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**A Portrayal of Badami's Women Protagonists as Moons in *Tamarind Mem*
and
*The Hero's Walk***

Abstract

The flavour of originality among the Indian women writers has been ever dynamic and extending due to the wide variety of cultural, social and economic patterns in India. Anita Rau Badami occupies a unique position among the contemporary Indian writers, especially women writers in English. She successfully deals with the struggle and adjustments of the vast majority of middle-class Indian women.

This paper tries to establish the fact that women have always been proving themselves the right cause of success in many families. Though they face several challenges both in familial and professional front, strive through toughest situations and undergo serious struggle, they ultimately emerge triumphant with consistent endurance and perseverance. They are the main reason for the bliss and joy that is established towards the end. With lot of patience they swim across the sea of challenges and blow breezes of comfort and contentment in the lives of their people as a moon

does after a sunny noon. This idea is discussed by studying the characters of Saroja and Nirmala from Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and *The Hero's Walk* respectively. They are also established as moons during the noon of the respective families.

Key Words: Familial and Professional front, bliss, perseverance, moon of the noon.

A Portrayal of Badami's Women Protagonists as Moon in *Tamarind Mem* and

***The Hero's Walk* --- Full Paper**

The world is full of suffering; it is also full of overcoming it. - Helen Keller

The statement quoted above is completely true with reference to every woman, particularly in Indian context. It is so astonishing to observe the unique levels of patience women possess to undergo any kind of struggle at any kind of situation. A woman's nature is presented by many women writers in great diversity and in numerous conflicting occurrences. As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks, "There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries."

A traditional heroine stands for a conservative and passive woman, whereas the 'female hero' implies the concept of an active female protagonist who does not surrender to the male protagonist. Occasionally she seems to be yielding; but she takes hold of the situations gradually, sets things right and proves her ability like moon, which seems to be covered by clouds, but makes one feel its presence by spreading pleasantness.

Anita Rau Badami's Saroja and Nirmala are exemplary in this regard. She is one of the influential women writers in the sub-continent with vibrant themes and unique characterization. She is an eminent woman novelist who contributes to the emancipation of woman's status as her novels have tenderly strong female protagonists who deal with their peculiar problems. She created a few female protagonists who fight against the situations they come across in the male chauvinistic society. Badami says, "I didn't want to make her the stereotypical boring, submissive Indian woman because most women I know aren't that way." (Interview)

Badami's female protagonists are Saroja, a sour-tongued woman in *Tamarind Mem*, and Nirmala, a docile, traditional Brahmin woman, in *The Hero's Walk*. It is a known fact that a woman is subordinated to man throughout her life. Preventing a woman from getting equal education like men and confining her within the household is seriously but smartly condemned by Badami in her

writings. She proves to the world how her women reveal their inherent abilities by solving the problems both in the familial and professional front. Hence her female heroes are not only just as good as male heroes are, but better.

In *Tamarind Mem*, Saroja is surrounded by deep rooted indigenous and family traditions. “My father goes to work every morning because it is his duty as a man of the house to earn money for his family; as children to obey them, respect their every word.” (TM., p-156) She is deprived of higher education as well as an option to choose her future path. “A woman can read and study all she pleases; her words mean nothing after all. So, why you are wasting your youth and our money? Get married.” (TM., p-158) When she expressed her desire to become a doctor, it was not permitted by her family. “No, I want to be a doctor... I want to be an Ayurvedic doctor.” (TM., p-158-159) She has to obey their decision in the matters of her education and marriage also. “A woman without a husband is like sand without the river.”(TM., p-158) Even after marriage she has to suppress her emotional feelings towards her husband, Vishwa, who is much pokerfaced and emotionless to her. “I marry a man who is already old, who fulfills his obligation to society by acquiring a wife. I am merely a symbol of what duty completed.” (TM., p-228) Throughout her life, Saroja compromises for everything, though fulfilling her duties and responsibilities as a wife and mother. Her inner self always encounters discontentment, denial and dejection. She could not rest till her daughters are admitted in the right schools where proper English is effectively taught and academics are properly valued. Though her husband took little interest in such responsibilities, she hasn't taken a back step. She tries to witness success and contentment at least in the lives of her daughters as she has missed them in her personal life. She chooses the path her which daughters prefer. Ultimately, she could emancipate the next generation women ie., her daughters and experiences the contentment of success. “They are grown women now, with worlds of their own, and decisions they alone can make. No, I leave them alone.” (TM., p-262) Then she starts on long tours visiting many places in India with a permanent railway pass. “I do not belong to anyone now. I have cut loose and love only from a distance. My daughters can fulfill their own destinies.” (TM., p-266) She enjoys the bliss of life in the journeys amidst people who are fascinated to listen to her experiences, disappointed hopes and aspirations.

