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

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### **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 a 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. An attempt is made to study thoroughly and comprehend reasonably the predicament and perspectives of two buoyant women Nirmala and Suman, the protagonists of *The Hero's Walk* and *Tell it to the Trees* respectively. The paper also discusses how these women become triumphant and prove their potential, although with consistent forbearance.

**Keywords: Real heroes, triumphant, hardships, predicament, forbearance.**

Since times immemorial many melodious songs of life have been sung by many literary musicians revealing 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 treasure 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 have a unique significance in today's English literary world. They have been singing many melodious songs of Indian life creating a mark of their own in the world at large. A note of originality found among the Indian women writers has been a remarkable 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 sensibilities prevalent in the modern 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 reality. The themes provide an analytical eye to judge themselves besides promoting positivity in their lives. The present paper tries to show how Badami portrays her characters as buoyant women who fight against the odds and emerges as a winner and provide solace to their families. In spite of their continual struggle in the toughest situations of personal and professional fronts, they finally win and prove to be confidantes with their consistent endurance and perseverance. They are found to be the main cause for the peace and bliss. Their constant effort to swim across the sea of challenges is praiseworthy. They try to bring fresh breezes of comfort and contentment in the lives of their family members. 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 strokes, 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 the younger 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 failures and fly high in the sky to spread the color of happiness and perform parabolas in the sky in the honor of Indian women.

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 novel deals with a typical twentieth century middle class 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, the younger generation is shown as being combating with the present-day situations that have changed drastically. The older and younger 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 Sripathi Rao, a middle-aged man working as an advertising copy writer who struggles to fulfill the whims and desires of his obedient wife Nirmala, their daughter Maya, pursuing her education in Vancouver, a mature but unsettled son, Arun, wasting his time in politics, a selfish mother impeding the marriage prospects of her daughter, and Putti, a forty-four-year-old spinster sister.

Nirmala's grand-daughter Nandana enters 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 by boosting her courage, confidence and progressive thoughts and gradually transforming her patience and passivity into assertiveness and sovereignty. Her resilience, perseverance and adaptability finally make her a survivor after her daughter Maya's death and a pragmatist when she initiates the marriage between her sister-in-law Putti and Gopala erasing the caste boundaries. Badami represents Nirmala as a heroic woman who, while fulfilling societal expectations as a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a mother, gathers enough courage to take decision and implement them for the progress of next generations.

Nirmala becomes a conqueror because of her optimism and patience. She reassures Nandana that the people of the Big House love her ardently. She even convinces Sripathi to sell the house in order to clear the debts. Nirmala's heroic role 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 caught in the shackles of patriarchy and pseudo-status. Nirmala's success sets 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 aim for a successful future. The optimistic thought 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” (Badami 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 cannot be taken for granted and counted as her 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's Heroic walk 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. In her another masterpiece *Tell it to the Trees* focuses on Indian family drama in Canada. The protagonist, Suman a feeble, timid and obedient woman, is caught in the web of society that is devised by her husband Vikram. Anita has a unique style in the way she uses 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 there with no complaints though it is totally isolated and aloof from the rest of the inhabitants.

The very opening scene of the novel shows the author's mastery in using various techniques. It is highly gripping and mysterious and 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 as the body of Anu Krishnan, the tenant of Dharmas, who died of Hypothermia. The exciting unfolding of the plot and the mystery of Anu Krishnan's death keep the reader's interest intact till the end.

Vikram Dharma, the tyrannical head of the family, is a dictatorial husband, insensitive 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 her family. She shows great concern for Varsha (Vikram and his 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 the extent that she even forgets to smile and sing. She loses all her liveliness she possessed when she steps into the Dharmas' House. She sings whenever she does some work; but later she stops 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 silently bears with all the persecution and insults done by Vikram. 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." (Badami 89).

Besides this, 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 of Suman, understands Suman's 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.” (Badami 35-36).

Varsha's obsessive love reaches to an extent where she takes hold of Suman's passport and hides it, lest she should run away from their house. Anu Krishan, the tenant in Dharma's House, also finds the dictatorial attitude of Vikram and Varsha. Anu tries to help Suman to escape from there. But Varsha comes 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 she has encountered in her house. Suman could be considered a successful woman as at the end Hemanth is almost out of the clutches of exploiter Varsha and favors Suman. The novel ends with a positive note.

These women demonstrate their psychological strength 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 a fresh morning.

A great observer, Anita Rau Badami aptly shows through the character of Suman and Nirmala that an Indian women crave for freedom, identity and solace. She seems to retort the society that a woman should not be treated as a non-living entity but as a human being who has a mind and heart. Suman suffers a lot only to learn how to encounter the harsh realities of her life. Many 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 take strides of their new journey for a successful and triumphant life ahead.

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