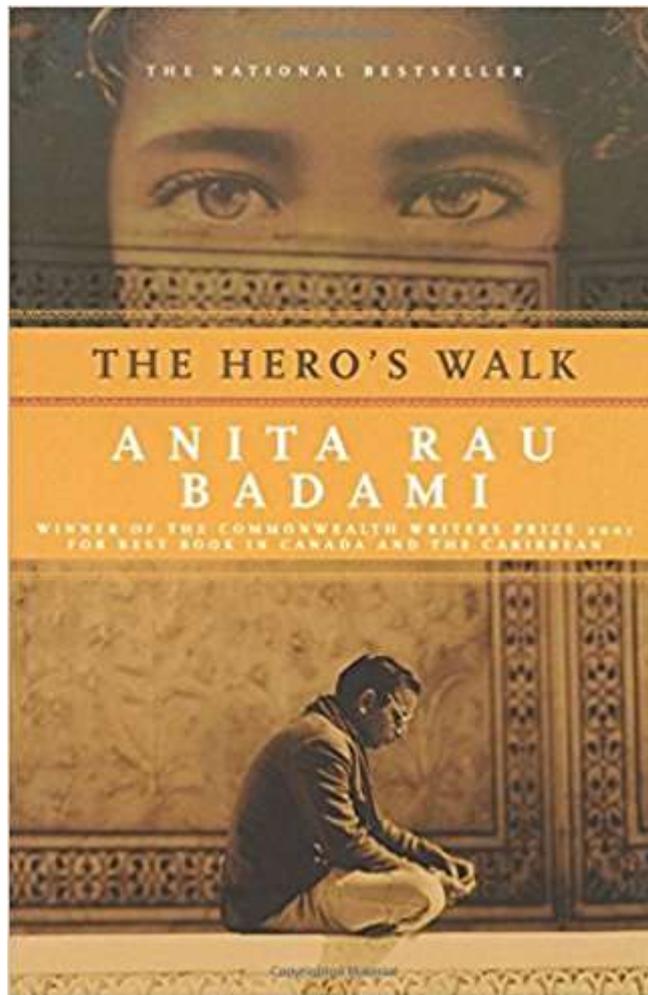


**Dislocated Self:  
A Study of Immigrant Psyche in Anita Rau Badami's  
*The Hero's Walk***

**C. Karthika, Ph.D. Research Scholar**



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.ca/Heros-Walk-Anita-Rau-Badami/dp/0676973604>

**Abstract**

Migration of people is on the fast move due to the easy access of technologies, transport and communication. Man, being a slave to the pleasures of materialism, shifts to the foreign land for greater education and economic needs. With the hope of bringing change in their life style, the immigrants tend to replicate the manners of the settled land. This in turn makes their identity hybrid and ambivalent. They maintain the tradition of the homeland and also adapt the life style of the host country. The children of these immigrants who are unable to cope with either culture face severe

psychic problems and withdraw from the society. The present paper highlights the mental trauma of the second-generation immigrant and the inability to accept the ways of life in the ancestor's land, India.

**Keywords:** Anita Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk*, Second generation immigrant, family, dislocation, identity.

### **Anita Rau**

Anita Rau Badami is one of the prominent Indo – Canadian writers. She has written four novels which depict the immigrants' life in Canada. She is born in Odisha, in 1961, India. She earned her B.A in the University of Madras and M.A in the University of Calgary. Cultural conflict, double consciousness and quest for identity are some of the prominent themes that are discussed in her novels. Badami's portrayal of women in her fictions explicates the position of women in India and also in the multinational societies. She is the recipient of many awards, including Marian Engel Award for a woman writer and Regional Common Wealth Writer's Prize for her novel *The Hero's Walk*. She now lives in Canada.

### ***The Hero's Walk***

The novel *The Hero's Walk* describes the different individual's quest for identity, is the just the psychic face of an individual. It is the inherent nature, which develops over the period of time. Identity is shaped unconsciously. In Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, self-actualization contains search for identity. Ammayya is an old aged widow, who has the constant fear of being in seclusion in her own home. She endeavors to seek the attention of other members in the family. Nirmala, who is a humble and the traditional wife of Sripathi Rao, asserts her identity through the traditional dance, Barathanatyam. Putti, a forty-two-year-old spinster, have still the hopes of getting a perfect groom. Being a dutiful daughter, she always obeys her mother. She sacrifices her life for the sake of her mother, Ammayya. But in the end, she carves niche for herself in protesting against her mother's wish to marry Gopala. The novel also highlights how a seven-year-old girl Nandana tries to make out her own identity in the alien land, India. Thus, the women such as Ammayya, Nirmala and Putti are seeking out their identities in their unique way.

