



Cultural conflict and personal growth: An In-depth Analysis of *The Hero's Walk*

Dr Sanjana Shamshery, Associate Professor, Department of English, H P U, Shimla

Saroj Duhan, Research Scholar, Department of English, H P U, Shimla

Abstract:

Anita Rau Badami's The Hero's Walk intricately explores the dynamics of cultural conflict and personal growth against the backdrop of a small coastal town in India. The novel delves into the life of Sripathi Rao, a traditional patriarch, whose world is upended following his daughter's death in Canada. This event catalyzes profound changes within his family, challenging their deeply rooted beliefs and societal norms. Through a comparative analysis with other South Asian and Western literary works, this study highlights the novel's unique portrayal of identity crises, family dynamics, and resilience in the face of cultural upheaval. Badami's narrative offers a poignant reflection on the complexities of modern Indian society and the universal human experience of adapting to change.

Keywords: Cultural Conflict, Personal Growth, South Asian Literature, Family Dynamics, Identity Crisis, Modern Indian Society, Resilience, Globalization Impact

I. Introduction

Anita Rau Badami's novel *The Hero's Walk*, released in 2001, stands as a noteworthy piece in modern literature, delving into the complex dynamics of cultural clash and individual development. Badami, with her articulate storytelling technique, as also observed in her previous publication 'Tamarind Mem' (1996), explores extensively into the core of familial connections and personal challenges amidst the context of a swiftly modernising India (Badami, 2001; Badami, 1996). This document endeavours to analyse how the main character's voyage in *The Hero's Walk* is a miniature representation of the wider cultural changes and individual metamorphoses taking place in contemporary communities. The importance of this investigation resides in its capability to provide perspectives into the intricate interplay between heritage and contemporaneity, a motif widespread in transnational accounts and crucial cultural ideologies (Parameswaran, 2007; Ahmed, 2004).

Anita Rau Badami, an Indian-Canadian author, has been widely praised for her subtle depiction of existence in rural India and the transnational encounter. In *The Hero's Walk*, she portrays a vibrant



image of the mundane existence in Toturpuram, a seaside village in India, where the main character Sripathi Rao manoeuvres his tense familial connections and societal anticipations. Badami's story is profoundly entrenched in the cultural milieu of her characters, mirroring the intricate social structures and customs of Indian society (Badami, 2001). Her methodology in narrating is evocative of her previous creation, 'Tamarind Mem', wherein she delves into the subjects of recollection, dislocation, and individuality (Badami, 1996).

The Hero's Walk, situated in the ebb and flow of cultural metamorphosis, skillfully captures the core of individual development arising from the crucible of cultural discord. Sripathi Rao's odyssey is emblematic of a person ensnared amidst the currents of convention and contemporaneity, reflecting the wider societal transformations in India (Badami, 2001). This conflict is not only outer but inner, as characters grapple with their own convictions and ambitions, frequently colliding with the entrenched customs of their society. The book's depiction of these disputes establishes connections with notions of cultural collage and impact, as debated in the writings of academics such as Barry (1995) and Ahmed (2010), providing a perspective to comprehend how sentimental reactions and cultural personas are interconnected and develop in the presence of obstacles.

II. Overview of *The Hero's Walk*

Anita Rau Badami's tome *The Hero's Walk*, situated in the petite seaside village of Toturpuram in Southern India, beautifully encapsulates the core of a family's odyssey through sorrow, salvation, and the intricacies of kinship ties. The narrative revolves around Sripathi Rao, a maturing marketing wordsmith and a conventional patriarch, who is faced with the tidings of his distant daughter Maya's demise in Canada. This sorrowful incident brings Maya's youthful daughter, Nandana, into Sripathi's guardianship, disrupting the already tense dynamics within his family. As Sripathi wrestles with his previous choices and the weight of unrealized aspirations, Nandana's arrival emerges as a trigger for transformation, compelling every member of the family to confront their individual inner struggles and longstanding disagreements.

The milieu of Toturpuram is not only a mere backdrop; it is a manifestation of the wider sociocultural terrain of India, ensnared amidst the tugs of convention and the impetus of contemporaneity. This municipality, with its customary norms, time-honored traditions, and the progressive impact of worldwide alterations, functions as a microcosm of the broader cultural clash widespread in modern Indian society. It is within this intricate network of evolving societal principles and anticipations that the characters of *The Hero's Walk* manoeuvre their lives.

At the heart of the story lies Sripathi Rao, whose existence serves as evidence to the obstacles encountered by individuals trapped amidst the inflexibility of customs and the advent of fresh, frequently clashing, principles. His spouse, Nirmala, stands beside him, grappling with her own sorrow and the absence of her daughter while endeavouring to uphold unity in the family. Their offspring, Arun, embodies the youthful cohort's battle against the burden of familial and societal anticipations. Maya, albeit not corporeally present, remains a pivotal figure in the narrative. Her existence in Canada and her sorrowful demise epitomise the connection between two realms – the customary one she abandoned in



India and the fresh existence she embraced overseas. Nandana, Maya's offspring, emerges amidst this chaos, her existence a quiet yet potent energy that gradually transforms the familial dynamics and guides them towards selfreflection and restoration.

