a forced removal from a given physical location. Exile in everyday use invokes images of individual political dissidents sent overseas or large groups of people banished to distant lands, forming various diasporas”(23). No doubt the crux of the immigrant’s dilemma is the question of identity, along with nostalgic yearning for the past and a sense of finality in exile. The immigrant loses his self-identity and does not belong anywhere, and he is a nowhere man, searching for a nowhere city.

The celebration of cultural blending considerably blurs the boundaries laid down by postcolonial theory. The writers are confronted with a sense of alienation which is inherent in the linguistic and literary situation itself. It is this sense of rootlessness which, paradoxically

enough, reinforces the need for roots. Parthasarathy.R while commenting on the poetry of A. K. Ramanujan puts it, “There is something to be said for exile/you learn roots are deep” (3).

Since postcolonial literature deals with place and displacement, it analyses many problems such as the hybridization of culture, language, cross-cultural recovery and the suppression of indigenous traditions. The dislocation could be due to migration and the resultant sense of loss which is specific to diasporic experience. This leads to longing for ‘Home’, the push and pull of their ‘in-between’ situation and the creative writers’ endeavour to create a notion of home. The search for ‘Home’ is the strategic concern of the diasporic writing. The ‘Home’ which the author means is home of their new country or the memories of the land they have left behind. Sometimes it may also refer to virtual snapping of the immigrants’ ties with the mother country and thereby they will make mental visits to their home by refurnishing their emotional and cultural loss. Svetlana Boym in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* says:

To feel at home is to know that things are in their place and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn’t depend on an actual location. The object of longing, then is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn’t know the temptation of nostalgia.(251)

Diaspora and nostalgic desires are inseparable. There is no exoticism or marketing involved when diasporians write about their days back home, where they leave their childhood friends and relatives because of the compulsory exile or intolerable climate of discrimination. Nostalgia is the condition of being homesick. It is a moral pain with the obsession to

return. It may cause functional disorders that may sap one's vitality. Such persons are miraculously cured when they return to the family home. However, if diaspora is analysed in the light of its original use that was for the Jews and the major diasporas of non-Jews, it becomes necessary to include the elements of alienation, loss, forced migration and dream to return to the land of birth. Stephen Gill in his poem "Tenants in Me" says

The immigrant in me
 Talks of the days
 When religion killed innocents
 Of different creeds.
 Those painful shrieks
 Hidden in his blood
 Stagger at night.
 He recollects the places
 Where he played
 The house
 Where passed his days
 With his brother, sisters
 And fond parents. (153)

Hence, through their experience writers of diaspora cry over the pain of discrimination and alienation that they find in the adopted country.

Language, culture and history are core constituents of memory, the emotional channel to the homeland. Monica Wehne in her article "Typology Memory of Forgetting

among the Expatriates of Rabaul” in the *Journal of Pacific History* says: “The memory of the lost homeland, lost cultural commonalities often becomes stronger to fight against the dominant culture. These memories do not in obvious and ordinary sense exist of its own unless they are remembered, until they are brought back into waking life and understood by the individual as memories, separate from the present”(19).

Alienation and identity are closely intertwined; when one seeks identity with a lover of a culture, the search has social, moral and spiritual dimensions, which are interrelated, especially in the sense that the focal point in each case is the discovery of the self. The concept of alienation arises when man loses his identity and detaches himself from everything around him and this detachment becomes his alienation. However, the process is inevitable because the main reason for alienation is man’s self-awareness. While inventing tools and mastering nature, man separates himself more and more from it.

Today, man does not like to share his joys and sorrows with others by creating islands of isolation for himself. The usual consequence of being ‘alienated’ are the developing of tendencies of fear psychosis, paranoia, disillusionment, desperation, frustration, inferiority-complex, suspicions, amnesia, dystopia, rootlessness etc., Alienation also results in the emergence of emotions of self-hate, self-deprecation, self-persecution, isolation, loneliness and feeling completely disconnected and disjoined from ‘the self’ and from the socio-cultural world around. But man can overcome this alienation by becoming intellectually aware and by establishing a creative relation with the society.

Nostalgia is the most striking feature of diaspora and the immigrants have always had a romanticized view of their native land. Irwing Howe has identified “nostalgia as the real reason for the expatriate’s need to evolve ethnic origins” (174). Nostalgia for homeland,

feeling of rootlessness, instability, insecurity and isolation cause intense pain and grief as reclaiming the past is impossible. Bicultural life entraps the immigrants in a confused situation. P.A. Abraham opines, “No matter where you lived, even if you lived in the same place all your life, you would look at the past, at lost moments, at lost opportunities [and] lost loves” (55).

