

Diasporic sensibility in Anita Rau Badami's the hero's walk

*¹ M Banu Krishna, ² G Jegatheswari, ³ E Jeya Indhu

¹ Assistant professor of English, Nadar Saraswathi College of arts and science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

²⁻³ Nadar Saraswathi College of arts and science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Anita Rau Badami was one of the contemporary writers in Modern Indian Diasporic writing. Her novel was mainly dealt with family tension, changing possibilities of memory, exclusive nature of mind and the misunderstanding between two generations by showing the conflict between modernity, traditional values, complexities of Indian family life and with the cultural gap the emerges when Indians move to Canada. "The Hero's Walk (2001)" examine about the prospective heroism and diasporic sensibility. The family pictured in the novel comprised the middle aged Sripathi Rao, a copy writer. Her daughter, Maya disowned her parents and got married with a Whiteman and settled in Vancouver Canada and one day unfortunately she met with an automobile accident while travelling along with her husband. After their death, their daughter Nandana has to be under the care of her Grandparents. So she has to move from Canada to India to her Grandparent house in a village named Toturpuram. She faced a lack of self-confidence and she also felt uncomfortable of being taken care by his Grandparents because of the difficulty she met with in managing the Indian culture and traditions later on she was able to set herself with her Grandparents. The family members were very much worried about the death Maya. At the present the future of Nandana was in the hand of her Grandparents. After migrating to Toturpuram, Nandana experienced estrangement due to the sudden change in the Environment. Though she tried to give the significance secretly however she got no reply from the other end because in the foreign land there was nobody to listen to her message. Nandana's alienation was very intense as well as traumatic which shattered her childhood.

Keywords: diasporic sensibility, the hero's walk

Introduction

Badami's picturization of Maya's family in Vancouver was alluring, there was the lovable father Alan, the beautiful and intelligent mother Maya and the talkative cute daughter Nandana. Nandana and her father Alan share a very lovely relationship. Alan was the one who introduced her to books and she developed a liking for them. Her father painted and designed her dresser drawer for her; they do many activities together as a family, which made the little girl miss her parents a lot. Though there were no separate chapters on Alan, who yearned for such a father was beautifully pictured.

During her seven years of stay in Vancouver, Maya wrote letters to her mother and called her every week, though Sripathi did not like it. Nandana has been staying at uncle Sunny and Aunty Kiran's home as a day care child when her parents gone for work. For a number of days, she remaining between disappointment and anger, unconscious of she has occurred and worrying about her parents have not come for her yet. All kinds of thoughts merge in her mind. When she was first told that her parents were dead, she refused to accept that, and she wondered whether she has been surplus because she was dreadful. However, when her parents death was confirmed, she reacted by completely ceasing to speak. She was told that her grandfather, who was now her guardian, was coming to take her to India. At that news she was not happy at all, because she disliked her grandfather. Because he made her mother cry.

Nandana's trepidation was also revealed when she imagined her grandmother in a sari. Nandana has a difficult time parting with familiar objects her father's computer, desk and chair,

and her dresser, which he had restored, painted and decorated with a daisy pattern for his "cherry pie."

Finally, she let go of all that she must, except her parents' warm, silky, grey and red jackets', and her purple backpack, which her father had given her, full of presents, for her seventh birth day(17).

One day Sripathi received a call from Vancouver from Dr. Sunderraj. He informed that Maya Baker, as her surname is Baker after marrying Alan, working in Bioenergies has died in an accident. Her husband Alan also died. Maya's car had crashed off the highway. Alan died immediately, and Maya had internal damage so she also died. Maya was thirty-four and Alan was thirty-six. Nandana wasn't with them. She was safe in Dr.Sunderraj's home, with his wife, Kiran and their daughter Anjali. Badami portrayed a bewildered child Nandana, who remained silent, thinking that her parents will return someday Hearing this, the family of Sripathi got shocked, and as Sripathi was a legal guardian of Nandana, he has to go to Vancouver to pick up Nandana. Her grandfather, Sripathi Rao, came to Canada at the beginning of September. But it required fulfilling financial papers, death certificate, cremation; he has to make arrangements of passport and money to take Nandana in India. The whole family realized that they should be able to sacrifice on the past, especially Maya's death and thought about the future consequences that are still yet to come, clearly projected 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" (323).