### **Sripathi Rao**

Sripathi Rao is a fifty-eight-year-old man, working in an advertising company in Toturpuram. When his daughter, Maya has got the prestigious fellowship in America, Sripathi Rao feels delighted that Maya would fulfill the dreams of Ammayya. But Nirmala, who is deeply rooted in Indian tradition, never accepts her unmarried daughter to go to the alien land before getting married to a nice Indian boy. Before leaving to America, she is betrothed with Prakash Bhat, who is working in Philadelphia. Prakash's father says, "We only want a decent girl from a good family, one who knows how to fit into the life in the west without losing sight of our Indian values" (100). When Maya goes to America, everything is alien to her. She hates the culinary items and the ambience of the alien land. "She was lonely in the beginning and didn't like the smell of meet when her room-mates cooking in the shared kitchen" (105). Maya writes the series of letters to her father frequently. She writes about her roommates, about, her professors, her assignments, food and so on. She yearns for the pickle made by her mother. She loves its acidic taste, prepared in the indigenous way.

### **Maya's Memories and Metamorphosis**

Life is not static. It has its own twists and turns, and no one can escape from the changes that

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life has imposed upon every individual. Though Maya is constantly made to remember the Indian rituals and traditions, she could not escape from becoming a hybrid individual. Sripathi Rao writes to Maya, "...your Mamma tells me to inform you that the *Yugadi* festival is on the twentieth of March this year. You are to wash your hair, say a small prayer to the assortment of gods we believe in and eat a small helping of something bitter mixed with something sweet" (105). Maya gets acclimatized to the alien culture over the period of time. She did not reply to the letters sent by her father. After a long gap of two years, Maya writes a letter, informing that she is in love with Alan Baker, a white man and she wishes to marry him. She wishes to get permission from her parents to celebrate her wedding in Toturpuram.

Sripathi Rao is shocked to see the metamorphosis of Maya from a traditional Indian girl to a matured anglicized woman. Sripathi Rao's mind is filled with suspicions. He thinks, "... Had Maya slept with the fellow? Was she pregnant was the way she was marrying him? How could she share her bed before marriage?" (110). Sripathi Rao advises Maya that adapting the western culture and marrying a foreigner will ruin the reputation of the family. Maya does not mind her father's words. "She explained, in an equally reasonable tone that she could not change her mind about loving somebody and wanting to spend the rest of her life with him" (113). Sripathi Rao is furious and dismisses Maya from his family. He drives her completely from his mind. He says, "She is dead for me" (113). He never thinks about Maya anymore. He avoids reading the letters and seeing the photographs sent by Maya with her family from Vancouver.

### **Inherited Indianness**

Though Maya lives a contented life with Alan, she is aware of the Indianness that she has inherited from her birth. She tells her daughter Nandana about the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, Hanuman and so on. Maya has given the portrait of the goddess Lakshmi to Nandana. She says, "She will always look after you and make sure you are okay" (22). Through these stories Maya makes Nandana know about the Indian myth, tradition and culture, but being a child, Nandana could not fully understand the Indianness. Moreover, she cannot escape from the despair of becoming an orphan. The sudden death of Nandana's parents has left her in a complete chaos and stranded in life.

### **Nandana**

Nandana stays in Dr.Sunderraj's house. She eagerly waits for her parents to take her back to her home. Even though Dr.Sunderraj's house is a familiar place to her, she feels desolate from her parents and home. Nandana says that her house is in "... 250 Melfalane, Vancouver, BC.,Canada, North America, The world"(16). She is scared when her parents do not turn up to take her back home. At last, she takes the answering machine and says, "Mummy, Daddy, please come and take me home," . . . "I am at Anjali's house. It's the white one with maple tree, behind Safeway" (18).

When Dr.Sunderraj informs Nandana about her parents' death, she is immobile and passive. It causes great psychic turmoil in her mind. She does not express her feelings and sorrows to anyone. Instead, she remains tacit. She does not feel the words spoken by Dr.Sunderraj. She thinks, "if she didn't speak, if she sat absolutely still, she could see her blue house and her parents and her room with its minnie mouse lampshade, all reflected in those eye balls. She could see her mother moving around in the kitchen, making supper, and her father hunched over his computer, typing away"(47).

Nandana's troubles increase when she is informed that she will be looked after by her

grandparents in India. Nandana remembers her parents' words, "Never talk to strangers, they had said. If some stranger approaches, start screaming or runaway. Never accept anything from someone you do not know" (29). According to Nandana, Sripathi Rao, Maya's father is a stranger. So, shenever talks with him. The emotional seclusion from the parental love creates mental trauma rather than assimilating with the stranger. Even after fifteen days of his arrival in Canada, she did not speak with him. She fails to express her desire to go to her house. Instead she stood near the car and aunty Kiran takes her along with them. In her house she hides in the bed with the hope that she will escape from the old man's vicinity. Sripathi Rao is dejected to see the happiest moments in Maya's life through the photographs in the house. He thinks, "... people were like trees, they grew and changed, put out new leaves that you forget to count, and when you weren't watching, they even dead"(42). Nandana is normally a very talkative girl. But the undaunting memories create great psychic unease.

