

**THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF ANITHA RAU BADAMI:
A STUDY OF IMAGE OF INDIA**

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Anita Rau Badami is a writer of South Asian Diaspora living in Canada with a strong voice of the modern Indian Diaspora. Her novels deal with the complexities of Indian family life and with the cultural gap that emerges when Indians move to the west. Her first novel *Tamarind Mem* deals with bittersweet nostalgia, of her Indian sensibility portraying her memories of her past days, depicting the descriptions of Indian domestic life.

Her second novel *The Hero's Walk* could be the best illustration to her alien feeling which is clad in a fine garb of refinement. Badami's third novel, *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call* explores the Golden Temple Massacre and the Air India Bombing is set against the backdrop of Punjab Division. *Can you hear the Night Bird Call?* Could be categorized as a historical novel, as the plot conveniently moves between India and Canada in 1947. It tries to explore the nature of works in those days when the growing desi community is flourishing in Vancouver, and the increasingly tumultuous political scene at Punjab and New Delhi, where Hindus and Sikhs are at conflict.

Badami's Roots in India made her observe the orthodox community set up in those days which are reflected in all her novels. She raises her voice against this communal set up and tries to give a broad prospective to this narrow outlook. She had tried to strike a balance between the pros and cons of Indian life and her conflict to acclimatize her ways between East and West.

Anita Rau Badami born on 24th September 1961 in Rourkela, Odisha, India is a writer of South Asian Diaspora living in Canada with a strong voice of the modern Indian Diaspora. She was educated at the Chinese language schools, University of Madras and Social Communications Media(SCM) Department at Sophia Polytechnic in Bombay. She emigrated to Canada in 1991, and earned an M.A. at the University of Calgary. Her first novel, *Tamarind Mem* (1997), grew out of her university thesis. Her novels deal with the complexities of Indian family life and with the cultural gap that emerges when Indians move to the west.

Anitha Rau Badami is one among the popular Diasporic writers who have come in to lime light by presenting the image of India in its splendor, with a touch of realism. Pre-independence writers focused on presenting culture and heritage of India, while Post- independence writers tried to make their own mark in presenting India with its reality. Expatriate writers try to present the complexities in Indian family life. This Vancouver writer has a technique which is special to her in portraying the suppressed lovelorn emotion of Indian women who practice Indian morale by habit and follow values reluctantly. In her novels women characters seem to be clutched in chains and are irritated by their partner's male chauvinism, yet they don't try to get out of their morale, Anitha Rau Badami could successfully portray the clash between East and West in the cultural arena.

Anitha made a name for herself in south Asian Diaspora writer. Her roots are in India as she was born in Rourkela, Orissa. She immigrated to Canada in 1991 and hence forth she started writing as soon as she pursued a Ph.D degree. Her first novel *Tamarind Mem* grew out of her thesis; all her novels sparkle with Indian sensibility yet unfolding complexities of Indian family life with cultural differences that arise in acclimatizing themselves to the west.

Badami's first novel *Tamarind Mem* deals with bittersweet nostalgia, of her Indian sensibility portraying her memories of her past days, depicting the descriptions of Indian domestic life. She succeeds in weaving a tale of nostalgia, exploring the ceremonious Indian life simultaneously rich and painful. The novel is set in India and describes the story of one family, essentially a family of females chained in a household through happiness and sorrow. "Dadda", the father and husband is away most of his time as he is an engineer with the Indian railways. Kids Kamini and Rupa are left to the care of their mother Saroja, who is always subjected to mood swings. One man-servant and the maid-servant Linda take care of the children. Fifteen years her husband's junior, Saroja wanted to be a doctor and tries to rebel against the restrictions of the railway colony with its rituals of conservative house hold like housekeeping, tea and gossip.

The novel attempts to reflect the sensible woman's heart which longs to be in the company of her spouse during his trips of inspection, he insists it is against the rules. She is restricted to live like any other women in the railway colony leading a peripatetic life. All the female characters seem locked in to interiors, circumscribed by rules and expectations, when they move from one place to another, they again go to the same kind of railway colonies, with the same set of costive values. Latter in her widowed life Saroja lives on her own accord using her railway pass to travel alone to places where her husband refused to take her.

