

## **The Problem of Immigrant and Nostalgia in the Novel of Uma Parameswaran's "Dear Deedi, My Sister"**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper focuses on Indian women's experience of immigration, nostalgia, culture, language and tradition in the literary works of Uma Parameswaran. The author focuses on one novel: *Dear Deedi, My Sister*. In this novel, Sapna did not have the feelings of nostalgia, because she could visit India through letters written and received to her dearest 'deedi' or sister. The feeling of nostalgia also grasps the immigrants from India as well as other countries in Parameswaran's works, particularly in *Dear Deedi, My Sister*. Sapna, a woman from India, writes to her sister living in her native country. The feeling associated with 'deedi', cannot be conveyed through the English word 'sister'. Sapna continues to write depicting a contrast between Canada and India; a contrast, which

throws into respite her nostalgia for a land that she left; a land that continues to live in her memory.

**Keywords:** Nostalgia, immigration, native land, diasporas, personal letters, Uma Parameswaran.

Uma Parameswaran, an Indo-Canadian writer of plays and fiction presents her first hand observation of diasporic life. She is of the opinion that there are writers who have a tendency to exaggerate, a leaning forwards the over-idealization of nostalgia or towards satire. Ultimately, the challenge of common wealth literary critics is in the exploration and understanding of the bicultural vision of writers. Prameswaran maintains objectivity in portraying the several facets of multicultural Canada. She lives in manifold, Canada undergoing the third phase of expatriation the policy of the government is multiculturalism in a bilingual framework. She represents ethnic minority writers in Canada "Whose cultures are neither English no French and whose heritage languages are neither English nor French". (Pivato, p. 2.1)

Migrated writers feel the mixed feelings of cultures and as well as they witness the pro-democracy demonstrations hereby leading to encounter of cultures. They experience the condition of anonymity for years of repercussions in the mainland with echoes a dilemma articulated by many recent migrants from the mainlands.

Uma Parameswaran's "*Dear Deedi, My Sister*" is a sensitive reconstruction of the experiences of immigrants who perpetually suffer the nostalgia of lost motherland. It is

evident that geographical locations reaffirm the bond of personal relationship between Chitra Banerjee, Divakaruni and Anita Rao Badami. She proceeds with the assumption that immigrants essentially share the burden of "separation" and seek silent spaces for assimilation in multicultural spaces through the possibilities of the retrieval of the lingering shadows of lost relationships or endeavors for the reconstruction of new paradigm of interpersonal bonding's. The title of the play is a symbolic manifestation of formal and informal nature of relationships. Addressing as "Dear Deedi" has an undertone of intense emotional bonding whereas the term "sister" with the additional emphasis on the pronoun "my" is suggestive of an uncompromising urge buried beneath the human predicament of immigrants.

The feeling of nostalgia also grasps the immigrants from India as well as other counties in Parameswaran's work particularly in *Dear Deedi, My Sister. Sapna*, a woman from India, writes to her sister living in her native country. The feeling associated with Deedi, cannot be conveyed through the word 'sister'. Language is an inevitable part of culture.

*Dear Deedi, my sister,*

*I have not heard from you for a long time. When I first came, the mailman's daily visit was my lifeline. Even now, I wait by the window, whiling the hour away thinking of all of you back home. The breeze is lazily blowing fine snow across the front yard that is already buried under two feet of white. Nature, here*

*as at home as I often say, is both bounteous and  
tyrannical (Parameswaran, Dear Deedi, p. 61).*

Initially, Sapana did not have the feelings of nostalgia, because she could visit India through letters written and received to her 'Dear Deedi'. Later on the exchange of letters among the two sisters go on decreasing and Sapana starts feeling nostalgic. Though initially she has found nature in two countries almost same, now she finds the fields in Canada too cold. Her expression 'dear God, it is too cold' suggests that now it is unbearable on her part to live there.

Sapna continues to write depicting a contrast between Canada and India; a contrast which throws into respite her nostalgia for a land that she left—a land that continues to live in her memory. The landscape of India has still occupied her mind through memories. She misses all the incense from India. Living in Canada, she could not visit the temple and so also missing the sound of temple bells. The mango blossoms and monsoon rains have still there in her memory. She wishes to feel all those things and longs for visiting India.

On the death of her friend in Canada, Sapna writes to her sister about her yearning for the holy water of river Ganga for the peace of his soul:

*Everything is so distant, so far away [...] but, death,  
till now a distant stranger, knocked on our door last  
month, we had to lay out one of our dearest friends.  
No matter how long we live here, our heart still*

*yearns to touch the waters of the Ganga before it  
can go in peace to its eternal rest. (Ibid., p. 71).*

Again, the need for the water of the holy river Ganga becomes a frantic need for a neighbor in a foreign land.

