

**Emergence of ‘Buoyant Woman’ as a Source of Solace: A Study of the Select Novels of
Anita Rau Badami**

Sujata Sonthalia
Assistant Professor
DVR & Dr. HS MIC College of Technology
Basic Engineering Department
Kanchikacherla, Vijayawada.

ABSTRACT

Anita Rau Badami is a writer of South Asian Diaspora living in Canada with a strong, prominent voice of the modern Indian Diaspora. Her works deal with the delicate intricacies of Indian women which infiltrate the hearts of the readers and achieve remarkable success. Her female characters are the real heroes, who encounter adverse situations; and find solution to the problems and become source of solace for their family. Withstanding all hardships and suffering, they gradually emerge successful fulfilling their personal dreams and responsibilities towards their respective families. Nirmala and Suman, the protagonists of *The Hero’s Walk* and *Tell it to the Trees* respectively are studied to appreciate how they have become triumphant. An attempt is made to study thoroughly and comprehend reasonably the predicament and perspectives of both these buoyant women. They prove their potential though with consistent forbearance.

Key Words: Real heroes, triumphant, predicament, forbearance.

Since times immemorial many melodious songs of life have been sung by many literary musicians, who revealed the beauty of life in all its imperfections. This beautiful melody has become the chord of humanity on the earth, irrespective of region, gender and race. It is the precious wealth of man's mind and soul that forms the real face of society. The new harmonious tunes representing new ways of life discover fresh identities and interpretations.

Among all the great songs sung by many musicians, Indian women choir attained a unique significance in today's English literary world. They have been singing many melodious songs of Indian rhyme creating a mark of their own in the world at large. A note of originality found among the Indian women writers has been an eternal dynamic feature which forms the replica of a wide-ranging variety in the cultural, social and economic fronts in India. It reflects the common Indian woman's status of the modern times. Feminine sensibility, their responses and retorts that are observed in the present day's social milieu are portrayed with much ease and tinge of originality. Among such writers of interest, Anita Rau Badami occupies a unique position, especially among the women writers of Indian origin. Her intense observation and evaluation of the struggle of the middle-class Indian women form the major themes of her writings. Her extraordinary literary bent of mind has created and is creating a niche for herself among all her contemporaries. Her novels are affluent with verbosity which enables a reader to learn, understand and confront with lot of knowledge, understand, realize and expand the vision of the readers. The themes provide them with an analytical eye to judge themselves besides promoting positivity in their lives. The present paper tries to show how Badami portrays woman character as a buoyant woman who fights with their problems and emerges as a source of solace and success in almost all the families. In spite of their continual struggle in the toughest situations of familial and professional fronts finally they win the confidence and prove to be confidantes with their consistent endurance and perseverance. They are found to be the main source for the peace and bliss that is established towards the end. Their confident effort to swim across the sea of challenges blows breezes of comfort and contentment in the lives of their people. This idea is discussed in detail and established by studying the characters Nirmala and Suman from Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* and *Tell it to the Trees* respectively.

Anita Rau Badami, an acclaimed artist, paints the life of all her female characters with colorful brush and makes it worthwhile by breaking the restricted social boundaries and self-imposed constraints. Her characters withstand all hardship and misery and gradually emerge successful, achieve self-contentment and fulfill the dreams of their young generation. Her woman characters seem to be humble and submissive but they are stable, assured and dedicated. In almost all her novels she would never make her heroine a stereotype, boring and submissive. This shows the author's trust on the untapped potential of women who would never yield, but like a phoenix, regain strength and vigor from their own failures and fly high in the sky to spread the color of happiness and perform parabolas in the sky in the honor of woman.

The novel *The Hero's Walk* is a saga of common man's heroism who simply seeks to traverse life from birth to death. The outline of the novel is that the middle class family set up, which has many failures and success. The novel deals with a typical twentieth century Indian Brahmin family which ardently follows Hinduism and struggles to retain its identity in the folds of modern arena. Older generation still follow the traditional and conventional methods that are deep rooted in religion even in their blood. On the contrary, young generation is shown as being combating with the present-day situations that have changed a lot. In such a dynamically changing generation gap, old and young generations have to acclimatize themselves to the changing mindsets of each other.

The setting of the novel is in an imaginary South Indian town Toturpuram in Tamil Nadu. The plot is fabricated around the lifestyle of a common man who is sailing in water handling on a very mediocre income to support his joint family. Sripathi Rao, a middle aged man working as an advertising copy writer who is struggling to fulfill the whims and desires of an obedient wife Nirmala, a daughter Maya, pursuing her education in Vancouver, a mature but unsettled son, Arun, wasting his time in politics, selfish mother impeding the marriage prospects of her daughter, and Putti, a forty four year old spinster sister.

