

Exploring the Diasporic Identity in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind woman* and *The Hero's Walk*

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Abstract: Canadian literature is now increasingly being recognized as a multi-cultural one. The emergence of women writers across the culture forms a significant feature in Diasporic writings. Their writings try to voice the hopes, aspirations and frustrations of the people with empathy and authenticity. These women writers bring with them the rich baggage of cultural, linguistic, racial and religious diversity. Though varied in culture, they share a deep interest in evolving female culture and emancipation of women. One such writer is Anita Rau Badami. Her writing is characterized by cross cultural conflicts. She attempts to explore the nuances of Diasporic consciousness by the picturesque portrayal of women characters. All her novels suggest to a form of diasporic identity that is not necessarily bound to transnational border crossings. Rather it thematizes the ways in which the effects of environmental and economic global restructuring moulds the character's national and cultural identity. This article aims to study how these two features of Diaspora fashions the writings of Badami and thereby forming the patterns of diasporic identification.

Keywords: Diaspora, Indo-Canadian writing, Expatriate Sensibility.

In recent years, a radical change has come over the feminist fiction, as it tends to reflect social, cultural and political theme. The main task of the woman writers across cultures is to define and redefine the feminine personality. They concentrate more on the cultural conflicts and the emerging female identity in various ethnic groups. Though varied in culture, they share a deep interest in evolving female culture and emancipation of women. Thus the emergence of women writers across the culture forms a significant feature in diasporic writing. Anita Rau Badami is the most recent name in the Diaspora space of literature. She has emerged as a prominent women writer in the contemporary Canadian fiction. In her novels, *Tamarind woman* and *The Hero's Walk*, she tries to explore the subtler shades of diasporic identities within socio-cultural heritages. Her writing is characterized by cross cultural conflicts. Her works remain basically rooted in Indian ethos although the space and milieu expand to cover two geographical and cultural spaces. Though Emigration is the theme of all her books, her uniqueness lies in exploring the Diasporic Identity. The Concepts of "homeland" and "transnational mobility" have become a common subject in Contemporary Diaspora theory. In fact both are counted as dominant elements in the formation of diasporic identity. All her novels suggest to a

form of diasporic that is not necessarily bound to transnational border crossings. Rather it thematizes the ways in which the effects of environmental and economic global structures transform the social life of characters and thereby makes a profound impact upon the individual's identity.

Her Second novel *The Hero's Walk* represents the formation of diasporic identities as an empowering process shaped by multiple changes on the local level. The main protagonist is Sripathi Rao, an advertising Copywriter and most of the events take place in a small town in Toturpuram in Tamil Nadu. In the midst of globally induced environmental catastrophes and local processes of social disintegration, Sripathi Rao, the father of the family has to cope up with the death of his estranged daughter, Maya and the arrival of his Canadian Granddaughter, Nandana. He undergoes a trauma in bringing Nandana back for he feels that it is his responsibility to travel to Canada to collect the reluctant, confused girl. The plane and the train journey from the pacific shore to the coast of Bay of Bengal is a wretched trail for both of them. In fact the whole novel examines how Sripathi's multiple displacements and rerooting and Nandana's reversed journey to India mediate diaspora through the character's everyday life experiences and locally defined events. *The Hero's Walk* dramatizes the formation of diasporic identities as an interdependent process of individual self-discovery and social reconnection on a local rather than global level. Although the novel explores national and local configurations of diasporic space, its narrative centers on Sripathi's development of diasporic consciousness. When Sripathi and his family receive the news of Maya's and her husband's fatal car accident, they experience a dramatic upheaval. First his daughter's death requires him to travel to Canada to arrange for his granddaughters' reverse journey to India, a move that marks her as doubly diasporic. Similarly Sripathi's journey to Vancouver turns out to be an experience of profound Psychic and cultural dislocation. It also suggests Sripathi's own emerging diasporic condition. Not only must he confront his own fear of a world that is no longer knowable to him, but more importantly he must face his granddaughter who has been literally silenced by the trauma of her parent's death. Thus to Sripathi, becoming diasporic entails that he recognize the impossibility of stemming the tide of global modernity through an act of personal self enhancement that prevents him from reconnection with his dead daughter, his family and larger community. He himself says that he 'could never be sure of anything in the world again, not even his own body' (162). To him his body denotes the totality of his being "the sum of all that happens in the world around (213). Here, the constitution of diasporic identity involves processes of both emplacement and embodiment. Sripathi's identity is achieved by the conditions of Social and cultural displacement. He never realized the value of a passport and that is why he wonders: Why would he when he had never left the country or even needed any identification in this town of birth? (126). In another occasion he says: What led those people to

leave the familiar and what was it that pulled his own daughter into the unknown world beyond the protective walls of home and family? (126).