As far as the immigrants are concerned, they enter the newly adopted world with the feeling that they have to live in ghettos. There are different types and attitudes among the immigrants where some are emotionally detached and some will stand together without worrying about their class and cultural differences. Parameswaran has observed in SACLIT (South Asian Canadian Literature) that the themes of otherness and alienation from their homelands are themes common to all immigrant literatures. Neera Singh in the book entitled *Diasporic Writing: The Dynamics of Be / longing* says, “. . . there are three kinds of writers viz., (a) those who feel nostalgia and constantly bemoan the loss of inheritance (b) those who celebrate the gains of adoption and do not regret ‘absent flavours’ and (c) the hybrid types whose writings reflect both the loss and gain of inheritance” (101). In fact, Uma Parameswaran belongs to the third category. She is one of those distinguished Indo Canadian writers whose writings have attracted the most extensive critical attention in India and abroad. In her works, one can find the trials and tribulations, fear and apprehensions, joys and hopes, dilemmas and predicaments, perplexities and paradoxes, in the physical and psychological lives of her characters in particular, to picturise the multidimensional reality in all its contours.

Nostalgia and longing for the homeland and their sense of alienation in the country of adoption are prominent in Uma Parameswaran’s works. She has given expression to

nostalgic memories where the reader can encounter the shifting involvement of the immigrant in the country of adaptation and the country of origin. Her works show how life abroad is exciting, a bit absurd and often lonely. In her writings the protagonists' search for the symbols of collective past and their attempts to resensitize their sensibility through their communion with past heritage is obvious. The central characters are drawn not only from the royal or ruling classes but generally from the ordinary segments of the society, a cross section of professions and races. This chapter discusses the concept of alienation in the life of the immigrants and how they overcome this problem in the alien place.

Uma Parameswaran unifies an essential Canadian sensibility with that of her Indian historic past. The individual's alienation from himself and society constitute the thematic centre of Uma Parameswaran's works. In the Play *Sons Must Die* Parameswaran says ". . . though the landscape around us was spruce and pine, the landscape of memory was filled with jasmine and mango"(123).

As an immigrant writer Uma Parameswaran voices the issues of racial discrimination, sense of alienation and nostalgia. According to her, writers of displaced communities occupy a significant role in expressing the transformation of language and culture. They live on the margins of two countries and create cultural theories. They are often preoccupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to locate themselves in a new culture. They focus mainly on the culture of the homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land. Uma Parameswaran in her article "Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too" says: "Some never grow past the phase of nostalgia. Romanticizing one's native land has a place, so long as it doesn't paralyze one's capacity to develop new bonds within one's adopted homeland. Nostalgia is the

only sustenance [that] can become quite toxic, vitiating the living stream into a stagnant cesspool” (32). The portrayal of her characters with their nostalgic experiences gives them a sense of relief.

Uma Parameswaran in her article “Literature of the Indian Diaspora in Canada” says, “. . . immigrant spaces are not homogenous, they depend on how they adjust and adapt to the new environment and nation”(12). Education, qualification, usefulness to society, economic status and one’s rootedness to one’s culture- all factors affect settlement. Their views are based on individual experience, which interfere with the whole process of belonging and adjustment.

Uma Parameswaran derives her material from her cultural background and history and articulates both Indian and Canadian sensibility. This sensibility stems from her culture and gives her a kind of imagination and freedom to roam freely around the world at large. In order to survive in the foreign land, the immigrants create an ambience thereby establishing their own ghetto, celebrating festivals, dining together or holding community feasts, sharing cultural markers, frequenting to the houses of their colour and little socializing with the dominant group. They create an “alternative world” in their present world and they ignore the subtle desire to merge among the majority, oppose the willingness of their children to adjust and accept the dominant culture.

Dear Deedi, My Sister portrays the problems that ravage the larger immigrant community in Canada. Though it is a short play the impression it leaves, is very powerful. Sapna, an immigrant from India in her late twenties, is the main character who narrates everything to her sister. For a woman who has settled in a foreign country, it is natural to expect letters from her motherland. Sapna says, “When I first came, the mailman’s daily

visit was my lifeline (63). Even though she is in Canada, her heart is still in India and with her relatives. Nature is “both bounteous and tyrannical to her” (63). As in India, in Canada also “wheat grows in miles and miles of prairie gold” (63). In the land around her, there are cedar and fir trees; but in the landscape of her memory, “there are other smells and sounds of mango blossoms, monsoon rains, and temple bells” (63). She has been longing to hear the temple bells which she used to hear in India; to inhale the smell of incense sticks which she used to burn for Lord Parameswaran; to see Lord Nataraja, the presiding deity of dance; to walk to the temple to have a glance of Lord Shiva. All these she describes to her elder sister, Deedi, who is far away in India.