Nirmala's grand-daughter Nandana enter into her life after the sudden death of her daughter Maya in Vancouver. This incident brings changes in Nirmala's outlook towards life and her family as well. Nirmala and Sripathi are sailing in the same boat but Nirmala tries to swim against the

tide with lot of patience and hope. She becomes a self-made woman who boosts her courage, confidence and progressive thoughts. She gradually transforms her patience and passivity into assertiveness and sovereignty. 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. Badami represents Nirmala as a heroic woman who, while fulfilling societal expectations as a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a mother, collects enough courage to take and implement her decisions for the betterment of next generations.

Nirmala become a conqueror because of her optimism and patience. She reassures Nandana that the people of the Big House love her ardently. She even convinces Sripati to sell the house to get relief from the debts. Nirmala's heroic walk in the family's tale provides a bright future for her next generation Nandana, Arun and Putti. Her success is the victory of a modern middle class woman who is in the shackles of patriarchy and pseudo-status. Nirmala's successes set the sinking ship of her family on normal sail. Badami never allows her women to fail in the male-chauvinistic society.

Finally Nirmala finds solace by taking care of her grand-daughter Nandana; thereby putting the whole family in solace. All the characters seem to attain maturity and start thinking on constructive grounds. They all aim for a successful future. The same is very clearly expressed through Nirmala's words,

“What is gone is gone. I will always miss my Maya, but tomorrow's meal still has to be cooked, no? The child's future is more important than past sorrows” (p-323).

The Hero's Walk ends with a note of success assuring a positivity, peace and comfort in everyone's life. The actual reward and appreciation for all the success and happiness in the Big House definitely goes to Nirmala, who, with heroic spirit and stoical attitude, rises to the occasion and solves the problems that have been worrying them for long. Her evolution in the novel proves that a woman's silence should not be taken for granted as inability. Her tolerance and kindness pay her at the end. Thus her success is the success of a middle class family that is fretted and bounded by the dictates of the patriarchy and false prestige.

Anita Rau Badami has proud work behind her that speaks of her incredible mind and eye. She has an extraordinary ability to make keen observation of life, lends a thoughtful ear to the cry of pain, and resolves the authentic injustice of the repressed and to append an intellectual insight

to her works. It is observed in her masterpiece *Tell it to the Trees*. Suman, the protagonist, is feeble, timid and obedient, who is caught in the web of a society that is devised by her husband Vikram. Anita has a unique style in the way she uses narrators. In *Tell it to the Trees* also there are multiple narrators who reveal facts from their different perspectives. Suman is one of the significant narrators whose version adds meaning and value to the story and strengthen the connectivity with the readers. The story is woven around an Indo-Canadian family, the Dharmas, who are settled in Merrit's Point, a small town in Northern British Columbia since two generations. They live in that place with no complaints though it is totally isolated and aloof from the rest of the residents.

The opening scene of the novel itself shows the author's mastery of using various techniques. It is highly gripping and mysterious which arouses the interest of the readers and sustains its right nerve. The frozen dead body of a woman is found in the backyard of the Dharma's house. It is identified to be the body of Anu Krishnan, the tenant in the Dharmas' House, who is dead of Hypothermia. Anita Rau Badami's adept in unfolding the plot and the mystery of the death forms an interesting interlude of the secret of the house.

Vikram Dharma, the tyrannical head of the family is a dictatorial father and an inconsiderate son. Suman Dharma is a short woman with long curly hair and worried brown eyes. Though she is not beautiful to look at, she is very gentle, obedient and a loving woman. She readily agrees to be the second wife of Vikram and willingly accepts to take the responsibility of the family. She shows great concern for Varsha (Vikram and Vikram's first wife, Helen's daughter) and offers motherly love and care to Varsha and Hemanth (Vikram and Suman's son) in the most impartial manner. She is a marvelous cook who feeds her family with delicious varieties of food. She keeps the house spic and span and attends to Akka, Vikram's mother, with utmost patience and tolerance. But Vikram neither loves nor expresses his affection and care to her. Moreover, he persecutes her to that extent where she even forgets to smile. She loses all her liveliness that used to be with her when she stepped into the Dharmas' House. She sings whenever she does some work; but of late she stopped to do so.

