

## NAVIGATING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: AN ANALYSIS OF DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN UMA PARAMESWARAN'S *MANGOES ON THE MAPLE TREE* AND SUNETRA GUPTA'S *MEMORIES OF RAIN*

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### **Abstract:**

The present research article is an attempt to analyze the pains and pleasures, hopes, and fears of immigrant life depicted in the two most relevant works, "*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*" by Uma Parameswaran (2015) and "*Memories of Rain*" by Sunetra Gupta (1994), with a particular reference to Diasporic identity portrayal through cultural assimilation. The research paper explores the emotional dimensions of immigration and diasporic identity by analyzing how these two authors represent cultural assimilation. The chapters by various authors discuss different plotlines and characters: the experience of immigrant transformations observed from the perspective of challenges faced by the Bhave family (by Uma Parameswaran) or diasporic identity seen through Monideepa's eyes (Sunetra Gupta). Both pieces' plot revolves primarily around the Bhave family and Monideepa. Based on the aforementioned broader themes and questions, this research will offer detailed evidence that illustrates various concepts related to identity and belonging in the diaspora. These include nostalgia, intergenerational conflicts between first-generation migrants (FGMs) and their second-generation migrant children (SG1Is), cultural hybridity and blending during acculturation processes, and the lingering effects of colonial histories in nostalgic accounts from 1947 to the present. They explore this through themes of nostalgia, generational conflicts, and cultural fusions, all hidden within the residue dragged along by colonial pasts. This study focuses primarily on research related to the themes discussed above.

Keywords: Diaspora, Cultural Identity, Multiculturalism, Assimilation, Hybridity and Immigrants

### **Introduction:**

Indian diasporic settings are studied, we will understand how identities are formed and affiliations occur, which also speaks to cultural disequilibrium. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* is a novel by Uma Parameswaran chronicling Mr. Bhave's and her family's experiences when they leave their life in India for Canada. However, Sunetra Gupta's novel *Memories of Rain* tells the story of Monideepa, a Bengali woman in conflict with her identity while dealing with an unhappy marriage to a British man. Both authors tell stories about the complicated emotional duress of feeling your way in a

different culture and simultaneously depict their characters looking to rediscover ground connections. This article will delve into some common themes found in both works, *Walk On* and *Binti*, to analyze the complexities of diasporic identity and the thematic concerns of cultural hybridity that shape their characters. Many of Uma Parameswaran's literary works demonstrate the crippling sense of dislocation, alienation, and longing associated with diasporic experiences. The author has meticulously captured the trials of the Bhave family in her novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*. The Bhaves, an Indian family, restlessly try to navigate their way to Winnipeg after migration. This word symbolizes the amalgamation of cultures Indian culture meeting Canadian civilization. In her book *Memories of Rain*, Sunetra Gupta presents a vivid account that adeptly weaves individual and social layers to create an identity. For the protagonist, Monideepa, establishing a sense of belonging in this world characterized by colonial pasts and cultural dislocation forms an incredibly nuanced terrain. In this article, I aim to explore some of the themes that piqued my interest in the novel, particularly those about the emotional journeys that define Desta, and delve deeper into Rabindranath Tagore's poetry and the cultural distinctions between East and West.

#### The Immigrant Experience:

An Emigrant Experience, *The Portrait of the Diaspora*, displays how an immigrant family (the Bhave family in *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*) feels away from home—physically and emotionally. Monideepa represents an identical encounter in *Memories of Rain*. The Bhave family of Sharad, Savitri, and their children Jyoti, Jayant, and Krish represent some of the many problems experienced by immigrants who try to make a new life in an alien country. Sharad left his comfortable life in India to relocate to a new country, a decision many migrants make as they leave their roots and pursue careers abroad in hopes of a better future. Yet Monideepa's search for identity starts when she marries Anthony in Calcutta and travels to London. The two fathers publish a column in America discussing how families cope with the emotional turbulence of walking away from everything familiar. They are also dealing with grief and searching for a new identity in their place. Parameswaran paints this inner warfare within Sharad vividly through her words; she describes it as the difficult choice that Sharad Bhave and his family made to abandon everything they knew about their luxurious home for a land with which none were familiar. Gupta depicts Moni's sense of alienation while juggling the expectations of her compromised marriage and cultural mores. The dilemmas Moni goes through in this novel can be further explored with postcolonial feminist theory, as they correspond to the struggles many women face when entering life abroad. Moni gives us a glimpse of the gendered dimension of cultural identification and illustrates some of what it means for her to practice agency within patriarchy. What could be read as Gupta undercutting the power of a female immigrant character is her challenge to common misconceptions about women immigrants, represented by Moni's portrayal as both sensitive and robust. Eventually, this representation prompts an identity crisis that breaks the colonial shackles. The Bhave family, including Sharad and Savitri, with their kids Jyoti, Jayant, and Krish, represent the quintessential immigrant journey. Sharad was a nuclear physicist, and Savitri was an Indian