*Gangajal, he said, I need Gangajal to wash him.*

*My heart contracted and exploded in fear.*

*I reached over to the alcove.*

*Where we have enshrined our household gods.*

*And took down a cup size copper pot*

*Sealed at a temple beside the holy river.*

*His hands were trembling as I placed it there.*

*And he had snowflakes in his hair. (Ibid., p. 71)*

The immigrants from different countries are united by a sense of nostalgia in the play *Dear Deedi, My Sister*. Wamahu, a young woman from Kenya, feels deeply nostalgic in her state of isolation. The writer has skillfully brought out the nostalgic moment; it gives the sensation of fragrance spreading from Kenya to Canada. Mariella from Nicaragua is also nostalgic about her homeland:

*Puerto Cabezas! I love you.*

*Your broad beach road where the polished tar*

*Flings mirages that vapor on my speeding car.*

*Your sands stretched out beside the sea*

*Where at my feet laps Eternity.*

*Your sullen sky, your sweltering air,*

*Your flashy rich, the blind beggar's stare,*

*Wreck of thirty ruinous years*

*When the sheep looked up and were not fed.*

*Puerto Cabezas, I hope one day to call me your own*

*Though pledged now to the land*

*Which my love has made our home (Ibid., p. 64)*

Through rich descriptions the poet brings alive the speaker's native land. She used adjective such as 'sullen' and 'ruinous' and nouns as 'sweltering', which give a very innate effect to the poem as a whole and give a way to the trace of very painful nostalgic feelings.

The first five and last three lines (cited here) uttered by Mariella in the play have been spoken in verbatim by an Indian character Candrika in Trishanku; the only disparity lies in the replacement of Puerto Cabezas by Madras (29). Again, the first five lines, in the above quoted extract, have been expressed by Chander in Trishankuand with an inclusion of a new line, which read 'seven months and then' and the next four lines reoccur with a minor change in the third line, where the 'wreck of thirty ruinous years.....' (27) is replaced by 'wreck of twenty ruinous years..' (Ibid., p. 27)

Uma Parameswaran's works are constantly analysed and interpreted by critics and reviewers taking notice of the reality of her creative writing. Her works have been reviewed in several well-known journals and books. Supriya Agarwal in her article "Immigrant Spaces-Uma Parameswaran and Sadhu Binning" expresses that Uma

Parameswaran's plays move around the problems faced by South Asian and other visible minorities in Canada. Her plays link epic India with modern Canada through myth and dance. She also observes that Uma Parameswaran's plays present the mindset of the new generation that is grappling with the problems of dislocation and discrimination.

In the article "Uma Parameswaran" Diane Mc Gifford express that Uma Parameswaran's writing is in one sense, a reaction to the Indian diaspora, particularly the experiences of South Asian Indians in Canada, and more specifically in Winnipeg, the city where she has been living since 1966. Her writings explore the lives and experiences of Indian immigrants as they struggle with the painful and bewildering task of adjusting to and claiming their new land. Most Canadians are immigrants and hence, the themes and motifs of Uma Parameswaran's works are no surprise to the students of Canadian literature. As an immigrant, she is profoundly Canadian. Yet she writes of these same events with important, necessary and delightful difference—a difference that has its origins in the rich cultures and traditions of her homeland. The major strength of Parameswaran's writing is her ability to blend modern experience with traditional myths and stories Gills, glotelization in critic.

Uma Parameswaran's writings deal with Indian immigrants, especially—though understandably—women and their plight in the new country. While her audience is

primarily Indian, the writings have a social value with an ameliorating effect. Uma Parameswaran chose her characters predominantly from the northern part of India because of her upbringing there, though she is southerner by heritage, because of the necessity of the reality of the situation she is handling. Hence, some autobiographical elements are woven into the stories. The character's names are repeated, symbolically to reflect the transformation of Indian immigrants after a period of residence in the West.

One of the obvious strengths of Uma Parameswaran's writing is her ability to blend modern experience with traditional myths and stories. Although she considers herself a Canadian, she yearns for the beauties of her homeland. Uma shows how rich culture and tradition of her homeland India is. She underlines the fact that every immigrant suffers from the same feeling and has a soft corner for the homeland. Through her writings, the readers are made aware of not only of the South Asian experience, but also of the struggles involved in the life of the immigrants.

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