“Papa began to find fault with everything she did or didn't do. He shouted at her, he called her a fool, and told her she can't wear anything other than saris.” (33)

She bears with all the persecution and insults caused by Vikram silently. She tolerates all the suffering without running away from the house. But it is Suman, who cannot make a decision

and keeps procrastinating of course, for a few valid reasons of her own. To observe the reasons in her words,

“I stayed for many muddled reasons: fear of this unknown world mostly, lack of money, and because I feared the shame of returning, of dishonoring my father if I left my marriage.” (89).

Besides these, she says that she is very much inspired by the words of her father who says, “Marriage is not about getting together, it is about staying together.” (89).

Varsha, a grown up step daughter to Suman, understands her pure heart and decides to possess her forever. She says,

“She is mine..... She isn't going anywhere. I am glad. I will try to love her as if she is my real mother,Suman is my real mother. I will love her to death and make sure she never ever leaves us. Never. Ever.” (35-36).

Varsha's obsessive loves reaches to such an extent that she takes hold of Suman's Passport and keeps it very secretly; lest she should run away from their house. Anu Krishan, the tenant in the Dharma's House, also finds the dictatorial attitude of Vikram. Anu tries to help Suman to escape from there. But Varsha came to know about it and she executes her plan of getting rid of Anu Krishnan permanently. Thus the novel has an open ending, leaving the plight of Suman to the discretion of the readers. Suman always outlives the problems that she has encountered in her house till then. So she could be considered a successful woman even at the end as Hemanth is almost out of the clutches of Varsha and has taken the side of Suman. This is one of the positive notes that can be observed.

These women prove that they are psychologically stronger and prove their inner strength to the readers with their tolerance, consistence and silence. They find solutions to the problems their families encounter and become trailblazer and source of peace, comfort and relief. Hence they can be compared to the pleasant Moon that drives away all the fatigue and tedium of the members of their families. Even in the hot Noon of suffering and persecution, a woman provides the coolness of the Moon to her respective families and lulls them to pleasant sleep and prepares them for fresh morning.

A great observer, Anita Rau Badami aptly shows through the character of Suman and Nirmala that an Indian woman is craving for freedom, identity and solace. She seems to retort the society that a woman should not be treated as a non-living being but as a human being that has a

mind and heart. Suman suffers a lot only to learn how to encounter the harsh realities of her life. Authors expects that more and more woman like Nirmala should become autonomous and asserts their self to the maximum and regain their original form like phoenix that comes to life from its ashes. The adversities and bitter experiences are their ashes from where they make their journey for a successful and triumphant life ahead.

Primary Source

1. ----- The Hero's Walk. Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto, 2000.
2. ----- Tell it to the Trees. Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto, 2011.

Secondary Source

1. [Interview | Anita Rau Badami - January Magazine](https://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/raubadami.html)
<https://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/raubadami.html>
2. [Diasporic sensibility-Representation of Indian diaspora in ... - Ijellh](http://ijellh.com/wp-content/uploads/.../17.-Mrs-bhaskara-rama-lakshmi-paper-final.pdf)
ijellh.com/wp-content/uploads/.../17.-Mrs-bhaskara-rama-lakshmi-paper-final.pdf
3. Gogoi, Asima, "Victims as Heroes: Women's Agency within Brahmanical Patriarchy in Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*," RSIRJLE, Vol-II, Issue-III, August 2014.
4. Rama Lakshmi, Bhaskara, "Diasporic Sensibility – Representation of Indian Diaspora in Fictional works of Anita Rau Badami,"
[Diasporic sensibility-Representation of Indian diaspora in ... - Ijellh](http://ijellh.com/wp-content/uploads/.../17.-Mrs-bhaskara-rama-lakshmi-paper-final.pdf)
ijellh.com/wp-content/uploads/.../17.-Mrs-bhaskara-rama-lakshmi-paper-final.pdf
5. 'Tell it to the Trees' by Anita Rau Badami | The Winnipeg Review
winnipegreview.com/2011/11/'tell-it-to-the-trees'-by-anita-rau-badami/
6. The Art of Fiction: Anita Rau Badami juggles writing with other artistic ...
nationalpost.com/.../away-from-love-anita-rau-badamis-fourth-novel-tells-the-tale-of-..
Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory
<https://books.google.co.in/books?isbn=1136891218>
7. [Anita Badami's new novel explores why people 'Tell it to the Trees ...](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/.../anita-badamis-new-novel-explores-why-people...)
[https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/.../anita-badamis-new-novel-explores-why-people...](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/.../anita-badamis-new-novel-explores-why-people...)
8. Kumar, Karthik.S., "Female Heroism in Anita Rau Badami's novels,"
[female heroism in anitaraubadami's novels - Anu Books](http://anubooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Notions-2015-No1-14.pdf)
anubooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Notions-2015-No1-14.pdf

