

Title: Embodied Diaspora: Living between 'Mangoes' and 'Maple' in  
*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*

Dr. Thejaswi D. Nair

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Nehru Arts and Science College Kanhagad

9496138788

Dr. Prajith P.K

Associate Professor

Department of Botony

Nehru Arts and Science College Kanhagad

9074777434

**Abstract:** The symbolic juxtaposition of the Mango Tree and the Maple Tree reflects the tension between homeland and hostland, tradition and adaption. This study examines how the novel represents diaspora as an ongoing process rather than a completed journey, emphasizing cultural hybridity, selfhood negotiation. The text challenges notions of immigrant identity and presents diaspora as challenging. The symbolic juxtaposition of the mango and maple tree reflects tension between homeland and hostland.

**Key words:** Cultural memory, Hyphenated identity, Diaspora, Displacement, Immigrant experience.

Diaspora Literature has its roots mainly in the feel of loss and alienation, which developed as a result of migration and expatriation. Generally, the literature of the diaspora deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, immigration, nostalgia, quest for

identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation and disintegration of cultures and tradition. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of their settlement and displacement. Creative writers like Uma Parameswaran reveals in *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* that she narrates her own experience of migration and the questioning of relatedness. She views, “Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too!” (30). It seems that when one arrives in a new land, one has a sense of excitement and adventure at the vision and feel of a landscape so different from that one is used to or experience before. There is also a sense of alienation, fear and intense nostalgia which most diaspora recedes to.

Parameswaran highlights the problem of dual identity and multiculturalism in the novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*. The work deals deeply with diaspora concerns, particularly the South Asian immigrant experience in Canada. The characters especially the Indian immigrant protagonists navigate the tension between their native cultural heritage and life in Canada. They are neither “Indian” nor “Canadian”, but exist in a space where they retain elements of Indian traditions and adapt to Canadian norms and values. She asserts that children born and brought up in Canada are different to a great extent from those who have reached from another country. Their disposition often gets tuned and decided by a number of concerns like the economic and educational background of parents. There is no other choice for the migrants to get habituated to the demands of new life and patterns of survival in the new land. We have characters like Savitri and Veejala expressing their mind-set repeatedly and difficulties of adaptation and reconciliation with the mysterious and the distasteful. This instills a sort of unavoidable frustration in their character which leads to drastic conclusions like quitting job and returning home.

The work contains allusions and reference of Indian plants and vegetation and this is a means of bringing the diaspora close to homeland. There are references to faith in religion and mythological connectivity. Still the writer holds up the need to have both cultures and traditions mixed up. The elements of Indianism are predominant in characters like Savitri which make her feel intolerant and indifferent of Canadian style and structure of life. Its replica can be seen in the characterisation of Sharad too.

The text also highlights the issue of hybridity, which is a major concern in Postcolonialism. It is used to denote cross-cultural exchange. It is in the ‘in- between’ space that

the meaning and essence of culture lies. Hybridity has been seen a part of the discourse analysis to de-historicize and de-locate cultures from their temporal, spatial geographical, ethnical and linguistic context. Hybridity forms the perspective of feminist analysis in an entirely different notion. Through the character of Duliya, Parameswaran depicts her outlook on lesbian relationships and how marriages remain unaltered by such relationships. It is described thus,

It is something all young women have to put up with, you know how it is, just a standard remark that married women make to unmarried young women especially at weddings and such occasions. You know about Duliya I guess; I am sure most of us have known for some time now about her. It is just that we don't talk about it, and as far as I know everyone has always been nice to her, even those who feel uncomfortable about her life style, but Duliya for some peculiar reason decided she would come out of the closet right then and there, and said she was not one for all this crap of arranged marriages. And she proclaimed herself with the L word. Yes, she said it, 'I am a Lesbian and don't need a man,' she said. You should have been there to hear the deafening silence and dismay on the faces of some of those women. (77)

The novel also projects instances of hybridity, acceptance of double marginalization faced by women and the problem of mixing up in a foreign land. We have the narration by Anant thus,