In another context, Parameswaran narrates how immigrants feel happy to receive letters from their homeland. It is a great solace for them as they get relief from the boredom as well as loneliness. When Sapna is in the joint family, she used to do all sorts of domestic works like cleaning, attending to the children and the men folk and spending long hours to fetch water from the well. She feels very happy amidst the family members and sometimes she is distressed by the ill treatment meted out to her by the family members. She says “But these are hardships one can bear for Nature, as you say is sometimes bounteous and sometimes stingy as a mother-in-law” (68). Since she has settled in Canada, she is quite relieved from all those burdens. Her sister Deedi says, “Sapna, my sister, you are lucky to be far away from all these burdens that womankind must bear in this our ancient land. Be happy in your new home . . .” (68). For that, Sapna replies “Here too women suffer dear Deedi, for being women. The burdens are different but the pain is the same” (69). These lines show that wherever they live, the immigrants feel the same way about their family problems. It may be because of living on a dual plane- of straddling two worlds -

of looking both 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.

Mridul Bordoloi in her work “Re/delocating Home: Memory, Dislocation and the Expatriate Predicament in Interpreter of Maladies” has quoted Edward Said’s idea on the pains experienced by dislocated beings and how they always recreate a semblance of the home which they had left behind, and the promise of re-locating it in a different spatial context makes living possible:

It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home; it’s essential sadness can never be surmounted, And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.

The achievement of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind. (63)

Uma Parameswaran’s first short story *The Door I shut Behind Me* introduces her saga of thematically related, intergenerational and intertextual immigrant experience. It reflects the sense of wonder and fear of the immigrant at the new world around himself and nostalgia for the world left behind. Regarding the theme Judith Kearns in her

introduction to this story remarks that the “treatment of the theme of Indo Canadian experience in different genres particularly intriguing especially as the writing was interconnected by theme and by recurring characters” (49).

The story is about a young graduate Chander who secures a green card, goes to Canada and is surprised to see the Indian families in a new country. His mother gives him a copy of the Ramayana and a translation of Bhagvat Gita as parting gifts but he buys a copy of Chandra Sekhar’s *Radioactive Transfer*, though it is not his field of study; nor is it one that one could read during a journey. He is simply driven by an urge to hold that book:

Chander blinked the glare away and focused his eyes on the book in his hand. The black of the title, the motley orange - yellow – green of the jacket resolved from their hazy halations into a clear spectrum of colours and forms – The Ramanaya, a new English translation. His mother had given this and Annie Besant’s translation of the Bhagavad Gita to him at the airport half-apologetically, half beseechingly, choosing the last hour so that he would not have the heart to refuse. “Keep it on your table,” she had whispered (3)

These lines show how Indian families in Canada create “Little Indians” around themselves and try to live in the memories of India of their childhood rather than the India of today. All the characters often live in a world of nostalgia centred on a sort of homesickness, bearing the pains of uprooting and re-routing, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new unfriendly surroundings. “Indians abroad” seem to be more self conscious than the “Canadians abroad”. Both are torn between the old and new world

values. Though Chander has a well settled life in Canada, his mind always longs for his motherland. He expresses his views “I’d give anything, anything in the world to see one of my own people, to hear my own language” (7).

When immigrants happen to see their natives in the alien place they feel happy. Chander says: “My own people, my own language . . . Could they never be one people unless they had but one language? Was it, after all, only language that could hold a nation together in peacetime?” (7). Whenever there is a social gathering immigrants used to discuss about their native place with fond memories. Chander says,

Ah! here is a Saigal album, a young man enthusiastically brandished the record. Several others responded, and in silence everyone heard the first song. Then they spoke of old films. Saigal sang on in the background. There was deep nostalgia in the air. What astounded Chander was that they spoke of the distant past. The first among them to leave India had left it only ten years ago, yet the India they had in mind was not the India they had left but the India of their boyhood, and often enough not even that. The young man who was jubilant at finding the Saigal album could not have heard or seen Saigal on the silver screen because Saigal was of the 1940’s; so that what he recalled was not even his actual boyhood but the dreams of his boyhood. To some of them trams still trundled by on Madras streets, anti- British slogans and processions still rang through the country, and Lala Amarnath’s double century against Don Bradman’s eleven was still the greatest event in cricket history . . . They seemed to have an image in mind, a golden age of romanticised memories. (10 - 11)

Through this Uma Parameswaran wants to convey that the search for the symbols of collective past and their attempt to resensitise their sensibility through their communion with the past heritage is quite conspicuous.