After one month's arrival in Vancouver, Sripathi got permission from the Social Services Department to take the child to India. Since her early childhood Nandana has heard about her grandfather's stubborn nature and life in India. She was unwilling to come to India. On the journey, Nandana refused to talk to him or to let any one touch her purple backpack. The backpack was her connection to the memory of her parents. Though she remind unresponsive and silent, gradually anchored her and began to put down roots. Her grandmother feed and hug her and hold her, bathes her, dress her. Ignoring her silence, Arun talked to her, tell her stories, and read to her. A beautiful description of grandparents showering love on their grandchildren was found in "The hero's walk" Nirmala became Nandana's primary caregiver after the death of Nandana's parents in a road accident. She liked being fussed over mamma lady who gave her only nutritious food, vegetables and fruits. She seems to forget that Nandana was a child and that children like to have chocolates, ice-cream and cakes. She even liked to be fed by mamma lady, "No-no, china, you mustn't waste good food. And slowly, she would put a piece at a time into Nandana's mouth, kissing her every time she ate one. Which she had to admit she liked, even though she wasn't a baby and could eat it by herself."(214)

After her arrival in India, Badami mentioned that Nandana could not adjusted food, stay, and social life. Badami narrated the difficulty of adaption of foreign culture to an alien Nandana. At Madras railway station, the experience of Nandana was narrated thus, she snapped awake as soon as they reached the station, though, and gazed around wide-eyed at the crowds that were boiling on the platforms, even at that late hour. It must be strange and disorienting for her, thought Sripathi the steady roar of sounds- vendors, children wailing for their parent's coolies shouting for customers, beggars, musicians-the entire circus of humanity under the high arching roof of Madras Central Station. With her small fingers, the child clipped her nostrils together to block out the stench of fish, human beings, diesel oil, food frying and pools of black water on tracks.

At the time of departure from Vancouver Nandana refused to leave her mother's red winter coat, and Alan's grey coat. Nandana was very much shocked on the death of parents. She felt so alien in India that even after one month of her arrival she did not speak a word. Nirmala asked various questions to Sripathi regarding post-death rituals of Maya.

"Did they close her eyes with coins? And put one in her mouth as well?"(173). She further asked, "My poor child has gone like a beggar, without any proper rituals, and you say it doesn't matter? Her soul will float like Trishanku between worlds. It will hang in purgatory forever. Did they at least dress her in unbleached cotton?"(173).

She asked through these lines one can understand the real feeling and one emotions of a girl after the death of her mother. She further asked that her poor child had gone like a beggar without any proper rituals her soul would float like Trish over less between the worlds. It would hang forever; they did not dress her in unbleached cotton.

After returning from Vancouver, Sripathi has changed from a rational man to a deeply superstitious man. He became angry when Putty asked him where he was going. He believed three cows were a portent of death, a coconut with four eyes meant a fatal illness, black cats and lumps of vermilion-stained mud are all ill omens. As October came to an end, Nandana's mind

went back to Pumpkins, witches, goblins, and trick-or-treating: "she realized that in India, they don't have Halloween. Instead, there was something called Deepavali, when people got presents and set off fireworks. She wondered why mamma lady her grandmother hadn't bought her any new clothes." (278). One day Nandana went out of her home and after a long search, a mechanic named Karim brought her back. Nandana liked the company of Arun, her maternal uncle but did not like Sripathi. Nandana had been admitted in second standard a convent girl's school. At school Nandana felt alone and different atmosphere than that of Vancouver. One of the girls at school asked "why don't you talk... Are you dumb? Did someone cut off your tongue?" this schoolmate continued saying, "I saw a movie once where they did mean things to you?" (278),

A school girl asked such unnecessary questions this made Nandana worried. Nandana brood over the fact that her grandmother had thrown away her tooth that morning and there had been nothing under her pillow. However, in spite of their recent loss, the family gave over its grief to celebrate Deepavali for Nandana, and she did receive new clothes and get to set off firecrackers. Nandana have not seen electric water heater in Vancouver that Nirmala used here for heating bathing water. For Nandana, mosquitoes caused unrest and she played hide and seek with friends. Arun as an activist brought some harsh realities about India. He said:

"See, you had your Independence of India and all to fight for, real ideals. For me and my friends, the fight is against daily injustice, our own people stealing our rights... no water to drink, electricity keeps getting cut off, you can't even play on the beach without getting all kinds of rashes on your legs"(239).

Nandana's final integration into family and community came after a bizarre episode in which a local woman, who has lost her child, invited Nandana in and refuses to let her leave. This happened one evening, when, after Nandana came home, her grandmother told her to go out to play with the girls across the road. Her great-grandmother, whom Nandana call the witch, told her to be careful of the old exhibitionist choc-bar ajja.

"The witch said that: If your poor mother was alive, she would make sure that you did not go to such dangerous places to play"(279).

The witch told her that if her mother was alive, she did not allow her to go to such a dangerous place to play. Nandana, who still did not accept her mother's death, shouts out in her mind

"My mother was in Vancouver.... I was only here for a short while." (279).