In another hundred years maybe, he said, women would get out of the bind, but now to be born a woman was to be born with all kinds of guilt complexes. The two of them had an even tougher time because of their hoping between cultures. Didn't she remember what she'd to put up with in North Carolina when he was away in Europe for two years? In India it was perfectly acceptable for a man to leave his wife and children for years on end in pursuit of his job. (170)

Writers on diaspora are found discussing issues related to nostalgia repeatedly. This feeling is predominant of their existence in a foreign land. It is suggested that they have to discover some strategy of adoption so as to negotiate with the cultural space of their country of adoption. The emphasis of diaspora is on such an attitude of cultural adaptation to make them feel at ease when they are far away from home and native attachments. Nostalgia is

often the preoccupation of these writers as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. It becomes important to question the nature of their relationship with the work of writers and literature of the country of their origin and to examine different strategies they adopt in order to negotiate the cultural space of the countries of their adoption.

Uma Parameswaran seems to suggest in the novel that acculturation depends upon the age of the migrant and the length of stay in the country of migration. Indians leave their homes and their respectable jobs for a better life in Canada, but their past haunts them forever. In an attempt to find roots in the foreign land, the first generation had to suffer much sacrifice. The novel explores tensions between the First Generation immigrants, who cling more firmly to tradition and the Second Generation immigrants, who adopt Canadian values more. These differences can create conflicts over language, religion and marriage demonstrating how diaspora affects one self. One among them is the memory of their homeland. Yet another is connected with the discrimination they confront and the attitude of inferiority inflicted on them by the natives who always look upon them as secondary citizens only. To recover from this unpleasant feel of aloofness, they start searching for their own lost ethnic identity in various ways such as celebrating Indian festivals, wearing Indian dress, assembling at religious centers and observing solemn days, becoming part of Indian art by dancing and singing traditional songs, holding family get-together and through wide spectrum of associated involvements. The diaspora is continually in search of different avenues of enjoyment to liberate them from the tight hold of nostalgic uneasiness.

Uma Parameswaran tries to convey the idea that nostalgia is the prime feature of the migrants of the first generation. The bond with the homeland is not easy to be broken, so far as the mind set of migrants is concerned. Assimilation and acculturation appear to be essential adjustments for the diaspora to feel at home abroad. For instance, Jyoti ultimately realises that she has to go in tune with the interest of her parents to lead a comfortable family life. This reversal of attitude related to reconciliation with home culture prompts her to drop the idea of wooing Pierre. The indispensable urge of diaspora appears to grow in synchrony with the attitudes and approaches of the second and third generations. Indian culture is the binding tag that brings all the generations together under a common canopy. The words of Vithal are expressive of the eagerness of the diaspora to establish assimilation and acculturation with the

culture and patterns of the life of the land they have embarked on.

The novel also projects instances of hybridity, acceptance of double marginalization faced by women and the problem of mixing up in a foreign land. We have the narration by Anant thus,

In another hundred years maybe, he said, women would get out of the bind, but now to be born a woman was to be born with all kinds of guilt complexes. The two of them had an even tougher time because of their hoping between cultures. Didn't she remember what she'd to put up with in North Carolina when he was away in Europe for two years? In India it was perfectly acceptable for a man to leave his wife and children for years on end in pursuit of his job.(170)

We see India and Indianness operating strongly in the minds of the migrants. The characterization of Savitri illustrates it. She prefers saree and applies saffron on her forehead in an attempt to hold her home culture and tradition up. She gets disturbed by the late-night arrivals of her daughter. Her husband Sharad also shares an identical anxiety, though he tries to conceal his apprehension regarding his daughter's friendship with a Canadian boy. Still he tries to console his wife,

Don't be a warrior savi. She is a good girl. And Andre is a decent boy; he behaves just like one of us. Besides you should continue to live in the prudish world of your youth. The youngsters here are doing well. They have their own code of morals and they are more idealistic than we give them credit for. (81)

Savitri rightly points out that they conquered 'within wherever they went'. Scrubbing the floor and polishing things to earn Canadian dollars, she has lost the softness of her hands. Jyoti reminds them of their suffering thus, 'No matter how long we live here, it is never long enough to forget either our old ways or our old comforts" (99). She tries to keep her spirits up forgetting the comforts of the past. These characters are often found feeling inspired of their Indian background and getting perturbed over the uncompromising ways and attitudes of the generation represented by their children.