Uma Parameswaran's *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* explores the lives and experiences of Indian immigrants as they struggle with the painful and bewildering task of adjusting in their new land. Her primary interest is to discuss the problems of the immigrants at various levels and their struggle between the pulls of two cultures. This story depicts real life like people in the Indo Canadian community and the events, situations and experiences pictured are common and typical as they occur in various families of the immigrants in Canada. Several factors related to the recognition and acceptance of the immigrants have been discussed in this play, as the change called for affects the total configuration of memory, history and cultural values and at times the individual immigrant has to work within polarities between the question of belonging and not belonging.

In the play Jayant, Sharad's son, introduces his father who was an atomic energy scientist in India. Jayant believes that instead of migrating to Canada if he had stayed in India, he would have become a Director. Because he was not able to get a good job as he desired, he ends up as a real estate broker. Jayant's voice has contempt for his father as he chooses to migrate. He says bitterly, "Instead he quits the place to be and rots here selling houses, Jesus, a crappy real estate broker, just one step better than an encyclopedia salesman . . ." (76). Though he had a better career in India, the living conditions are better in Canada which even Jayant admits later when he recalls their ancestral house. "Some house that, a sprawling shambles handed down untouched from the time of Peshwas,

where you have to walk half a mile to get to the shithouse, Jesus, we haven't lost anything on that count; even he couldn't think so"(77).

Like the others in the play, Sharad too faces racial anxiety. He has a lean face and a long neck "which he tends to stick out so that his Adam's apple shows even clearer and he looks even taller than he is" (81). Sharad's life represents the state of diasporic dilemma as he is like 'Trishanku' a figure from Indian mythology who, with the efforts of the 'rishis' was pushed to heaven but was denied entrance to 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. His plight of not being able to belong anywhere gets further reflected in his as well as his children's behaviour.

Savitri, Sharad's wife faces challenges of different nature in the new country. When she comes to know that her daughter has an active sexual life, she reacts vehemently and says "We are supposed to treat you as rational adults even when you behave like beasts" (90). As a father, Sharad finds it difficult to accept his children's life style. He refuses to admit that his children "can wander into the bushes" (81). These lines show how the first generation immigrants are facing problems due to the behaviour of their children.

Jayant, Jyothi's brother is also upset when he realizes that his sister might be sleeping with her boyfriend. He looks at her and "there is something in her eye that draws him up sharply, against the wall of recognition" (77). He is extremely disturbed and wants her to turn down his suspicion, "Unwilling to accept it", he desperately wants her to deny the same by asking her again and again: "You haven't sister? You haven't? (78). Hence youngsters are unable to handle the pressure from home and from friends and if

they don't follow their culture they would be alienated. As a result, irritability and unhappiness surfaces in the home. The author sees "the seeds of sadness in her eyes" (81) to reflect the melancholic state of their unsuccessful attempt to fit in the given environment.

On the other hand, the second generation immigrants in this play – Jyothi, Jayant, Krish, Vithal, Priti, Arun, Dilip, Rajan, and Sridhar, who have studied in Canadian schools, speak and dress like other Canadians, have similar hobbies, but still they are seen as aliens. Jayant tells Jyothi: ". . . but you are never going to be one of the boys. Not that I see why anyone would want to fit into this mould" (76). The second generation Indo -Canadians find it difficult to maintain a balance between what the society expects from them and what is expected of them by their families. The parents of the second generation immigrants want their children to be members of the Canadian society and at the same time want them to confirm to their notion of Indian Children. Like their parents they do not have memory and nostalgia to fall back upon, nor do they cherish the comforts of the present life, as they have not known the discomforts.

Apart from this, most of the members of the Indo - Canadian diaspora experience the feelings of alienation, assimilation and go on 'nostalgic trips'. The memory of the homeland remains an important part for the first generation members. They face tough competition and racial discrimination wherever they go in the alien soil. For people of the first generation who have spent most of their life and have settled in Canada in their middle ages, the conflict is not as intense as their roots are still in India. They have their own country to fall back at any time. But, people of the second generation are greatly disappointed, when the whites are not ready to accept them and consider them as equals. Uma Parameswaran in her article on "Scaling Walls: Linguistic and Cultural Barriers Between

Writer and Community” says “All these years we thought the isolation was coming from us, but now that we are trying to merge we know exactly what they feel . . .”(28). Hence, in order to save themselves from the psychological crisis of their identity, the immigrants are compelled to cling to their own tradition and to mix with their own people rather than suffer total rootlessness and alienation from both the cultures.

In this play some of the characters especially of the first generation remember their ‘homeland’, old friends, relatives and this brings them to the realization – of being isolated in the new land. A distant vision of the comforts of the ‘homeland’ coupled with the prevalent racism in the new land brings frustration. As a result, most of the members in this play experience the feeling of alienation and often go on ‘nostalgic trips.’ When Veejala discusses the hectic work of her life, she thinks about her nativity :

SAVITRI. Vee was never much of a housewife. Back home she was used to returning from work and finding a hot dinner ready, clothes washed, the house spic and span; it has not been easy to adjust.