schoolteacher who gave up the comforts of India for Canada to embark on "starting life all over again." And this was the beginning of their struggle with loneliness and homelessness, driven by professional ambition. Lives in transition are often portrayed as the main antagonists of many immigrants' lives, forced to leave their comfort zone for a world saturated with new experiences. In other words, Parameswaran nails the unbearable lightness of Sharad's existential crisis by thinking too hard about selling his home to take a teaching job in another state. This makes sense in conjunction with the central precept of diaspora literature, which postulates that continual displacement is an existential crisis for individuals, and they must grapple with their cultural identities.

#### Cultural Assimilation and Identity Crisis:

The novels explore into the difficulties of cultural assimilation, defining how each generation strives to integrate their identities into various environments. Therefore, these two texts highlight the cultural integration between them. Jyoti and Jayant, the two protagonists of *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, are one such mirror, representing a bitter reflection of what it means to grow up as immigrants born in Canada with experiences that feel so alien, even if manifested right at your doorstep. Director Baljinder Grewal uses the relationship between Jyoti and Pierre, a Caucasian Canadian, as a medium through which to explore cultural assimilation. However, this link can serve as a prism for understanding cultural assimilation. This reconciliation of an Indian background with the desire to be accepted in Canadian society is a textbook instance of how fraught identity formation becomes when it takes place within the diaspora. Monideepa and Anthony's union demonstrates the difficulties associated with cultural integration. It is incumbent upon her to face the reality of her husband's Western illusions, and she can do so only because it helps fulfill his duty. Through and through, the ideological conflict of preserving her culture versus upholding men's patriarchy leaves no breath unstained with pain. Moni is contemplative; she wonders about her sense of identity and the things that compromise it to blend in with everyone else. This is how Gupta beautifully paints her struggle.

#### Nostalgia and memory:

In all its various forms and shades of nostalgia, the past plays a big role in who these characters are. Jayant's childhood memories in India, evoked in the novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, leave us longing for a past we love but cannot possess. However, Parameswaran said the scene stayed with Jayant long after, resurfacing frequently in solitary moments. This comment confirms what Parameswaran said. Nostalgia is a sentiment that stems from the conflict felt by immigrants who experience an internal loss of home and put their hearts in permanent storage. The immigrant's journey is a difficult one. As Moni attempts to navigate this alien society, she is beset by several trials.

The expectations placed upon a foreign woman compound her sense of isolation and worthlessness. Moni's struggle to accommodate herself in her husband's surroundings resulted in the slow erosion of culture, further alienating and isolating her. Touchingly and insightfully, Gupta illustrates Moni's struggle to walk the tightrope between her Bengali heritage and what Western

life expects of her. This is ultimately a perfect example of the complexities that diasporic identity displays. *Memories of Rain* become an essential sphere of emotional refuge, serving as narrative anchors in Moni's varying turmoil. They enable her to connect with the culture of bygone eras, providing her with a sense of coherence amidst the current crisis. Like London, where relevant factors contribute to the erasure of cultural traditions, her remembrance actively challenges these factors. In short, Gupta found that who we grow into depends on the culture and history in which our memory resides.