Idealistic sexual involvements, chastity and related virtues are of high value and concerns in the Indian matrimonial perspective. This gets shattered when Savitri finds contraceptives in

her daughter's car. Despite the torment she bears, she is incapable of questioning her daughter in such conditions. As a means of ironic deviation, she advises her daughter to stop using her father's car when she goes out for dating.

Sharad feels repentant of leaving home country. There are instances of him cherishing the values and culture of the homeland as well as under-estimating that of the migrant land. He looks at family ties superior to anything else. Yet another character, Veejala, finds her feelings for homeland unsurpassable and its stress forces her to take the strong decision of forsaking everything foreign and returning home.

She suffers psychological upheavals caused by racial and gender discrimination. The intersection of different cultures is beyond her tolerance level. She prefers tradition ancient to new and altered patterns of life. Here Uma Parameswaran implies her high sense of attachment to the diasporic community in Canada and its surging emotional conflicts. Cross cultural conflict is the major concern in her writings and the select books for the present study expose this feel of conflict experienced by the settlers vividly.

Gender identity and discrimination get expressed at its best through the literature of the diaspora. Clear distinction can be cited in the literary attempts of both the male and female writers while portraying discrimination and gender bias. The works of women often appear to have an upper edge in the portrayal of social and cultural issues of the diaspora related to identity crisis, nostalgia, discrimination, and marginalization. All these are inter-linked attributes of the consciousness of the diaspora which often reflect vehemently through the works of writers like Uma Parameswaran. Such a feel and awareness generate strongly among the transnational communities of the present time. It is distinguished by a sentiment that is generated from the duality of inclination towards the motherland on one hand and the migrated land on the other. James Clifford suggests, "Diaspora consciousness leaves loss and hope as a defining tension" (312). Clifford proposes, "The empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there.... It is the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here)" (332).

The necessity to associate one with the others is stimulated from the awareness of multi-locality. It often brings up queries related to conceptualization of locality as here and there and the longing of a sect of people to partake identical 'routes' and 'roots'.

In the novel Parameswaran uses narrative, memory and character development to explore major diaspora concerns like identity negotiation, cultural memory and nostalgia, intergenerational conflicts. The novel captures the emotional dislocation experienced by Indian immigrants in Canada. It is studied that physical migration leads to psychological unsettlement, where characters feel uprooted from their homeland and struggle to feel fully at home in the host country.

### Bibliography

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Perseus, 2007.

---. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove P, 2005.

---. 'On National Culture', Routledge, 1963, pp. 170.

Gandhi, Leela. *Post Colonial Theory*. Oxford UP, 2011.

Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. Harvester Wheat Sheaf, 1993.

---. *Resistance through Rituals*. Routledge, 1976.

---. "Thinking the Diasporas: Home Thoughts from Abroad". In welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies. Routledge, 1994, pp. 63-64.

H, Kapur. *Indian People in Natal*. Natal UP, 1960.

Hutnyk, John et al. *Diaspora and Hybridity*. Cambridge UP, 2005.

Jain, Ravindra K. *Indian Communities Abroad Themes and Literature*. South Asian, 1993.

Jasbir, Jain. *Writing of Indian Diaspora Theory and Practice*. Rawat, 1998.

---. *Dislocations and Multiculturalism*. Rawat, 2000.

Kadekar, Laxmi Narayan. *Global Indian Diaspora: History Culture and Identity*. Rawat, 2012.

Kalra, Virinder S. *Diaspora and Hybridity*. Sage, 2005.

Parameswaran, Uma. *A Cycle of the Moon*. Broken Jaw P, 2002.

N, Jayaram. Diversities in the Indian Diaspora. Oxford UP, 2011.