

The Grief of Immigrants: Unfolding Complexities of Indian Family in Badami's *The Hero's Walk*

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Abstract

Anita Rau Badami is a well-known Indian writer who now resides in Canada. She is a member of the Indian Diaspora. She is the author of four books, all of which deal with the complexities of Indian families, immigration difficulties and the cultural gaps that exist between Indians and westerners. The novel *The Hero's Walk* addresses several important topics, such as the grief and loss suffered by immigrants. Maya, the story's central character, was born into a Brahmin family in Thoturpuram, moved to Canada for further education, and fell in love with Alan. Unfortunately, after Maya and Alan tied the knot, both of them perished in a car accident, leaving their seven-year-old daughter Nandana as an orphan in an unfamiliar nation. The author Badami does an excellent job of conveying the pain that comes with immigration through this work. This research paper emphasises the tragic, miserable, and pitiful situation of immigrants and their families.

Keywords: Grief, Immigrants, Culture, Agony, Family, Assimilation

Introduction

Anita Rau Badami is recognised as a leading figure in the Indo-Canadian writing community. She is the author of four books, all of which illustrate the intricacies of immigrant life, including Indian family dynamics, the cultural divide, and the challenges faced by Indians after moving to western countries. She was born in the year 1961 in the Indian state of Odisha. She attended the University of Madras for her undergraduate studies and the University of Calgary for her post graduate studies. She has been honoured with a number of prizes, such as the Marian Engel Award and the Regional Common Wealth Writer's Prize, which was awarded to her for her work *The Hero's Walk*.

Literature is a multi-coloured and multi-faceted portrayal of society, depicting all of the gloomy, sunny, and murky aspects of human nature that are evoked out of the complex web of interactions in life. It outlines current challenges, the contemporary dilemma of mankind facing, and the inter-relationship issues that hamper human life. The phenomenon of migration in India's history and society has been a distinguishing characteristic, driven by factors such as rising population gaps, socioeconomic inequalities, ecological factors, development initiatives, and conflicts. The migration movement of people directly results from the ease with which technology, transportation, and communication may be accessed. Because man is a slave to the joys of materialism, he migrates to a distant place in search of higher education and the satisfaction of his economic wants. Immigrants often adopt the customs of the area in which they have lived in an effort to raise their standard of living and increase their chances of success. As a consequence of this, their identity is both hybrid and ambiguous. They keep the traditions of their origin while also adjusting to the way of life of the host nation. Children of immigrants who are unable to integrate successfully into either culture can develop serious mental health issues and become socially isolated as a result.

The Hero's Walk, the second book that Badami has written, is about the struggles that families confront and how, in the end, they may find peace with one another. In this novel, Rau illustrates and communicates the emotional conflicts that are prevalent in the South Asian diaspora. The tale is reflective of both Canadian society and culture. Eliza Mc Carthy asked Rau a series of questions regarding the novel, and one of those questions was concerning the choice of its title. In response, Rau recalled the reasoning behind her decision to include the word "walk" in the title of the book. She explains, "When I was little, I observed that the hero in dance-dramas often walked in with this strutting swagger. When the demons appeared, they all utilised the same style of stride, although there were various embellishments... It seemed to me that the manner in which the clown in the performance

would stumble, fall, and the trip might serve as a good metaphor for the way in which each of us lives our own life.... My view is that there is not a single person in this world who exemplifies the concepts of perfect goodness, perfect evil, or perfect intelligence. In our day-to-day lives, I believe that each one of us embodies all of those characteristics. (Rau Badami)

The book focuses on the Brahmin family of Sripathi Rao and their lives. He is a press reporter from an upper-middle-class family who is having difficulty fulfilling all his duties to his family. He is fifty-seven years old and has a family that consists of his widowed mother Ammaya, his single sister Putti, his wife Nirmala, the daughter Maya, and son Arun. Maya is a bright and loving girl. She did well in school, earned a degree with honours from Madras University, and then received a scholarship to study at a prestigious university in America. Her parents were very proud of her. Before she left the country, she married Prakash Bhat through an arranged marriage. Prakash is an educated young man from a good family who studied in Philadelphia at the time. However, three years into her studies, she met a man named Alan Baker, with whom she fell so in love that she married him. She wrote a letter home informing her parents “I want to cancel my engagement to Prakash. I am in love with Alan Baker, whom I have known for two years. We want to get married and with your blessings”(109). Because of this, Sripathi and his daughter Maya have a very tumultuous relationship. He is quite angry with his daughter and said “never show your face in this house again. Never” (113). Maya continued to write letters, which Nirmala read, but Sripathi did not. Maya would call and talk to her mother. Sripathi refused to talk to her and wouldn’t let her visit. He says “Dishonour was what she had given them in return for the independence they had granted her” (113).

Sripathi Rao is on the balcony of the big house when the phone rings. He doesn’t answer it the first time, nor does anyone else. When the phone rings a second time, however, no one is on the other end when Sripathi answers. When it rings a third time, Sripathi picks up and receives bad news, news that shakes him to his core: his daughter, Maya and her husband, Alan, have died in a car accident in Canada, leaving their seven-year-old daughter Nandana an orphan. The news is a terrible blow to the family, which has already been struggling through years of strife and latent hostilities towards one another. As Nandana's legal guardian, Sripathi is the one who makes the journey to Vancouver in order to bring Nandana back to her mother's homeland.