When her father is a resolute person who does not react to his wife's tantrums, he is mostly absent even when at home. Kamini who rejoices his stories in the childhood becomes indifferent in her teenage, for which she regrets when she recounts it while studying abroad, staring at the snow banks from the windows of her basement suit. The narrative technique is very realistic unfolding the attitudes of both mother and daughter, mother realizing her dream to travel and daughter who is unable to resolve her conflict with her mother, whose thoughtless trips irritate her .The book is full of pungent thoughts, bitter feelings and a few cherishable moments.

Badami's second novel *The Hero's Walk* could be the best illustration to her alien feeling which is clad in a fine garb of refinement. A Canadian – raised orphan returns to her grandparents living in a remote village Toturpuram, to face the clash between East and the West, tradition and modernity. Unlike the first novel which is submerged in melancholy, the second one is lighted with a small hope; seven-year old Nandana loses her parents in a Car accident and must go to live with her grandparents, who disowned her mother, when she got married to a

white man. Badami's eminence at portraying pathos is obviously shown in painting the shattered life of Nandana, who is isolated with her mother's demise, at a tender age, when she needed her mother badly, she has lost her warmth which is indeed a blow to her by the fate. In her grandparent's home everything seems to be haywire as she never met them before, her mother Maya a bright, accomplished woman detached herself from her parents. Her distraught grandparents, her lazy but kind uncle, her bitter great-grand mother, love-loran spinster aunt, must struggle to understand this miniature Maya and her western outlook. Indeed Nandana struggles hard to strike a balance between east and west, which threw her in to more varied experience and opportunity in her short life than many of the others could imagine. Little Nandana faces turmoil to put up with her conservative grandparents, which is a contrast to her previous life style.

This novel which bagged 2000 Common Wealth Prize for fiction throws light on her longing for her lush green and evocative Indian Life in comparison to her Ivory towered lifestyle in Canada. Little Nandana finds a wicked absurdity in the traditions of India, though she tried to give a comic touch to the pervasive Social conflicts, a few sketches like the families visit to astrologer, depicts Anitha's realistic approach to the Indian nativity which has made a strong impact on her. The whole family lives in a ancestral Mansion which made them bondages to its glory, which reveals the love for false prestige that Indians nourish in their long standing heritage. Ultimately all the characters in the Novel find heroism in small gestures and in their own courage to move out their bondages and to defy the age old traditions, most significantly winning on their own regrets.

Badami's third novel, *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call* explores the Golden Temple Massacre and the Air India Bombing is set against the back drop of Punjab Division, it is a medley of series of stories which centers around three Indian women each in search of peace, during the tumultuous scenes in Punjab both personally and politically. The three women- Bibiji, Leela and Nimmo whose roots are in India, immigrate to Canada, where series of situations lead to their catastrophic lives. Bibiji, steals her sister Kanwar's fortune to gain entry into Canada, and she is given to luxuries at Canada, her sister Kanwar is left behind to face the rapidly changing political crisis of partition, of India and Pakistan in 1947. In the meanwhile she disappears making Bibiji penitent and guilty all through her life. Kanwar's daughter at last makes her life happy by marrying and saving her own life from the clutches of orphanage. She establishes her own family skillfully. Badami's technique in sketching the Indian scenario and her skill in knitting the plot so as to make the ambitious reap the consequence is special to her. Bibiji believes that it was a punishment for having stolen her sister's fortune. Finally she composes herself and utilizes all her energies in establishing a restaurant called 'Delhi Junction'.

This restaurant becomes the place where members of the growing Vancouver Indo-Canadian stream come to discuss & dispute their ideas, probably Badami made use of one such meeting place where the Indo-Canadian stream of writers meet in reality in her work of fiction. This might be an attempt to ravish the ambitious women who even 'stoops to conquer'. Though Bibiji was penitent for her misdemeanor, she never redeems herself, when given a chance she again deceitfully adopts her niece's eldest son Jasbeer, and brings him to Canada as she doesn't have a heir. Jasbeer, who is a resentful Youngman, finds solace in Paji's stories that made him bound to his Sikh ancestry. Finally, rebellious Jasbeer becomes a Sikh extremist striving for separate Sikh Home land. Her third woman Leela Butt was suffering from her in-between Identity as her mother was a German who married a Hindu. Leela's mother was an out-caste,

when her mother passes away, she happens to marry a Hindu Brahmin. Thereby gains an access to get away from her in-between position.