The character, Nirmala in *The Hero's Walk* is a woeful wife in a traditional Brahmin family headed by her reticent, patriarch husband Sripathi. He is waiting for retirement from the copywriting job, for which he has little passion. Nirmala's orthodox mother-in-law Ammayya,

spinster sister-in-law Putti, her son Arun who has no regular job even at the age of twenty-eight and her daughter Maya a professional medical person living in Vancouver are her family. Nirmala, who is surrounded by such a disgusting set of typical family members, tries to swim against the tide with lot of patience and hope. Maya marries her fiancé, a person from Vancouver, after her engagement with another young man of her father's choice. It is an inexcusable offense in the eyes of Sripati. "If you persist in doing this foolish thing, never show your face in this house again. Never." (THW., p-113) From then he excommunicates her from their family lineage and dictates the same terms to his family. "She is dead for me."(THW., p-113) But after the sudden death of Maya in Vancouver, Nirmala repents a lot for being silent and not extending at least moral support to her daughter for seven long years. "Your fault, your fault, your fault! You killed my daughter. You drove her away from me! You! You! You!"(THW., p-35) For the sake of Sripati's feelings, she has missed many important relations and emotional moments in her life. "I am tired of behaving myself."(THW., p-35) After Maya's death, a new arrival in Nirmala's life is her granddaughter Nandana. Nandana's arrival gradually changes Nirmala's outlook towards her husband, her family and life as a whole. She becomes a self-made woman who boosts her courage, confidence and progressive thoughts. She transforms her patience and passivity into assertiveness and sovereignty. In short, Badami presents Nirmala as an unpredictable woman who, while fulfilling her familial duties and responsibilities as a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a mother, has revealed required stubbornness to face a few questions and enough power in making a few decisions. Her resilience, perseverance and adaptability finally make her a survivor, after Maya's death and a pragmatist when she initiates the marriage between Putti and Gopala erasing caste boundaries. Thus, her daughter's loss is compensated by her granddaughter's presence.

Nirmala's heroic walk in the family's tale gives a bright future for the next generation women Nandana and Putti. Nirmala's optimism and patience make her a successful conqueror. She gets her sister-in-law, Putti married to Gopal and reassures Nandana that the people of the Big House love her ardently. She even convinces Sripati to sell the house and get relief from the debts he has to clear. "I am selling this house. I have decided. Yes, that is what I shall do." (THW., p-322) She persuaded and convinced Arun to work for a firm in Delhi; thus, making him share family's responsibility. "It is a small job in Delhi. An environmental group - a non-governmental, so the pay is not great – but it is what I want to do. I will be able to send some money home; I don't need much for myself." (THW., p-322) She herself finds enough time and energy to attend

to Nandana in whom she sees her dead daughter. Thus, she emerges as the real hero of the novel who gets transformed from a meek, timid house wife into a decisive and sensible woman.

Thus, her success is the victory of a modern middle-class woman encircled in the shackles of patriarchy and pseudo-status. Nirmala's successes set her family stable. Their family bond is strengthened and there is love and respect sprouting among them. Badami never wants her women to be meek and submissive in the male-chauvinistic society. Saroja and Nirmala are perfect examples of such unseen psychological power of the women. One should not take a woman's silence for ignorance; her calmness cannot be taken for granted and her kindness is never her weakness. As C. Joy Bell observes "The strength of a woman is not measured by the impact that all her hardships in life have had on her; but the strength of a woman is measured by the extent of her refusal to allow those hardships to dictate her and who she becomes".

In the light of the discussion presented above, Anita Rau's woman is like the moon providing much comfort, solace and peace in the noon's struggle. (Hardships and challenges)

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