

**QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN UMAPARAMESWARAN'S
"ROOTLESS BUT GREEN ARE THE BOULEVARD TREES"**

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Literature of early days focuses mainly on reuniting of legends, praise of peasants and writing about personal experience which give a befitting expression to their thoughts and feelings, visions and aspirations of the writers. However, this lasted only for several decades and the quest for identity is a recurrent theme in modern literature. The term 'identity' and 'identity crisis' is 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 their preservation are consequences of survival instincts have become a perennial problem for the immigrants from time immemorial. The sense of identity is a perennial sustaining creative force for the writers when they happen to be the victims of marginalized societies, groups or individuals. They live with the unlivable crisis of identity by either shedding off these concerns in their works or by seeking shelter in concerns themselves. At times distance dilutes difference that defines the identity. With the advent of new technology, the whole globe has become a village the identity is no longer fixed. A person got his identity by virtue of his profession, caste, religion, region, but the moment he shifts to another place, country, region he has become marginalized because of his demographic caste, religion and regional patterns. Hence the question of marginalized is related to identity and self and this has become the major source for the writers who are marginalized. . Hence Identity is an imprecise term which refers to "a configuration arising out of constitutional givens, idiosyncratic, libidinal needs, favoured capacities, significant identification, effective defences, successful sublimations and consistent roles".(Anita Desai's Introduction,1993 ,Pg XI

This paper would discuss about the agonizing problem of identity crisis expressed by the Uma parameswaran. She is one of those modern Indian writers in English focuses on the condition of Indian Immigrants in Canada. All her protagonists suffer from the loss of a sense of identity at one point or the other. The immigrants do not enjoy the life in "Straight lines" and smooth plains and neither can completely detach herself from her past nor do her characters have any certainty in the future. In the quest for identify as an Indo –Canadian writer Uma parameswaran expresses

the culture, mythology, rich traditions of India with sarcasm and and irony and tries to bring out that “Life outside India no doubt shapes one’s responses to India” and the responses may vary a lot depending on one’s own personality and values.

As the Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, She 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 angle. In her Canadian experience, immigrants were lost souls but in her transformation to a writer and a resident of the Canada in the process of immigration is something different. In her opinion woman experience diaspora under 3 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 do to other countries in order to pursue higher education or for lucrative job. Hence, whatever the classification, in real life also, they caught between psychological problems of diaspora such as dislocation, unbelonging, marginalization and cultural dissonance that are common to men.

In *Rootless but green are the Boulevard Tree* “She narrates her own experience as well as the life of an average Indo –Canadian family which migrated to Canada for better prospects. In this play, the Bhaves a Maharastrian family migrates to Canada, leaving a well-settled pattern of life back home. Sharad who was comfortably placed at home as an Atomic Energy Scientist, migrates to Canada,

“ 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)

But in Canada, he couldn’t get a suitable job and ends up as a real-estate broker and encyclopedia seller, much to the decision of his own son. For all his optimism behind his migration sharad has to come across many unpleasant situations and has to find out his identity. He visualizes situation as

“It upsets me profoundly to find myself in a crowd. All these 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 .” (82).

In another situation, Vejala, sharad’s sister quit her Assistant Professor post in a Canadian University because of the insipid academic scenario and the colour- cum-gender bias prevailing in the University. The younger generation of immigration keenly feels that they have to face 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 don't want to mingle with them. In spite of all these difficulties the immigrant achieves success by losing their identity in the process of assimilation. 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.

As for as Uma Parameswaran is concerned, the immigrant spaces are homogenous they depend on how they adjust and adapts to the new environment and nation. She believes that one should feel part of the Community, one has adopted and try to grow roots there and for this one has to face the trauma of self –transformation. In this play parameswaran gives expression to a vocabulary of resistance especially to that of younger generation. In this dimension, parents ready to bear the pangs of criticism where as children are frustrated against it Jyoti; the Twenty year old girl says to her brother Jayanth.

“I'm sure hope it get into that thick head of yours that we are different and no matter what we do, we are never going to fit in here”.(27)

It shows the issue of oppression subjugation, discrimination and also the dilemma of the immigrant families who feel the pangs of dislocation. But the younger generation tries to adopt a compromising attitude as Jayanth 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”.

This shows the mindset of the new generation that they want to establish their identity rather than fall back upon the old memory and nostalgia. They are individuals with their own psychology and biography reaching to situations in their own individual manner. Vithal who is Veejalas son and sharad's nephew unlike others condemns the merging and assimilation and says “They want us out we will be squashed like bugs soon. They've never wanted us and now we are a threat, we have to stay separate from them and stay together within.(54), expressing the fear of the minority. They overcome this problem as they have developed the quality of adjustment and try to grow roots through self-transformation. It is a gradual absorption where the immigrant has to adopt the organic process of gradual growth to carve space for oneself.

Hence we observe that a search for new identity, a loss of home and memories of the past were felt not only by the characters but also by the writer. She has handled the problem of exclusion and discrimination meted out to the South Asian immigrant and the settling of the Indian Community in Winnipeg through 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”. The only solution the reader

can conjecture is to accept the fact that all immigrants involves anxiety and belonging to two communities which forces a kind of struggle that they face in alien place. Parameshwaran deals with every possible aspect of immigrant experience through the varied degrees of emotional involvement and they have created a new culture, have travelled a long way from “Unthinking scorn, unfeeling barbs, closed fists and closed hearts” to being accepted and appreciated. Hence growth is painful experience for the expatriate and the recognition of doubleness, “fluid identity” is even more painful. But it is an acknowledgement of alternative realities where we take from each other’s cultures and redefine our hopes and as aspirations.

References:

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