

Race, Gender, and Identity: A Study of Badami's *Tamarind Mem*

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“Home comes into being most powerfully when it is gone, lost, left behind, desired and imagined.... The Story about home is the story of trying to get there.”

- Friedman, Susan Stanford

Indian English literature represents perhaps one of the most valuable contributions India has ever made to the world of books. It is the offspring of India and England and one of those few fortunate outcomes of the coming together of the two countries. Of all genres, fiction has always enjoyed the most popular state in Indian English Literature. Indian fiction in English in the post-colonial period discusses man's psychological sufferings due to modern living conditions. It examines his struggle for survival between tradition and modernity. The domination of western culture and the invasion of western materialism over India's faith in religion and humanity are also discussed by the post-colonial Indian English fiction. In many Indian English novels, the home or the domestic space is the site of contact and conflict between tradition and modernity and of changed man-woman relationships.

Anita Rau Badami is one of the most prominent writers of the Indian Diaspora in the U. S. A. Her novels deal with the

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problems of the immigrants, especially the woman immigrants. Being herself an expatriate woman, her discussion of the issues of immigrants gains authenticity. Anita Rau Badami is one of the contemporary women writers in the vibrant field of Indian literature in English. In Badami, one can find the combination of an artist and a missionary.

Though she is not overtly didactic, her novels are valuable works of guidance. In her novels, the reader comes across several female characters that one can see in any Indian family. Though she is influenced by feminism, she avoids the extremes of feminism. She is also a humanist. Infact, her feminism is influenced by humanism. Badami, the humanist, offers a solution to women's freedom. Badami in her novels highlights the woman's status in the traditional Indian family. She voices for the equality of women and does not rule out the role of men. Thus, she is more a humanist than a feminist. Her novels have definitely created a space for the discussion of the issues related to the difficulties of women. She contributes to the development of women's status as her novels have only female protagonists and deal with their peculiar problems

In the era of globalization, the world has shrunk into a mere village. On the one hand technology in telecommunication has increased the contacts between peoples of the world. Migration, trans-nationalism, and multiculturalism have become familiar terms in common parlances. But, at the same time, loneliness, isolation and quest for identity have become the familiar themes of modern writings.

Most expatriates try to escape from the alien life. Their longing for home in the birth land becomes an unfulfilled dream. The desire for a safe place to call home manifests itself in competition between life and death. The survival for a

comfortable life ends in a happy life for half of the people and tragedy for the other half.

The identity of an individual is shaped by his/her self-perceptions of the world surrounding him/her based on the religion, race, class, economic and social status of family cultural and religious beliefs shared by the society in which the individual lives. Identity for a woman in particular questions a lot. A woman is always a preserver of culture. An expatriate woman is called as a "half and half". Because she is half-and-half in her, culture, country, the mere fact in parentage too.

Badami portrays the feelings of the Diasporas by describing their heartfelt desires to come out from their mobility life. Not all the Diasporas have the freedom of choice in their migrations. In search of identity, the characters lose one identity and find out another one. Badami writes almost exclusively about the category of immigrants, of new Diasporas, for whom mobility is a central concern. She claims, "I don't think I could have written a novel if I had not left India... I find that the distance gives me perspective and passion. I was twenty-nine years in India and ten years here, so I have a foot in India and a couple of toes here."

In Badami's novels, the desire for a safe place to call home manifests itself in competition between life and death. These opposing forces need not act on the same time, even if they do act in tandem. In Badami's novel *Tamarind Mem*, Saroja and Kamini try to create a home where they can find their identity. In Saroja's life, her search of identity is motivated by her gender. Even from her childhood, she has her desire to do medicine. But it is forbidden by her parents and she is locked into marriage bond. Her marriage life is a silent war, for Saroja holds her "tamarind" tongue. A frustrated Saroja feels caught in the traditional role of an Indian wife and mother who must always

be the epitome of an ideal woman - - cooking, keeping the house and raising children. Saroja uses her sour tongue to show her revenge upon her disappointed life and protect her daughters from those traditional rules that have caught her and destroyed her romantic dreams. Saroja uses her sour tongue to break all the barriers, which prevent her to create her own room.

Saroja starts her journey in search of identity only after giving everything to her daughters. Whatever she missed in her life, she manages to offer to her daughters. When her younger daughter Roopa marries without permission from her mother, she never abandons her; 'My girls know how to pick their fruit' (148). Her elder daughter Kamini expresses her desire to do doctorate in Chemical Engineering in Calgary University in Canada, she protests to allow her because of her motherhood feelings of sending a girl abroad without any protection to her. She uses her sour tongue to melt Kamini's desire. "...I have been a modern-times mother and these girls have taken advantage of me" (150).

From her acceptance of her being a modern times mother, Badami pictures Saroja as a woman escaping from the traditional prison to the modern independent world. She individualizes her life from everything. First from her orthodox parents and then from her disappointed married life and now she unconsciously slowly escapes from the motherly duties. She wants to lead a life for her own, she does not want anyone to watch and order her to do and not to do. She cuts off the relation of being a good mother to her daughters. They are now just disgusting brats to her. Because women like Saroja never want to leave her identity as a modern independent woman. Saroja's travel by train as a modern day "sanyasi" shows Saroja's room of her own. She never wants to depress her future and waste her remaining energy. She uses it to fulfill her wishes of journey.

Her search of identity completes in her pilgrimage around the country.

Badami as an effective creator weaves another story of Saroja's daughter Kamini. Through Kamini, Badami portrays the feelings of the Diasporas by describing their heartfelt desires to come out from their mobility life. Kamini also tries to find out her identity through her education. She wants to get freedom from her mother Saroja's whiplash words. Kamini is like Badami who belongs to a first-generation immigrant to Canada from India, belongs to what Vijay Mishra calls the "new" Indian diaspora (422).

Kamini finds out her identity, her soul home in Canada's snowy surrounding. Kamini's lonely life in Canada forces her to recall her past life. Her present identity never gives her a desired life, which she expects. Every immigrant feels sad after having migrated to another country. Her remembering of her past life shows immigrant's longing for their home country. Through her, we get a feel for the culture, sounds, smell and a certain mood of a bygone era that is often romanticized. Kamini's recalling of the past-lost identity portrays her longing for the past life. Kamini understands the mysteries of her mother's sour tongue and her whiplash words after she leaves her mother. As a child, Kamini used to blame her mother for being angry all the time and sympathize with her father who always loved and was gentle with his daughters. She always hates her mother Saroja for being alwaysangry with her father.

However, later Kamini understands the social constraints her mother faced. She also realizes her own dreams and makes her own choices freely. She no longer wants to escape from the emigrated country, but she wants to escape from the loneliness; she needs her sour tongued mother to accompany her. She

accompanies her through telephones and postcards only. However, she does not get any affectionate words from her mother; she gets “why you are wasting your money calling me every week? Will your hand drop off if you write instead?” she demanded (15). However, she expects her mother to understand her loneliness and ask her to get back. Saroja a sour tongued mother hurts her love.

From Kamini we learn about the expatriate’s critical situation of missing their family members in the distance and longing for their love and care which they only get partly. Badami successfully portrays the sufferings of the expatriate by the life of Saroja and Kamini.