The book describes Indian and Canadian culture, the environment of Toturpuram, casteism, patriarchal set-up, political situation, beliefs in astrology, Indian rituals, the question of settling a foreigner in Indian tradition, and shifts in individual values, aspirations, and ways of life. It weaves

together the events of the recent past with those of the recent past that are brought to light via the recollections of the characters. Within the same chapter, Badami narrates events that took place in India and Canada independently from one another, using a creative new technique.

Nandana, who had grown in a global setting, needed to acclimate to the regional and traditional atmosphere of India. Nandana, having an Indian name and being of Indian descent, is oblivious to the customs that are observed by Indian households. Nandana's initial hatred is directed at her own grandpa, who was required by law to adopt her after she overheard a conversation between her parents in which Sripathi Rao discussed his opposition to her parents' love marriage. When Maya would show Nandana photographs of her house in India, Nandana would often ask her whether the house had any ghosts living in it.

Putti gained the confidence to rebel against her mother. She began speaking out against the myriad cultural stereotypes that existed. She is a girl from an Indian Orthodox Brahmin family, yet she has managed to marry a Dalit boy despite her family being from the Brahmin caste. It was a move that she took, but it was backed by the contemporary (global) ideas of Nandana

In *The Hero's Walk*, readers come to know Canada through Nandana. Nandana experiences all the characteristics of diaspora mentioned by Willian Safran, where the idea of moving to India creates fear in her. The idea of home fills the hearts of Nandana with nostalgia. For Nandana, "home" is, "250 Melfa Lane, Vancouver". BC, Canada, North America, the World" (p. 16). To her, Canada is an attractive place to lead a peaceful life. It is home to her, but she sees herself as a foreign person in India. Nandana struggles hard to have a balance between the east and the west. Life with her grandparents is entirely different from her life in Canada with her parents. Nandana is assimilated and acculturated by the social and cultural phenomenon. In India, she begins her protest through muteness since everyone is a stranger to her, and she believes that speaking to strangers is against the wishes of her parents and it may break the charm of her parent's survival. Nandana attends Girl's Christian school in India, which seems entirely different from attending a public, co-gender elementary school in Canada. In her school in India, she does not even talk to her friends in school.

Badami has successfully portrayed all aspects of Indian culture by depicting characteristics such as Brahmin Street, Sripathi's emotional mother, a normal unmarried sister living at home, an orthodox household, stringent customs, and many other aspects. In the novel, both Nirmala and Ammayya foster an attachment to their home, viewing it as their usual range of familiarity for various

reasons. Nirmala, who partakes in a deep-rooted stable relationship with her significant other, Sripathi, views her home as her recognisable internal space and safe place. Maya's demise makes Nirmala mindful of her limitations as an Indian housewife who neglects to settle on choices concerning her home and her girl as she has been apprehensive all the time to confront her better half and talk about Maya's absolution with him.

As a writer who has lived in both India and Canada, Badami has a unique perspective on life in both countries. In an interview, Badami remarked that...

“I find that the distance gives me perspective and passion. I was twenty-nine years in India and ten years here, so I have a foot in India and a couple of toes here. I am both doomed and blessed, to be suspended between two worlds, always looking back, but with two gorgeous places to inhabit, in my imagination or my heart.”

The aforementioned comment provides a vivid depiction of the environment in which Anita Rau resides. Through her statement that she possesses a connection to both Canada and India, she acknowledges her own experience with multiculturalism.

One of the thing that make *The Hero's Walk*; most intriguing aspects of a novel, is the way that it flips the conventional narrative of immigration. Readers in Canada are used to reading stories of Indian immigrants learning how to adjust to life in North America. However, having a Canadian who must adapt to living in the rural areas of India is an unusual occurrence. In this manner, Badami toys with the preconceived belief that this kind of immigration always travels in the same direction.

In the majority of Indian-Canadian tales, Canada is portrayed as an unfamiliar, alien nation where inhabitants must learn to adjust to new ways of life. In *The Hero's Walk*, however, little Nandana recalls Canada as the place that she once called home. Instead of being anchored in India's rural customs or cookery, the immigrants' sense of nostalgia here takes the shape of chocolate doughnuts and thick winter parks. It depicts Canada in a manner that is different from how readers are accustomed to seeing it, and it enables readers to experience the immigration process from the perspective of someone applying for asylum. Because of this, *The Hero's Walk* is an absolutely unique addition to the canon of Canadian literary works.

Conclusion

The Hero's Walk articulates the experiences of globalisation and transnationalism that are prevalent in today's society. Badami has successfully portrayed all aspects of Indian culture by depicting characteristics such as Brahmin Street, Sripathi's emotional mother, a normal unmarried sister living at home, an orthodox household, stringent customs, and many other aspects. Nandana experiences diverse conditions. Initially, she hated her new environment, but later on, she made herself accept India as her home. Nandana was trapped between two different cultural backgrounds, one the host culture and the other the home culture, which creates a huge disparity in the construction of her identity. Canada's social and cultural upbringing greatly prejudices Nandana in *The Hero's Walk*. Thus, she finds herself driven out to India. But for the sake of survival in her mother's land, she finally accepts its values.

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