Furthermore, it's crucial to stay connected to your roots during times of displacement. It takes place in Winnipeg, circa the late 1990s, and serves as an enriching backdrop to illuminate aspects of the Bhave family's culture and complexities. This is the narrative that plays out over time. The cultural battle is best represented by Jyoti and Jayant, who illustrate the disconnect that can emerge between their Indian roots and now living in a Canadian environment. This tension persists, engulfing the surrounding environment. Parameswaran illustrates this tension through an anecdote about Jyoti's partnership with Pierre, a white Canadian man; for instance, how does one adapt to this dynamic? The paper raises contradictory questions about assimilation and the concept of ownership. Pierre is a Canadian citizen. Jyoti's personal and immigrant struggles are reflected in all second-generation immigrants' children. There is always a pull between assimilating into a dominant mainstream culture and one's family or cultural obligations and customs. Jyoti's ordeal is the singular human example of such an encounter. His decision to cancel a planned road trip to make bold decisions for his family is a powerful example of bonding and duty. It reveals the ideals that remain within him despite his shift towards Western individualism. Harrelson reflects, "For me to be a part of human service again is something I would consider an act of God if that were the case, so I will stay here all day where I have no problem." From high family duty to religious harmony, we can gauge the importance of these elements in an occurrence within Indian culture.

#### Conflict between Generations:

These two pieces both show the generational gap in immigrant households. The works also demonstrate knowledge of each sibling's paraphrased cultural background. When Jayant criticizes his siblings and refuses to call their parents with words of affection from Indian culture, it indicates a loss of authenticity, marking this era as a time when he was tearing away at those who disapprove of him. This event is beautifully depicted in the book *Mangoes on Maple Tree*. The book portrays Jayant's unwavering determination to integrate into Canadian society. The person's response could be, "Aiyoh, you have to call everyone Auntie Ahya Uncle or what?" This rejection indicates his struggle to discover himself in a foreign land, an outer expression of his inner turmoil. However, Jyoti's persistent relationship with her home while dating Pierre emphasizes the difficulty of cementing a strong sense of self within the diaspora. The main character's internal struggle is that she wants to be accepted in Canadian culture but also needs to retain her Indian heritage. Set against the quandary of how to protect a cultural legacy in a country that often demands assimilation, the rupture within Mati's family is symbolic of more significant problems faced by immigrant families. In *Memories of Rain*, Moni finds herself caught between the expectations

driven by her Indian heritage and those imposed on her when she becomes married to a British gentleman. Even in her marriage, many of her intergenerational issues stem from her approach to managing her spouse's expectations. Moni and Anthony's clash of values is essential to the cultural tensions characteristic of immigrant families. It also illustrates the challenges of forging an identity in a multicultural environment.

It never feels like an act of courage, but rather the plain-speaking common sense that Pinod Parameswaran and Anu Gupta adapted in English from Badal Sircar's original Marathi screenplay Nikolay (Nikolai) brought to their characters. They don't leave the scene in any meaningful way. The Meeting (*Mangoes on the Maple Tree*) A memorable incident where Jyoti encounters racism and racial slurs from two Canadians during an interview at *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* encapsulates immigrants' profound loneliness. Jyoti is an immigrant to Canada. The rage and disorientation form a beautiful copy of the psychological afflictions that arise from constant stereotypes and the war against immigrants, highlighting an overall problem with being granted acceptance in such a society.

They emphasize the issue of unfamiliarity, which intensifies their hostility towards strangers. She also expresses what sure seems like deep resentment and confusion—a shining example of the emotional scars that arise. Memories of the Rain Novel Moni must grapple with integrating into a society that does not see her as one of them because she is different on many fronts. It is a struggle she faces throughout the story. She is forced to reckon with herself and decide how she wants to operate in a world that frowns upon her racial makeup. This is why, due to the psychological impact of racial bias in society, Moni has to find a way to survive. Gupta beautifully bottles up the psychological baggage discrimination dumps on Moni herself while deftly showing her fight for self-worth.

#### The Future of Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity

Both stories presented a multicultural approach to the future: cultural hybridity—a hopeful message of new identities that can emerge genitally from mixing two cultures. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* follows a similar narrative arc of racial divisions and realizations but takes the setting of Canadian suburbs, where one cannot help but think it could be relevant. This narrative was depicted using a visual of mangoes coming into whole blossoms on maple trees. Jayant's statement, "We must ripen mango trees on maple fruits by planting evergreens and oaks with deep roots," further illustrates how cultural blending could coexist with evolving identities. When Moni decides to travel far from home, deep into the jungle, she reappropriates her cultural heritage and thereby reappropriates herself. The contrast between her memories and the stark reality she finds herself in reveals just how emotionally complex an environment is. Gupta's presentation of Moni's return home indicates that cultural heritage is critical to recovery. This shows that no matter how difficult and painful it is to adjust to removing your foundation, you can still find yourself one way or another.