Nandana, of the other hand experience the instability of her home environment after her parent's death. Her instability is questioned when Sripathi takes her to India. It further complicates the ways in which Nandana negotiates 'home' as a locus of displacement. This experience of cultural disorientation literally shapes diasporic identity. In this novel Nandana becomes an agent of 'unhomely' carrying within her the global realities of displacement and uncertainties of belonging. In contrast to Nandana, Maya acts as the novel's most Conventional diasporic character, who lives as a haunting presence in her father's and brother's consciousness. By defying her father's wishes and forsaking the family duties, Maya on one hand initiates her own transformation into a diasporic subject and on the other hand, she confers Sripathi with the changing reality of social and personal. Both aspects facilitate Sripathi's diasporic transformation. In short *The Hero's Walk* Clearly explains notions such as ancestral homeland and transnational mobility as foundationalist determinants of diaphora. It elucidates the ways in which becoming diasporic relates to the rituals of everyday life and necessitates the abdication of one's privileges of gender and cultural location. Particularly through the figure of Sripathi, the novel suggests that being diasporic is not only cultural given but also a mode of system operating with in a cultural, historical canvas of understanding and misunderstanding. Her another novel *Tamarind woman* exemplifies the notion of homeland and identity on a different plane. In this novel Badami tries to explain how the displaced writer goes back to locate the centre of her knowledge to systematize and synthesize the experiences of her travel with the demands of fictional world.

Tamarind woman is a sweeping story of two generations of woman namely Kamini and her sour-tongued mother Saroja. Both have different perceptions about the same incidence. The novel unfolds itself through Kamini, who identifies her mother's feminist impulses that operate within her mind. The novel is actually an authentic documentation of female diasporic experience. Kamini, who has settled in Canada, recounts her childhood days. She learns to adjust herself as a daughter of a railway civil servant who takes the family from one railway colony to another. As a child, she fails to understand the sour tongue of her mother. But now as an immigrant she understands the reason for her mother's erratic behaviour. She feels that her father is responsible for mother's sour tongue. She persuades her mother to come to Canada, where she could find happiness. Throughout the novel, Kamini tells what she heard from her mother but in the process superimposes her own revisioning on it. Kamini by retelling her mother's life embarks on a search of Diasporic identity. The narrator's reconception of feminist experiences as related by her mother is redolent of Badami's own position as a woman writer obsessed with the refashioning of Diasporic identity.

The second part of the novel presents a different view as Saroja tells how Indian culture was vastly different in past years. She couldn't achieve her

dream of becoming a doctor and moreover her marriage is not a happy one. She is subjected to new rules and regulations after marriage. Only after her husband's death, she is able to come out of the clutches and does what she pleases. In the end, Saroja shocks everyone by making an unconventional choice. She sells her house and journeys across India alone by train. She wants to see the Country on her own terms. Actually Saroja's journey is an odyssey, without an end. It can be defined as 'a new voyage to know the unknown'. To Saroja, the most Significant development in her character is the journey undertaken to discover her self identity. She herself says: I do not belong to anyone now. I have cut loose and love only from a distance (266). Like an aged parent, She will also: Shook her heads over youthful follies and thought quietly about the journey yet unknown that stretched before their callused feet (266). The journey provides not only freedom but also a unique identity to Saroja. Thus the formation of identity becomes crucial point in Diaspora. In the context of Canadian Literary criticism Victor Ramraj explains that diasporic writings are invariably concerned with the individual community's attachment to the centrifugal homeland. He actually locates the idea of the homeland at the centre of communally and individually defined diasporic consciousness. In order to avoid the tension between Diasporas and homeland, the diasporic writer rewrites his/her texts as journeys to give fresh meaning to the condition of being uprooted these writes make their characters as constantly moving from one place to another. Badami too makes use of Journey metaphor to show the restlessness of Saroja, who is constantly on the move. She tours across India not to proclaim her newly achieved freedom. She actually undergoes a spiritual journey in the pursuit of her own identity, which is characterized by the social environs of modern India she tries to see life as a continuous quest, an unending journey of diasporic consciousness. Thus Badami's attempt to establish Diasporic identity which is central to her fictional exercise provides as an important link in the overall feminist literary tradition.

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