On a dare, Nandana ran into a tunnel between tall apartment buildings- when she came out the other end, all her friends have gone home. As she stands looking for them, she was approached by mad Poorna, a neighbour who entice her into her home. Poorna then locked Nandana up in her lost daughter's bedroom and forcibly feed Nandana her daughter's favourite foods, in her captivity, Nandana can hear her family calling her. She cried out but was not heard. Later that night, when Poorna came back home from a business trips, and returned her to her families; Nandana's silence was broken for good. Nandana's ability to communicate affirmed the root she has set into the transitional space. The bicultural child found her home and her voice only when she was released from "captivity" to an Indian woman with whom she has nothing in

common, who mistook her for her own off spring. Once there was a cyclone, heavy rain and flood situation in Toturpuram and Madras and even the chief minister has to shelter in a boat. Ammayya got ill and hospitalized and she died there. The jewellery that she preserved after the death of her husband was found to be fakes. At the end Nandana consoled Sripathi on the death of Ammayya that not only he but she also had lost her mother in past.

However in "The Hero's Walk", Nandana was a second-generation Indian immigrant in Canada and a Canadian in India! Leaving behind her house, her belongings, her concepts of "tooth-fairies", her white Canadian friends and her Green eggs and Ham and The cat in the hat, Nandana has to struggle in an alien land where a lady called Lakshmi with four arms and a smiling white face set on a lotus flower and was regarded as a goddess (92). "The hero's walk" does not show any trace of nostalgia, on the contrary it shows how the very concepts of the 'Home Land' and the 'diasporic' can be altered. The tragic incident of the loss of her parents had forced Nandana to take refuge in India which she came to accept as her home only when she realized that the pain of losing a dear one was universal. She had lost her mother back in Canada, and now her grandfather lost his mother in India – the two orphaned people belonging to two very different generations seek solace and belongingness in each other.

Maya acted as the novel's most conventional diasporic sensibility character. She was the bold and heroic daughter who "had dared everyone" and lived as a haunting presence in her father's and brother's consciousness. Interestingly, the novel's dramatization of Maya's and Sripathi's relationship suggested that Sripathi's painful "labour of self-erasure and self-fabrication" from the time of her birth, in the eyes of Sripathi, Maya was the "perfectly formed creature" he wished to name her as Yuri an Russian Astronaut and he thought she had a ability "to reach for the skies, nothing less". While these sentiments might reflect no more than the proud hopes of a young father. But after the argument with his wife Nirmala they named their daughter as Maya. Maya which means illusion. The name was appropriate for a daughter who had disappeared from their lives like foam from the shoulder of a wave (96). Sripathi was a proud father. This was his daughter who had received a prestigious fellowship in faraway America and she had done it on her own merit wit out any help of influential relatives or friends (97). Indeed, Maya's engagement to Prakash Bhat, the son of a rich family who "had just started a job in Philadelphia" (99), was a match that would have permanently marked Maya as a diasporic sensibility subject and increased her father's social and financial standing. As a respectful daughter, Maya was expected to honour her father's name and wish and, as her prospective father-in-law remarked, as the wife of a middle-class Indian expatriate, she was also expected to fit into life in the West without losing sight of our Indian values. In the months that followed Maya's departure, Me.Bhatvisited Big House frequently Sripathi liked the man immensely (104). Three years into her studies, shortly before she was to graduate, there came another letter from her. Since this was a serious issue for them they planned to have a conversation with their daughter through telephone. They were not able to convince her. Maya was very much stubborned in her marriage. Sripathi had shouted at his daughter, "never show your face in this house again never" (113). Now Maya

cancelled her engagement with Prakash to marry a Canadian man. By defying her father's wishes and forsaking her family duties Maya, on the one hand, initiated her own transformation into a diasporic sensibility subject with multiple belongings and groundings; on the other, she tackled Sripathi with the changing reality of his social, personal and work environment. These aspects eventually facilitate Sripathi's diasporic sensibility transformation. However, was that the novel assigned Maya the traditional task of diasporic sensibility women, namely the painful role of "mediating discrepant worlds" and of connecting and disconnecting, forgetting and remembering, in complex, strategic ways. Thus, in the narrative logic of the novel, Maya's death is not an accident but a symbolic necessity that facilitates Sripathi's diasporic sensibility.

Central to Sripathi's further development of a diasporic sensibility consciousness was his understanding of Arun's involvement in environmentalist movement. If Sripathi initially consider his son's activism as just some other saving the world. Arun insisted that his work was about our own people stealing our rights and fighting against daily injustice and against globally sanctioned ecological irresponsibility. Arun's environmental activism *The Hero's Walk* dramatized diasporic sensibility as a political category of sensibility not necessarily dependent on transnational mobility. On the contrary, it explored the intersections of local and global ancestors of belonging and displacement.

References

1. Badami Anita Rau. *The Hero's Walk*. Toronto: Vintage, 2001.
2. Krishnaswamy Revali. *The claims of globalization theory: some contexts and contestation*. *South Asian review*. 2003; 24(1):18-32.