JYOTHI. But she’s been here a lot longer than you and . . .

SAVITRI. (In a reminiscing voice) . . . No matter how long we live here, it is never long enough to forget either our old ways or our old comforts. (124-125)

Through these lines Parameswaran wants to convey that the comforts and happiness they had in their homeland could not be replaced by anything in the new country.

The author has categorized nostalgia as an element of the first phase, the very fact that one turns towards ethnocentric community. Organizations go to prove that the

immigrant never gets over the feeling of ‘nostalgia’. It is symbolically pointed out that the immigrants can survive in the alien soil like “the tall Ontario poplar trees that look evergreen and beautiful though rootless. It is enough that it survives and it is green and beautiful” (83).

Uma Parameswaran’s *Trishanku*, is a series of monologues, spoken by different characters; some voices recur, others do not; all gather richness and meaning from each other; each monologue is a poem in itself and each is part of *Trishanku*. The most striking feature of *Trishanku* is the vivid sense of life created by the memories, dreams and present realities of each speaker. This memorable work epitomizes the life of typical middle class Indian immigrants in Canada. All the characters, incidents and even dialogues are repeated in her work, spanning genres, whereby they give a sense of continuity and veracity creating the illusion that she is writing about real people and real episodes. In this poem, the poet narrates the strangeness of the land, its geography and customs through the section where Sharat remembers his ancestral home, where his father would perform puja early in the morning facing the rising sun in the east:

In our ancestral home
 Every newmoon day
 Father, as his father before him,
 in silk dhoti
 vibhuti on forehead and chest
 sacred thread dipped in turmeric
 sat on a wooden plank

facing the east
 to repeat the purohit's chant
 sprinkle holy water with darbha grass
 and call upon our ancestors. (40)

This shows the vivid sense of life created by the memories and dreams of the speaker. The collective memory touches every person who is physically, culturally and emotionally displaced.

For the immigrants, getting letters from their parents is a solace. By reading the content of the letters, they feel that they are important for their family members in all aspects; it is a great relief for them from their mundane activities as well as from their loneliness. In this poem, the following lines clearly express the feelings of Chander.

My father, in his large scrawl
 writes every week, often ending:
 Find yourself a job, Chander, and stay there . . .
 My mother wrote to me
 In Tamil, 'Om' centred top of the page:
 My dear son, A mother's blessing.
 I'm glad to know you like your college;
 I'm sorry to hear you don't like the food . . .
 My son, this is the land where the Ganga flows.
 Your father is well. Our blessings. Mother. (29)

For immigrants the distance is reduced when they receive letters from their parents as well as relatives. By this way, they console themselves because “distance makes the heart grow fonder” (40).

The aspects of fear, wonder, uncertainty, dilemmas and intense nostalgia are also expressed through the different characters. Chandrika, Usha, Dilip, Savithri, Jayant- all of them are caught in the in-between world like ‘Trishanku’ trying to create a third space, in order to survive in the new environment. Chandrika, wife of Chander, dreams of returning to her beloved Madras, while holding together and protecting her family and community of fellow Indians in Canada with her generosity. During her conversation with Chander she compares Canada with Madras which she remembers with fondness:

Madras, I love you
 Your broad beach road where the polished tar
 Flings mirages that vapour on my speeding car,
 Your sands stretched out beside the sea
 Where at my feet laps Eternity.
 Madras, I hope one day to call me your own
 Though pledged now to the land
 Which my love has made our home. (36)

CHANDER. Hardly remember you as mine
 gave you so long ago to her
 and kept the empty shrine

polished and perfumed
 an eunuch dusting the corridors of time
 hoping
 fondly hoping
 she'd give me hers to place therein
 Go break, my heart
 I have no tears to spare
 for a stranger. (26)

Through this, the poet could relate the plight of immigrants who are not able to develop a sense of belonging to either places as they encounter the new world. This makes them to look back at the world they left behind with nostalgia.

Uma Parameswaran's metaphor of 'Trishanku' illustrates the predicament of the diasporic people. Like the mythological king, Trishanku, the immigrants stand suspended between two worlds, unable to enter either, trying to make a heaven of their own. The members of the 'New Diaspora' go to the new land for material success but assimilate there partially and the feeling of nostalgia stays with them. Usha says,

into my dark chamber
 the sun shone thro a crack
 danced madly
 withdrew
 left me

more alone

than ever

I had been. (30)

In spite of having all the facilities in the adopted land, the immigrants want to go back to the native place because they feel alienated. They know that their stay in the new land will not help them in growing roots. Chander says,

I cannot bear thee

I ought, you ought, we ought love

love too soon hate becoming love

the land where we're born . . .

