

The Tragedy of Immigrants in Anitha Rau Badami's
The Hero's Walk

K. Sathishkumar and Dr. V. K. Saravanan



Anita Rau Badami

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Abstract

Anitha Rau Badami is a prominent Indian Diaspora writer, living in Canada. She has written four novels in her credit, dealing with the complexities of Indian family, cultural gap, and immigrant problems that emerge when Indian move to the western country. This paper deals with agony, sorrow, pathetic state of immigrants, and their family in *The Hero's Walk*. The novel deals with serious themes such as grief and loss of immigrants. In this paper is about a middle-class family living at Thoturpuram in India. Maya is the protagonist and lives in abroad. Her father had received a phone call announcing the death of his beloved daughter. Due to the phone call, elderly parents live with anxiety. This will resonate with many immigrants and expatriates. In the novel, *The Hero's Walk*, she was born in a Brahmin family in Thoturpuram, and migrated to Canada for her higher education, and fell in love with Alan. Maya after got married with Alan, unfortunately the couple are killed in a road accident by leaving alone their daughter Nandana, who is unknown in a foreign land. Through this novel, Badami skillfully portrays the tragedy of immigrants.

Keywords: Anitha Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk*, Expatriates, Agony, Sorrow, Immigrants, Diaspora.

Indian Migrants and Migration

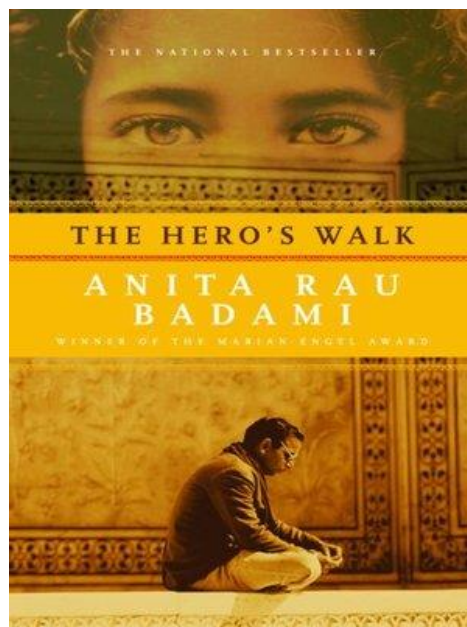
The Indian diaspora of around eleven million people is smaller than its Jewish, Chinese, African, British, Canadian and other counterparts, and represents just over one percent of the population of India, it is unique in several significant respects. First, it is far more widespread than any other, covering over seventy centuries and a significant economic and political presence in over a quarter of them. The Indian immigrants are more varied than any other. Its members represent half of a dozen religions, are drawn from even different regions for India, belong to dozen castes, over a wide variety of occupations ranging from labours and factory workers to professionals and industrialists, earn both highest and lowest percentage capital income in the world.

The major Indian migration occurred after the Second World War, at first to Britain, then to the USA and little latter to Australia, Canada and continent of Europe. The labour-hungry British industries recruited Indians mainly from the Punjab and Gujarat, the peak period of migration bring between 1956 and 1965. The professionals, mainly doctors, came a little later, joined in the late 1960s. In Indian population in Britain today is around one million, of which just over a third are Hindus, about forty percent of Sikhs, around sixteen percent Muslims the rest Christians, Parsis and Buddhists. Although their percentage is small, the number of Indians such countries as Canada, Russia and Netherlands is quite large.

Anitha Rau Badami

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The Hero's Walk



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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: *Indian Writing in English: A Subaltern Perspective*

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The Tragedy of Immigrants in Anitha Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*

The Hero's Walk is straddles two worlds: India and Canada. This novel is beginning with a long-distance call from Vancouver from Toturpuram, somewhere in Tamilnadu, south India, the narrative goes back and forth, the ring of the telephone aptly symbolizing our globalized world where national identities and national literatures are porous and multivalent.