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Can you hear the Night Bird Call? Could be categorized as a historical novel, as the plot conveniently moves between India and Canada in 1947. It tries to explore the nature of works in those days when the growing desi community is flourishing in Vancouver, and the increasingly tumultuous political scene at Punjab and Delhi, where Hindus and Sikhs are at conflict. Fatal twist in the Plot is that Bibiji and Paji were taking their annual pilgrimage to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest of Sikh Shrines. While they were inside the Temple, the Shrine was stormed by Indian air force aiming at Sikh extremists who were taking refugee in the temple compound in June 1984; the consequences were devastating, as Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh Bodyguards, as an act of vendetta for her assault on the Temple, which in turn created a whirl in this normal course of Sikh follower's live. The violence flooded India and overflowed to Canada, and into the lives of these three women. This novel tries to unfold the ease of Badami's in weaving the personal and political life together, and takes the reader from dream to realism of terrorism and religious intolerance.

The Calgary Herald complimented Badami for her "enduring style which explored the 'In-between' state that is part of both immigrant life in Canada and Sikh life in post-partition India is equally rich in the complex joy of struggle and the possibility for tension, misunderstanding and sometimes violence".

The work gained her critical acclaim despite its shortness and jumping of plot skipping years between 1980 and 1984. Badami's licentiousness could be approved as she never let her plot loose.

Her fourth novel *Tell It TO The Trees* exposes her gripping style in which she narrates the story of a Indo-Canadian 'Dharma' Family, which lives in a isolated home at Northern British Colombia. The story starts with the discovery of the frozen body of their tenant Anu, in the backyard who died of Hypothermia. Badami's strength is her closely knit plot which unfolds the secret behind her death and situations that lead to Anu's death.

Badami could successfully reinforce the rueful life of Indian housewives who are subjected to the male chauvinism of Indian husbands who believe in patriarchy. It is more than just an emigrant story. Vikram Dharma is the autocratic head of the Family while his second wife Suman is submissive and amiable wife. Their life together is morally complex, and it has been elucidated rich in detail.

Vikram Dharma is an authoritarian person, very demanding, crossing the level of control beyond normal. Varsha, his teen daughter born to his first wife grows possessive about her step mother Suman and half-brother Hemant, seeing her father execute autocracy on her step mother, Varsha tries to hide Suman's passport, she tries hard to put her family whole by trying every possible way apart from putting up with her father's mood swings and flaming tongue. At this Juncture Anu, who wanted an year off from her busy career as a writer enters their lives as a tenant. Anu remembers Vikram Dharma's first wife Helan as a beautiful, vivacious and social woman. Helan was killed in a Car accident, knowing well about the Dharma's family name, she finds their 'backhouse' comfortable for her retreat from the city; prior to her arrival Suman was suffering from her husband's suspicious, controlling and angry tirades resigning Suman to a

desolate future entangled in a marriage of fear and despair. She arrived from the bustling warmth of India full of promise of a new-life, a new-home, a new country to cope up with her husband's daughter from his first marriage. Suman is isolated both by the landscape and culture; her fate begins to change with the advent of Anu. A friendship begins to blossom between them, with constant sittings sharing Tea and Stories. How the plot took drastic change is revealed in a beautiful lyrical way in the novel.

Edmonton Journal praises Badami's descriptions of all locales as vibrant, realistic and filled with sensory detail and an acute sense of place. Badami's psychological insight illuminates every scene and breathes authentic life into her characters. Her *Tell it to the Trees* is part literary whodunit, part psychological drama, and could organize the plot of solitude and secret well. She could persuade the reader how both solitude and secret could combine to hold a family together and tear them apart. The art of Badami in delineating the Indian values in her novels with complex variations on themes is astounding.

Thus, the expatriate writers who write with a flavor of nativity could never escape from sketching the image of India in their works. As they face the cultural clash when they go West in search of good living, they carry the Indian image where ever they go; they subconsciously draw the contrast to their earlier conservative life and the present technically sophisticated life. However they can never forget the fragrance of their mother land. Anitha Rau Badami is also not an exception from such expatriate writers. Her realism leaves a deep impact on the readers who are captivated by the image of India in her works.

Workcited

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