Back to the land where my sons their roots shall find. (34)

At the end of the poem Tara's mother-in-law portrays an old woman who finds it difficult to exercise the ghost of the past. The poem not only expresses the helplessness of the woman but also exposes the isolationist Western culture and the artificiality of Canadian life. She asks her son, "What kind of place you have brought me to, Son? / Where the windows are always closed/ And the front door it is always locked" (62). She also feels that she is shut out from the joys of being in the human as well as natural world which results in her loneliness. This makes her to think about her old world with its freedom. The nostalgia, the longing in the closing lines is pathetic:

Open the windows, Son

I am too used to the sounds

of living things;
 Of birds in the morning
 Of rain and wind at night . . .
 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)

One of the areas that can productively be explored in this poem is the gender difference. Chandrika is willing to bond with the land to which her husband Chander has brought her and can love both homelands whereas Chander cannot attach himself to either. By nature women are adaptable to any situation. They are born and brought up by their parents in one place and after they get married they move to another place. Perhaps, women with centuries of cultural indoctrination and expectation are able to adapt more quickly and to accept and love two homes without conflict or ambivalence.

In Postcolonial theory the ambivalent relationship has been termed as 'Mimicry'. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *Location of Culture* describes "Mimicry as one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (35). Generally, mimicry has been used to describe the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and colonized. It encourages people to adopt the colonizers' cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values and thereby result in a 'blurred copy' which is quite threatening. Mimicry gives rise to postcolonial analysis by subverting the colonial master's authority and hegemony.

It is a weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. This kind of double perspective enriches Uma Parameswaran writings, as she presents lively portraits of individuals with varied experiences from different sections of the society.

Uma Parameswaran's novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* focuses on the sense of loneliness and the feeling of nostalgia that the immigrants undergo in the early stages of their settlement in the alien place. There are different types and attitudes among the immigrants where some are emotionally detached and some will stand together without worrying about their class or cultural differences. Krishan Das and Deepchand Patra discuss the process of 'Cultural alienation' in their book named *History of Literary Criticism* as :

Cultural alienation is the process of devaluing or abandoning one's own culture or cultural background. A person who is culturally alienated places little value on their own or host culture and instead hungers for that of a sometimes imposed-colonizing nation. The postcolonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin link alienation with a sense of dislocation or displacement. Culturally alienated societies often exhibit a weak sense of cultural self-identity and place little worth on themselves. The most common manifestation of this alienation among people from postcolonial nations at present is an appetite for all things from television, music to clothing, slang, even names. Culturally alienated individuals will also exhibit little knowledge or interest in the history of their host society, placing no real value on such matters. (53-54)

In the diasporic realities, alienation is considered to be the artifact of conflicting personalities, because they are shaped by socio- cultural values and the immediate milieu, conflict of values, which might be regarded as the root of alienation.

Sharad Bhave has been leading a comfortable life in his ancestral home in India. The harsh racial discrimination he faces in Canada disturbs him. Through his nostalgia he used to pass the proud family history to his children by telling them bed time stories. His son Jayant says, “. . . his inheritance is foreclosed by his father” (108). Jayant recollects Sharad Poornima nights in their ancestral house and wonders how “Hinduism has a place for everyone and everything” (103). He remembers how Avi’s father used to threaten them saying, “If he ever caught them talking about and doing the things they had discussed he would have them circumcised- they could be like Muslims for life, because they did not deserve to be high caste Hindus” (111). These lines show the emotional ties between the family members which form the core of Indian culture.

Another cause for the immigrants’ sense of alienation is the unequal treatment meted out to them. Jayant’s aunt Veejala resigns her job without the consent of the family. Because her professional life as a scientist is male-dominated; she decides to go to India, so that she can enjoy more freedom and liberty in her homeland. She used to be rebellious at her mother’s place and now she would like to relive those moments. In India, when she sold her ring to do a flying course, the family never wanted her to do that course as it felt that such courses are not meant for girls. In the same way, she remembers the freedom she used to enjoy when she was there. She never cooked at her mother’s place: “Back

home she was used to returning from school, college, tennis, swimming, etc., to find a hot dinner ready, clothes washed and ironed, the house spic and span”(95). However,

Veejala’s sister-in-law Savitri wonders at her 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, whereas 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)

These lines reveal the immigrants’ pent up passions, emotions and feelings that help to rediscover the commonality and inclusiveness of India.

