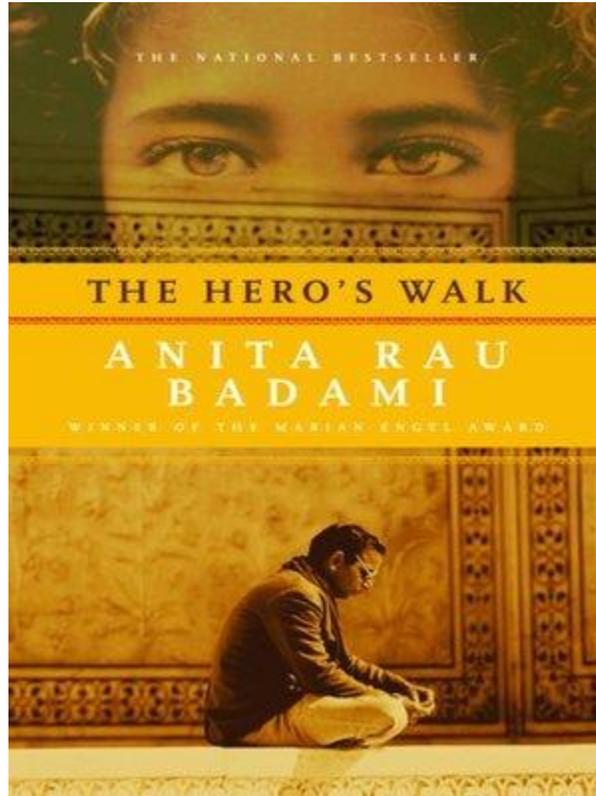


New Image of Nirmala in Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*
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Abstract

Anita Rau Badami is considered as one of the Indian diasporic writers who have attained much acclaim and recognition. Anita Rau Badami was born in Orissa, India and she is living in Canada at present. *The Hero's Walk* is the second novel of Anita Rau Badami which was published in 2001, brought high reputation to her in writing career. This novel portrays the life of a family in a small fictitious town Toturpuram near Madras. It is about Sripathi Rao and Nirmala's family. It deals with the complex lives of an ordinary Brahmin family, social transformations and the consequential changes in their values, expectations, and lifestyles. The plot is turned around the distressed life of Sripathi Rao with his submissive wife Nirmala and his daughter Maya pursues her education in Vancouver where Maya married a Whiteman. The sudden hardship hits the family that can be understood by Sripathi, guilt-ridden as he almost abandoned Maya from the family. Thus, Nirmala's new image provides a bright future for the next women generation Nandana, her granddaughter and Putti, sister in law in the family. Finally Nirmala's confidence and endurance settles the family on successful platform. Badami ends the

novel with happy and confidence through the typical style of balancing complexities and mutual relations in Indian families.

Introduction

Indian writing in English is related with the part of the Indian Diaspora. In this connection, Anita Rau Badami is considered as one of the Indian diasporic writers who have attained much acclaim and recognition. Anita Rau Badami was born in Orissa, India and she is living in Canada at present. On account of her father's profession as a train designer on the railroads, getting frequent transfer, she had to move different places in every two to three years. Anita spent her childhood days in various urban places of India. English played a major role as a bridging language to her in childhood days.

The Hero's Walk

The Hero's Walk is the second novel of Anita Rau Badami which was published in 2001, brought high reputation to her in writing career. This novel portrays the life of a family in a small fictitious town Toturpuram near Madras. It is about Sripathi Rao and his wife Nirmala, and their family. It deals with the complex lives of an ordinary Brahmin family, social transformations and the consequential changes in their values, expectations, and lifestyles. Sripathi Rao is a copy writer in an advertising agency fraught to fulfill his social, economic and family responsibilities with great difficulty. He is living with his widowed mother Ammayya, unmarried sister Putti, Nirmala, and son Arun who is an unsuccessful and unsettled, wasting time in politics. Everyone in Sripathi's family undergoes a life change, and in the moving denouement, reconciliation grows out of tragedy, and Sripathi understands the chance, hope and loss that always accompany life. The notion of Indian women as submissive and weak is disproved with the commendable role of new woman in the novel through the characterization of Nirmala. The character has proved that even within the oppressive structures woman can undertake a few acts that help to subvert the structure to lead to a change though implemented slowly and gradually.

The plot is turned around the distressed life of Sripathi Rao with his submissive wife Nirmala and his daughter Maya pursues her education in Vancouver. Maya, who has already got engaged with a person of Sripati's choice, break off her engagement and married a Whiteman in Vancouver. This is the ultimate blow to Sripati, who could no longer tolerate her decisions because he is very cautious about the family and traditional reputations. So, he is more serious of his life and completely discarded Maya from their family lineage. Sripathi is upset about the family situation because even his son is quite irresponsible and careless about the understanding of the family situation.