Conclusion:

The diasporic experience: Celebrating Ambiguity While the diaspora has emerged as the dominant identity for migration, it would do everyone good to acknowledge that no one depersonalizes us more than we allow them to. Uma Parameswaran and Sunetra Gupta are the authors of *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* (1992) and *Memories of Rain* (2009). These are stories set amidst the Indian diaspora, exploding identity and depicting cultural fusion wonderfully and effortlessly. The *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*, authored by Uma Parameswaran, is a brilliant exploration of what it means to be of Indian origin and not belong in India. As the author walks us through the Bhave family's experience, she flags many of these feelings of isolation and helplessness in a foreign place but also triumphs over the willpower of individuals trying to define themselves anew. Trending now: Therefore, by describing the incidents within the Bhave family, she opens up opportunities for individual enlightenment, social engagement, and connection. In *Memories of Rain*, Sunetra Gupta skillfully navigates through various cultural stories, effortlessly weaving snippets into the senses, memories, and life experiences that many displaced people across the globe can identify with. The stories come from various ancestries. Love and betrayal also guide Monideepa in Gupta's exploration of self-worth and the hegemony ('cultural violence') in relationships based on colonial institutions. Monideepa is happy with this journey. It is a story of remembrance and longing for oneself in the complications of contemporary reality. The story ends on a positive note, with Moni realizing that she is back to the place from where they began their journey, representing rejuvenation and bringing one into peace with oneself. The stories paint clear and powerful imagery of displacement and loneliness that the Bhave family members and Monideepa have to undergo, thus adding layers to their emotional journey. While acknowledging the motivation of individuals striving to establish a new identity far from their home, the stories also highlight the difficulties of distancing oneself. But to these two meandering texts, both of which can only hope to grapple with what is so elusive about being an immigrant (which might be that it's contemptible, first by citizens, then even your fellow citizens), tell us a little bit more about the qualities and strains of life as a migrant. They say that no matter how difficult the journey, it is an opportunity to evolve personally and socially, thanks to a new feeling of home.

#### Suggestions

1. In intersectionality research, the characters' diasporic identities can be analyzed based on race, gender, and class. One might uncover their intricate identities by understanding the impact of these situations on individuals' lives.
2. Some modern diasporic authors, like Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai, write about cultural identity, displacement, and belonging. Comparative analyses of their works might help us understand how different themes and points of view affect encounters between diasporic people.
3. Literary Techniques: Both writers employ symbolism, imagery, and narrative structure, which might illuminate their connection to identity and belonging.

4. Cultural origins: Delving into the authors' cultural backgrounds, such as their upbringing in India and experiences as immigrants, can provide profound insights into how these factors shape the narratives, characters, and themes in their works.
5. Analyse Second-Generation Immigrant Experiences: Both works vividly depict the unique challenges faced by second-generation immigrants, such as the struggle to balance their cultural heritage with assimilation into Western society. For example, exploring Jyoti's conflict with Pierre in *'Mangoes on the Maple Tree'* showcases the complexities of navigating dual identities.
6. Analyzing how diverse audiences react to the characters' challenges using reader-response theory can reveal the works' societal significance.

#### Findings:

1. The novels *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* and *Memories of Rain* delve into individuals' challenges when adapting to a new culture while striving to preserve their cultural heritage.
2. Nostalgia: Both novels depict individuals grappling with the emotional turmoil caused by their separation from their place of origin and the cherished recollections that shape their identity.
3. Intergenerational Conflict: The disparity between generations in immigrant families impacts the characters' relationships and perspectives on their cultural heritage, highlighting the intricate nature of transmitting diaspora culture.
4. Cultural Hybridity: Both authors believe that the amalgamation of many cultural influences has the potential to engender novel and multifaceted identities.
5. Racism and Discrimination: The main characters' encounters with racism highlight the challenges of fitting into a diverse society and the profound emotional impact it has on their sense of self.
6. Both narratives applaud the resilience and adaptability of diaspora communities in overcoming challenges and forging new cultural and social identities in their adopted homelands.

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