Though they are Indo Canadians, the Bhaves family follows certain Indian habits and customs at home. For example during dinner time everybody should be at home and no one should leave anything on their plate and Sharad would narrate the family history. Savitri is like a typical Indian wife who would discuss everything with Sharad when they are alone because certain things could not be shared in front of the family. Uma Parameswaran presents the constricting problems of the immigrants with a sense of pity and loss, though she highlights the liberating advantageous position enjoyed by the immigrants in the new land. She presents the first generation settlers as nostalgic of homeland whereas the second generation settlers are initially analytic and critical of their Trishanku position who finally accept and acknowledge the new land as a source of their survival. Through

this one can understand that immigrants try to overcome their alienation through their past memories. This is the affirmative vision of Uma Parameswaran.

In Uma Parameswaran's works memory plays a major role and it is vigorous and creative. Life is viewed as a nostalgic recollection through the eyes of sensitive, vulnerable and observant characters. As a writer, she never writes from the position of a distant observer, her writings reflect the perspective of paradisaical past and a tormenting present. Her effort to bring about a meeting point for the past and the present has been intensified by the nostalgic representation of the characters.

In literature, this fluid state of 'dual affiliation' is denoted by the journey metaphor that not only presents the exile as inherent to the human condition but stands as a potent symbol for the physical and mental nomadism of diasporic life. Further, the journey motif represents an essentially dynamic process of becoming rather than of being and plays a significant role by giving the creative author an alternative ideology. Hence the writers of the diaspora remain the voice of the marginals though coloured in a vibrant emotion; and their stories are those that depict the struggle to negotiate into a new space and culture. They draw their strength from their home country while assimilating in a new milieu.

The element of 'double identity' makes the immigrants think of their role as ambassadors as they try to adopt the host culture while trying to nurture or preserve the native cultures. Nigmananda Das's book *Jhumpa Lahiri: Critical Perspectives* says:

The first culture immigrants are like the Greek god Janus - at once 'leaning backward' and 'looking forward'. They look at the past, at their lost moments, lost opportunities, lost loves and at the same time live in the host country in

present time imagining about a better career, better future; while the second generation gets inspired by their role as refugee that induces them to seek refuge, protection, and relate more positively to the host culture.(15)

Hence immigrants can never be completely away from their home country. This idea is accepted by many writers, who come back to their home country at recurrent intervals to rediscover the 'lost patria.' They often return disillusioned because home which the immigrants have been cherishing in their memories is no longer like their adopted country.

Caught between two cultures, the immigrant writer negotiates a new literary space with a complex view of looking forward and a yearning backward. Immigrants of first generation find it hard to mentally adjust to the alien culture and they try to survive in the adopted land by creating alternative worlds in two ways: firstly in the form of nostalgia of the past and secondly, avoiding in all possible ways the process of socialization by clinging on to their own culture. Through their nostalgia they are able to recognize the land they were born and grew up and the land which has carved a space in their psyche. They spend their time by indulging in nostalgia, for it sustains memory and sometimes prevents the experienced self from the influence of the new culture.

The strategic concern underlying the diasporic existence is the act of displacement. It connotes a dispersion, scattering or decentralization of national or religious groups living outside their homeland. As far as immigrants are concerned, the homeland is a pious place of worship. They are nostalgic and tend to cling to the culture of their homeland and become quite obsessive about their home country. They tend to stick to their communal thinking and find it difficult to integrate into the mainstream of the society they are living in. They are exploited economically and are like birds in a cage, and hence they cannot

completely merge into the culture of the host country. They are under a state of conflict most of the time. They often try to figure out which one is better, their homeland or their present location where their aspirations lie. They are in a metamorphic situation and end up feeling alienated. Immigrants are frustrated, depressed and in a dilemma and thus psychologically injured. There is a void that the immigrant cannot fill in spite of the realization of materialistic goals. One is pulled from different directions, but it is his passion for life that makes him move on in life.

However, the psychologists and social thinkers express that the human values of sympathy, love, affection, and compassion can help a great deal in redeeming the situations before paradise becomes too lost to be regained. In fact, it has been rightly said that ‘every dark cloud has a silver lining’ and this can be compared with Shelley who in his poem *Ode to West wind* says “If winter comes, can spring be far behind?” (70). Thus it is hope that sustains man in difficult situations.

To sum up, it is noted that alienation could be best understood with reference to the identity-crisis and the survival instinct of individuals and also the nation as a whole. In fact, Uma Parameswaran is an expert analyst of the human mind, creator of memorable characters and astute interpreters of the vicissitudes of life. She has presented a gallery of vivid and realistic portraits of life. When her characters are analyzed they are seen as human with their moments of weaknesses and strengths. They are, indeed, caught in the web of their own inner compulsion, but they cannot be called ‘haunted protagonists’ who lack the ability and the will to come to grips with life.