Nandana's behaviour towards Sripathi expresses her apathy to go to India. She does not allow him to pack her things. She snatches her parents' coat from him. "For the entirety of his stay, there was nothing between them but a deepening silence" (145). She even fails to respond to the questions asked by him in the airport. This indifferent behaviour of Nandana shows the hatred towards the stranger and her fear to settle in the alien land, India.

With the fear of being the stranger in India, she gets down in the Toturpuram railway station. She compares the Indian heat to Melfalane bathroom in Canada. She does not like the people wailing and shouting in her ears. She fails to comprehend the words spoken by Nirmalain Kannada. On the way home from railway station, "... she thought that she was in a zoo" (153). She has many questions pestering her mind. Finally, she decided that she should not stay in the old house for a very long time.

## **Nandana in India**

Nandana hates everything in India. Although a month has passed in India, She does not wish to speak. Nandana hates Indian food, milk and school. She shows aversion to play with her friends. But she loves in playing with the toys that she has brought from Canada. She made a plastic house with three dolls in it. Sripathi "had seen her with it often, her lips moving soundlessly, her face absorbed, as she played with the tiny family in its pink and perfect nest"(157). Whenever she thinks her parents, she visualizes her house from the memory. "She saw her house. Her mother was washing something in the sink. Her father using swear words, she could hear him"(47)

Nandana never mingles with people in her grandparents' house. Her favourite spot in the house is the cupboard where her parents' coat hung. "She had snuggled into the hot darkness of the cupboard, loving the faint smell of her mother still embedded in the soft, red coat" (166). Nandana never expresses her sentiments to anyone in the house. She talks to her parents' jacket. She is not interested in attending the Indian schools because the uniform scratches her neck and everyone is a stranger to her in the school. Nandana says, "Mummy, she whispered to the coat, "I am never going to school again. Okay? There are strangers there" (167).She feels comfortable by rubbing her face with her father's coat.

Nandana's indifferent behaviour in school draws everyone's attention towards her. She never speaks with her classmates and also to her teachers. She does not obey the instruction given by her teacher, Neena. When Nandana is asked to draw pictures, she tries to draw the butterfly shown by her teacher Mrs.Lipsky in Canada. But she cannot draw it perfectly. This causes great anxiety in her.

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She tears the paper and hangs her head down.

During the month of October, she thinks of pumpkins, witches and goblins. She realizes that in India people celebrate Deepavali instead of Halloween. She eagerly waits to see what the festival is. She thinks why Mamma lady does not get any new clothes for her. She expects it from her grandmother, but she fails to express it to her. Besides, her wishes, she always thinks about going back to her home in Canada.

### **Centre of Attraction**

Though she does not speak with anyone, she is the centre of attraction in her home and among her friends. During holidays, she is constantly invited by her friends to play with them. “She was a heroine” (316) in the game. She is teased by her friends. They made her run into the tunnel. She likes to share the experiences that she has met a monster and disappointed it while passing the tunnel. “However she could not share it with anyone the great empty feeling that had come to her in the lost girl's small, mournful room the understanding that her parents were dead” (316). Nandana's physical alienation and emotional detachment create perpetual tension and pregnant chaos in her mind. Ammayya never allows Nandana to play with her friends. She also advises her not to play in the dangerous places. Ammayya's behaviour irritates her. She wants to tell Ammayya that, “My mother is in Vancouver... I am only here for a short while”(279).

Though Nandana knows that her grandparents will take care of her forever, she does not like to stay in India, which is an alien land to her. Arun, Nandana's uncle makes her feel comfortable by telling the stories of Hanuman, Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha. When she hears the stories, “She wanted to cry when she thought of her parents and their voices coming out of the darkness, warm and comfortable, reading one story after another until she was fast asleep”(185).

### **Identification and Assertion**

Identification and assertion of their own selves are the greatest obstacles of the diasporans in the alien land. Being a dislocated child, Nandana tries to carve her own identity inspite of the emotional and psychic turmoil. Though she finds difficult to acclimatize herself in the new place, she endeavours to create her own identity. This abnormal behaviour of Nandana is the hallmark of her character. By maintaining abnormal silence, she makes everyone watch her. As she considers herself alien in India, she brings everyone's attention through her tacit behaviour and passive resistance. Thus, Nandana being a dislocated self-adopts taciturnity as a power to create her own identity in India, the land of her ancestors.

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