Focus of this Paper - Impact of Maya's Death on Her Family

This paper traces the many-faceted tale of the impact of Maya's death on her family; her father and mother, her spinster aunt, her grandmother her brother and finally her daughter. The narratives move forward mainly through the voice of an omniscient narrator, replenished by the memories of the characters. Sripathi and Nirmala, both in their fifties, are the two main characters whose points of view are privileged. In Sripathi home shrill ringing of the telephone in Big House in Toturpuram is the harbinger of bad news. Sripathi and Nirmala's daughter Maya and her Canadian husband Alan die in a car accident. The news interrupts the day- to- day life of the Toturpuram household during the filling water containers, the morning coffee. Ironically, the rangoli pattern of at the front door of the house, which is supposed the ward off evil, has failed to avert the disaster.

The death of their daughter would have been terrible under normal circumstances, but it causes a crisis in Sripathi and Nirmala's marriage because of the unfinished business of Sripathi's refusal to accept his daughter decision to break of her engagement to an Indian and marry a white man she met in her university. For nine long years, Sripathi has refused to speak to Maya on the phone or read her letter, let alone write her, and he had forbidden to visit her. So the first thing that happens after the news of her death reaches Toturpuram is Nirmala's anger against her husband. She blames him for Maya's death. Sripathi, while maintaining a brave face for the outside world, begins to crumble inside, feeling responsible for Maya death because he withheld his blessings from her. Meanwhile, he must travel to Canada to bring back Nandana, his granddaughter, who has stopped speaking because of the shock caused by her parent's sudden death.

A Moving Tale of a Tragic Death

Badami tells a deeply moving tale of the aftermath of a tragic death. The memories of the dead daughter haunt the couple and imbue their lived space with her ghostly presence. We see her through their eyes, as a young child and young women. Nandana, the child, provides another version of the lives of Maya and her husband Alan. Because she no longer speaks, what we hear are her interior monologues. Her visit to the eerily empty family home in Vancouver with Aunty Kiran is a powerful portrayal of grief and loss.

But life goes on. Sripathi brings Nandana to Toturpuram as stipulated by maya's will. From this point on, it is Nirmala who is centre-staged as Nandana's primary care-giver. Picking up the pieces, so to say, she heroically goes on, providing day-to-day sustenance to Nandana and to the rest of the family. Her experience also causes a psychological transformation in her. She feels that she should not have obeyed her husband so docilely, that she should have demanded that Maya be allowed to visit.

Sripathi's and His Friend Raju

The novel juxtaposes Sripathi's and his friend Raju's relationship to their daughters. While Sripathi distanced himself from Maya because of her love marriage, Raju has devoted himself to his severely disabled daughter. However, the burden of caring for her all by himself proved too much for him and the reader is left with the impression that he may have killed his daughter. Then there is the deranged Mrs Poorna, who kidnaps Nandana, thinking her to be her own daughter who did not return one day. It is being locked in Mrs Poorna apartment that Nandana finally accepts the finality of her parents' death and begins to speak.

Transnational Grief and Loss

The Hero's Walk tackles serious themes of grief and loss in transnational migratory context, when a large number of Indian middle-class families have relatives living in abroad. Many of us, part of South Asian diaspora, have received that phone call, announcing the death of loved one. And those of us elderly parents live with elderly parents live anxiety of receiving such a call. Badami's theme, therefore, will resonate the many immigrants and expatriates, not necessarily the South Asians alone.

Language Challenge to Indian English Writer

In terms of language, Badami faces challenges similar to other Indian English writers: "how to portray the experience of the character who is speaking Indian language". Through her language, Badami try to convey the lexical and syntactic nuances of Indian English. Her language is richly textured. For instance the description of Nirmala's grandmother's gold-threaded sari with peacock pattern is beautiful. She does good job of evoking textures, sounds and smells of the worlds the narrative unfold in. One can describe her battle with cancer. Drastic life-changes laced together with eternal ordinary. Aimed to move more easily between the two, with a sense of proportion, *The Hero's Walk* achieves a balance between joy and sorrow, death of old and beginning new, aptly beginning with sea, ending with sea, the origin of all life, and the place where we end up as ashes after death.

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