At the psychological level, the ambitions, hopes, failures, aspirations, joys, sorrows, disillusionment and loneliness of the immigrants can be visualized as real. No doubt, they

react to their troubles and problems with confidence, yet by the fictional rendering of their behaviour, the novelist not only plumbs human nature but also helps the readers to grasp their inner reality intuitively. Growth is a painful experience for the immigrants and the recognition of doubleness, “fluid identity” is even more painful. But it is an acknowledgement of alternative realities where one takes from other’s cultures and redefines the hopes and aspirations of the immigrants.

History, memory, melancholia and nostalgia play a significant role in creating a variegated picture. The pain of the loss of the Arcadia-home- impinges upon the memory and brings back the subjective truth whereas nostalgia works within the framework of the past with a vision of perfection. The cultural vision of perfection bestowed on the past can be re-lived in an imaginary future. As Rita Joshi in her article on “Nations and Alienation: Diaspora in Recent Indian Fiction” says, “Difficulties in adjustment, nostalgia for home, inability to connect on return visits to India, Schizophrenic sense of double Indian and Western identities or a sense of belonging nowhere, neither here nor there, remain the dominant feelings of the Indian immigrant. It is this psycho-cultural space that is especially explored in Indian fiction in English” (93).

The concept of home, nation and cultural identity of belongingness to the place of ancestry does not remain the same for all individuals. In the first generation immigrants, migration creates alienation, nostalgia of the past and rootlessness at the place of migration as he or she is still clinging to the cultural beliefs, practice and norms of the homeland. Makarand Paranjape makes an apt observation in his work “Coping with Postcolonialism: “. . . there is a clinging to the old identity and a resistance to make a transition” (71).

Hence, the sense of loss or ‘living in border’ gives rise to the concepts of double consciousness and homelessness which mark the diasporic identity.

Uma Parameswaran’s writings reflect the consciousness of the need for regaining roots in the tradition of India and a rueful nostalgia towards that. Through her work one can identify how Canadian culture produces disenchantment in the minds of the immigrants and how they find themselves crushed under the burden of alienation and rootlessness. As a diasporic writer she has a huge bank of memories of homeland that she has left behind. It has provided the necessary impetus to chisel her identity in the host society. Her characters demonstrate the universality of real life experiences.

Though Uma Parameswaran has categorized nostalgia as an element of the first phase, the very fact that one turns towards ethnocentric community organization goes to prove that the immigrant never gets over the feeling of ‘nostalgia’. Hence, the best way to survive under the pressures of hybridity is to keep contacts with one’s roots. In fact hybridization transcends the boundaries made by man and thus creates a heady mix of multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Through their sense of alienation the immigrants have learnt what they have unlearned in the alien culture – The old order has to give way to the new, by way of assimilation. It also depends on the age and the immigrant’s length of stay in the two cultures.

Most of the first generation immigrants do not get emotionally involved with the events of their host countries, though they very much remain alert to the incidents in the mother country. The second generation immigrants are not fully cut off from the mother country; but they too have a feeling of unsettlement and disturbing memories of the parents’ motherland. The issue is alive, though not as powerfully as for the parents. Hence, the attempt to “assimilate” has been explained by Uma Parameswaran in her play

Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees as follows: “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” (101-02).

The second generation is torn between two polarities; the immigrants develop a sense of in-betweenness which results either in the loss of identity and alienation or in hybrid identity which means adoption of both elements of home and host culture which has also been termed as plural identity. Hence there is no solution to the problems of the immigrants. The disturbing issues which resist adjustment or which stirrup irrational responses can be overcome with the positive mentality of the immigrants. Gauri Shankar Jha in her book *Dimensions of Diasporic English Fiction* says :

The immigrants employ three different techniques of adaptation in abroad. They are assimilation, cultural preservation, with economic integration and ethnic polarization for pursuit of power cultivations. The most profound and predominant pattern is the cultural preservation with economic integration. It continues from generation to generation. In the process some disappear and some syncretise or change. Meanwhile they develop double identity, a status of Trishanku, neither to the maternal place nor to their foster country, and their culture becomes a sandwich culture. (144)

Undoubtedly, to an Indian, an ancestral house stands for an institution and roots are not merely geographical site, but a way of life oriented to value system believed in and lived by people through generations. Uma Parameswaran re-creates the atmosphere of nostalgia, homelessness and the consequent agony faced by her characters and at the

end, her characters gradually rise above their alienation and work for assimilation in their new home. They remember their 'homeland' in various ways by recalling old myths, telling and retelling many versions of the stories from the great Indian epics to the children, cooking Indian food at home and thereby maintain a relationship with their homeland. Perhaps Uma Parameswaran's finest achievement is this – that she ends the isolation and silence of her immigrant people by giving them a place and voice in Canadian literature.