Effect of Tragedy on the Family

The novel prudently examines the effect of tragedy on the family that is obligated to remain quiet and submissive due to the financial conditions and the blemish marked by the daughter. Sripathi is observed in a state of suffering and sadness from the beginning of the novel. The actual twist of the novel begins with a phone call received from Vancouver about his daughter and son in law's sudden death in a road accident. The unexpected death of the beloved daughter the whole family gets disappointed. Sripati immediately rushes to Vancouver and brings home the confused and abandoned child of Maya, Nandana who retreats into mysterious silence at the strange and odd

things happening after the sudden death of her dear parents. The emergence of family's responsibility instigated from their orphaned granddaughter Nandana, a seven year old innocent girl. Nandana's nurturing makes the family more intentional in life. The sudden hardship hits the family that can be understood by Sripathi, guilt-ridden as he almost abandoned Maya from the family. He could not endure the guilty conscious and rests in depression for a long time. Badami's portrayal of the bewildered child is quite pitiful and tear-jerking. Nandana believes and awaits the return of her parents very innocently. On the other hand, Sripathi also remains silently unable to compensate the grief and love of the child is longing for.

Badami sharply portrays the psychological trauma and torment of the family undergoes. The author is flourishing in exhibiting the values of the familial bond through this sequence. Sripathi is portrayed as a character who respects his tradition and culture besides his family reputation which is on the threshold of a great fall. But he is a family person who takes up all his responsibilities with courage and confidence, though not with proper planning. He values the sentiments of his mother and hence tolerates her peculiar behavior with patience. He tries hard to continue the standards of the family which is once prosperous, when the family name is seriously spoiled by Maya, who married a person from Vancouver revoking the engagement with a boy whom Sripathi thought of right match to her. "If you persist in doing this foolish thing, never show your face in this house again. Never" (THW, 113). Therefore, he punishes her and almost abandoned her from his family. All these show his honesty and earnestness in maintaining the family status and familial relations without any compromise. The novel reveals the understanding, concession and pardoning within a family for developing healthy bond and mutual respect made by Nirmala among the family members after the arrival of Nandana. Karthik argues,

After Nandana's arrival, Nirmala slowly learned to wing her into the modern world. She never wants to be a passive wife, no longer. Even she changed into a rebel for her survival still she maintains a peace in the home. As a woman, home is still her life and soul. In short, Badami represent Nirmala as a predictable line of a woman who while fulfilling societal expectations as a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a mother. It makes enough chutzpah in her to question such role-playing. (03)

Thus, when Nirmala tries to compensate Maya's death by the presence of Nandana, all the family members understand her psychological condition, but for the aggressive Ammayya. They all support Nirmala in the best way of possible to make a change. This is observed even when Nirmala tries to erase caste boundaries and arrange for her sister in law, Putti's marriage with Gopala who is her neighbor but different caste. However, the beliefs of caste has not vanished that can be understood from Sripathi and Ammayya look at the low caste neighbour, Munnuswamy's family, says:

This is no longer Brahmin Street. Cow-shit Street would be a better name for it ...If only we had known that the rogue was saving our money to drive us out of here, we would have drunk water instead of milk. Much safer for all of us it would have been. (20)

Marriage

Everyone in the family welcomes the marriage as they wish Putti's life to be settled which Asima states that "Nirmala thus makes ways for emancipation not only for herself but also for Putti" (143). It is only Ammayya who intentionally opposes Putti's marriage that are brought forward by Sripathi. Ammayya wants Putti to marry the man of her choice, which may not be possible till she is alive. This is the unfortunate relation that exists between Ammayya and Putti. With some silly excuses she keeps Putti unmarried to make her available to her service as long as she is alive. Putti's remarks reveal the fact very clearly. "Why can't she be happy for me? She never wanted me to get married, I know. Why should I care how she is feeling now?" (THW, 339).

Celebration of the New Image of Woman

The novel *The Hero's Walk* is totally about the celebration of the new image of woman in day-to-day heroism. In this development, Nirmala is portrayed with a new image, a female hero. It is observed that Nirmala has the courage to look at herself in the mirror, as she realizes her heroism.

Thus, Nirmala's new image provides a bright future for the next women generation Nandana and Putti in the family. Nirmala's confidence and endurance settles her on successful platform. She takes timely initiative and settles her sister-in-law's life with Gopal, their neighbour. She comforts Nandana and ensures that the people of the house take proper care of her and love her ardently. Fortunately for them, Nandana also gets adjusted to the new ambience and people gradually. Hence, it is with little difficulty, Nirmala is able to convince Sripati to sell the house and get relief from all the debts they have to clear. Thus, she brings him out of the prejudiced feelings he has in the name of his family and its glory in the past. Sripati shares the idea with Arun, who says, "I am selling this house. I have decided. Yes, that is what I shall do" (THW, 322). Finally Nirmala persuades Arun to understand the situation of their family and convinces him to work in Delhi. He is convinced and says, "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, 322). In this way, she makes him share family's responsibility and which provides lot of relief to both Sripati and herself. Arun also has got bad experience in the political path he wished to travel early.

Nirmala compromises her sorrow of Maya's death by nurturing Nandana in a proper and loving manner. It is realized through Nirmala's word who says, "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" (THW, 323). The whole family comprehends that they should be able to learn lessons of realization from the experiences they have encountered. All the characters seem to attain maturity and start thinking on positive vibration.

Badami's new and fortunate image of Niramala makes the whole family starts to living in mutual love and respect with one another. The family members also understand the real family bond and the responsibility of each member. Thus, Badami ends the novel with happy and confidence through the typical style of balancing complexities and mutual relations in Indian families that are fit in the edge of patriarchal system.

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

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