



DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN PARMESWARAN'S *ROOTLESS BUT GREEN ARE THE BOULEVARD TREES*

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There is huge number of Diasporic Indian writers who write in novel form. They received name and fame with their creative writing and their looking back of their homeland from an alien land. Their experiences in the hostland and their sensibility with which they react to the circumstances is remarkable. However, few writers tried their talent in exploring the dramatic representation of Diasporic peoples' problems. Uma Parmeswaran is also one of the prodigious talents among these writers. She is born in Chennai and brought up in the cities of India like Nagpur and Jabalpur. She migrates to United States for her higher education in 1963 which offers her firsthand experience of a Diasporic individual. Being the resident of Winnipeg and an immigrant, she tries to explore the sense and sensibility of the Diasporic people in her creative writing. There are many novels to her credit but her play *Rootless But Green Are The Boulevard Trees* (1998) which reveals the Diasporic sensibility with difference.

Rootless But Green Are The Boulevard Trees is a play divided into three acts which uncovers the feelings of rootlessness, alienation, search for better future and problem of assimilation in the hostland. This is a domestic play which focuses the diasporic feelings and experiences of Bhave and Moghe family. The plot of the play moves from Winnipeg to Fort Richmond and again back. Bhave family comprises of five members: Sharad, the father, Savitri, the mother, Jayant and Jyothi are the grown up children and Krish is young one. Jyothi falls in love with Andre, a white boy. On the other hand, there is Moghe family which consists of four members: Anant, the father, Mrs. Veejala, the mother and Vithal and Priti are their children.

The present play highlights the experience of the Diasporic beings after their displacement to the foreign land. The displacement of Moghe and Bhave family changes the life of all the members. The feeling of rootlessness is very dominant in these members. It minutely notes an effect of rootlessness among the characters of this play. In the opening scene of the play, Jyothi tells her brother Jayant, that as they are immigrants they are rootless. She further tells that they are the misfits in the novel environment of hostland. They basically feel the problem of assimilation with the host culture. For any diasporic individual it is very essential that he or she have to accept the cultural ideology of the hostland. Then only he or she can be fit in the environment of the hostland.

The feeling of alienation is very dominant in the character of Sharad. He feels completely isolated in Winnipeg due to loss of his earlier job and his people and

environment. He has been a scientist at Trombay in India, however due to his segregation from the dirty politics in the institute he resolves to migrate to Winnipeg. He becomes an estate broker after his displacement to Winnipeg. As he is unable to assimilate with the host country thoroughly, he reveals his alienation as:

“It upsets me profoundly to find myself in a crowd. All those alien faces staring at... who are these faceless people among whom my life is oozing away? Each so self-contained, so complete, look at me as though I shouldn’t be there” (82).

He is doubtful about his isolated self in the hostland because he feels every face is unknown to him. Due to his alienation he undergoes a crisis of identity and he remarks that he is not complete like the native people of that land. His dilemma is that he cannot live with the unknown and unfriendly people of the host country.

Even the environment around him looks unknown and he becomes nostalgic. Looking at the environment around he recollects the environment in Indian and he says that, “That is why our people raised temples on every hillock and riverbank. Our people...” (83). In the present context, Sharad’s expression “Our people” is much significant to throw light on his nostalgic memories of homeland. His memories of rivers, temples and his people bring him out of the angst of alienation in the hostland.

Sharad’s character exhibits the feeling of rootlessness in an intense manner. He asks his son Jayant, this question “Can we really grow roots here?” This reveals his dilemma that being the migrants they are undergoing many problems and he is not sure of his existence in the hostland. But in the next few pages of the play he appears quite optimistic and he cites the example of banana tree which multiplies its roots in the ground and rears the young one in its shade.

Dilip asks Vithal, the son of the Moghe family that they have to change according to the modern manners and the life style of the hostland. Dilip’s attitude is to assimilate thoroughly with the host culture.

“... this is your country, the only land you know... you have to try to assimilate ...The whites would appreciate that effort” (97).

However, Vithal is not of the same opinion. He thinks that the whites don’t allow the immigrants to assimilate with them.

They don’t want to assimilate. They want us out... They’ve never wanted us and now we are a threat ... we have to stay separate from them that we have as much right to be here as the pissed-off whites ... We’ve got to stay apart, stay together” (98).

The above quote highlights the predicament of the Diasporic people in the hostland. The basic problem of assimilation makes them restless and insecure. They start to make their



ghetto for their security. The ghetto of Indians at South Hall in England is the best example of such assimilation.

The sense of rootlessness is very dominant in the character of Sridhar which is supported by Jayant as:

“Yeah, rootless. Let’s face it. Jesus, no one but no one has roots anywhere that’s the way things are in 1979 A.D. But we can stand tall, ... and live each day for all its goddamned worth and ours” (127).

Jayant thinks that everyone is rootless in the world. Even the history reveals the same thing. But everybody has to stand firm and confident in his life. Parmeswaran tries to convey the same thought through this play that nobody has his or her roots fix in a land. Globalization has compelled every one go beyond the thresholds of his or her nation-state.

R. Vedapalli rightly comments about the immigrant experiences in her article, “Quilting a New Canon: A Study of the Select Plays of Uma Parmeswaran,” as:

Uma Parmeswaran describes the different phases of immigrant experiences in her works. The first phase points out the nostalgia for the world they have left behind and the mixed feelings of wonder and fear at the new world they are now in. In the second phase, concentration is on family and career, due to their impulse to survive. The third phase shows an active interest in the activities of their own ethnic community and the final phase leads to participation in the larger political and social arena of the new country.... Through this intermingling of cultures she attempts to effect a shift from a sense of rootlessness to a sense of community, from alienation to reconciliation” (176).

In the present play she focuses on the transformation of characters from a Diasporic being to the reconciled member of an ethnic group in the hostland. The immigrants have to flourish in the hostland though they have not all their roots the same land. They have to accept the land and their ideology being the residents. They should be the transnational and also accept their existence in the same country. The boulevard tree in fact gives the same message to flourish wherever you live. Though it cannot get enough space to spread its roots still it flourishes and nourishes in anywhere.

Thus, *Rootless But Green Are The Boulevard Trees* is the play which throws light on the Diasporic sensibility of the immigrant characters. It basically highlights the feeling of rootlessness, alienation, search for better future and assimilation. Dislocation brings the feeling of alienation and rootlessness among the migrants in the present play. In fact their search for better future makes them feel isolated from their people and their homeland. The problem of assimilation is also one of the serious problems of the immigrants. Through this



play, Parmeswaran hints at the phenomenon of transnationalism as a remedy to this problem. Reconciliation with other cultures will truly make them transnational in the world.

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