In *The Hero's Walk*, Badami skillfully intertwines a tale that is not just a narrative about a family but also a critique on the wider concepts of cultural heritage, the conflict between age groups, and the voyage towards comprehension and harmony. The book stands as a touching examination of the human predicament, set against the backdrop of a society in transition.

III. Cultural Conflict in *The Hero's Walk*

In Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*, the motif of cultural clash is intricately entwined into the tapestry of the narrative, acting as a pivotal component that moulds the characters' expeditions and the story's advancement. The book, situated in the petite village of Toturpuram, skillfully depicts the tension amidst customary Indian principles and the advancing impacts of contemporaneity and globalisation. This clash materialises in diverse facets of the characters' lives, from their interpersonal connections to their inner battles and societal engagements. Sripathi Rao, the main character, personifies this conflict; he wrestles with the conventional principles he has embraced throughout his existence and the fresh realities imposed by his children's decisions and the evolving world surrounding him. His daughter Maya's existence in Canada and her ensuing demise bring this clash to the forefront, as Sripathi is compelled to confront his own inflexible convictions and the repercussions they have had on his family. The advent of his granddaughter, Nandana, additionally heightens these conflicts, bringing a poignant contrast of bereavement and transformation, symbolising a fresh era that is distant from the customs Sripathi cherishes deeply. Badami's story delves into how these cultural conflicts are not only outer conflicts but profoundly internalised predicaments that question the characters' identities, convictions, and feeling of fitting in. In *The Hero's Walk*, Badami showcases a minuscule representation of a community in flux, where cultural clash is an unavoidable route to individual development and comprehension, emphasising the intricacies and subtleties of manoeuvring a realm where the bygone and current are in perpetual conversation.

In *The Hero's Walk* by Anita Rau Badami, the storytelling is profoundly rooted in the examination of cultural clashes, mirroring the intricate interplay between conventional Indian principles and the onslaught of contemporary influences. The personas, symbolic of a wider societal conflict, discover themselves ensnared in a network of cultural dualities, each wrestling with their individual array of obstacles and ideological skirmishes.

A. Cultural Conflicts Encountered by Characters

The disputes encountered by the characters in Badami's book are diverse, frequently mirroring the wider societal pressures between ancient and contemporary India. Sripathi Rao, the main character, discovers himself at the nexus of these disputes. His conventional perspective, moulded by the customs of his upbringing and societal anticipations, is consistently confronted by the progressing worldviews of his offspring and the unforeseen circumstances life presents to him (Badami, 2001). Every individual, in their distinct manner, personifies a fragment of this cultural collision, whether it's via their ambitions, interpersonal connections, or their attitude towards life's challenges.



B. Key Cultural Conflicts

1. **Traditional vs. Modern Values:** A primary clash in *The Hero's Walk* is the strain between customary principles and contemporary philosophies. This is demonstrated in Sripathi's battle to embrace his daughter Maya's intercultural union and her existence in Canada, a territory greatly distinct in its cultural principles (Badami, 2001). This dispute is not merely a familial issue but mirrors a broader societal conversation about safeguarding cultural legacy in light of globalisation and evolving societal standards.
2. **Gender Roles and Expectations:** The book additionally explores the profoundly embedded gender roles and anticipations in Indian culture. Nirmala's persona, as Sripathi's spouse, is an embodiment of conventional womanhood and the relinquishments and adaptations that accompany it. On the other hand, Maya embodies a contemporary, autonomous lady, questioning these conventional responsibilities. Her selections and their consequences emphasise the persistent clash between gender norms and personal independence (Dhawan, 2005).
3. **Impact of Globalization on Local Culture:** The inconspicuous yet momentous influence of globalisation on indigenous culture is another pivotal facet of the novel. The contrast of Toturpuram's conventional way of life with Maya's existence in Canada exemplifies the wider impact of worldwide culture on regional customs and principles. This facet of cultural clash transcends the family, delving into the alterations in societal standards and the unavoidable transformations brought about by exposure to diverse cultures (Parameswaran, 2007).

The Hero's Walk is a lavish tapestry of cultural clashes, with characters personifying the predicaments encountered by numerous individuals in a swiftly globalising globe. Badami's storytelling adeptly captures the core of these conflicts, presenting a subtle viewpoint on the trials of harmonising heritage and contemporaneity, gender norms, and the repercussions of worldwide influences on indigenous cultures.

IV. Personal Growth Through Cultural Conflict

In *The Hero's Walk* by Anita Rau Badami, the theme of individual development through cultural clash is a central cornerstone, propelling the transformation of its characters. By means of their reactions to these clashes, every character experiences a metamorphic odyssey, presenting a subtle viewpoint on coping strategies and the ultimate settlement of their inner and outer struggles.



A. Character Development in Response to Cultural Conflicts

1. **Transformation of Protagonist:** Sripathi Rao, the main character, is the embodiment of a persona moulded by cultural clash. At first, he is perceived as an inflexible figure, abiding steadfastly to conventional principles and anticipations. His daughter Maya's demise, and the ensuing advent of his granddaughter Nandana, serve as catalysts for his metamorphosis. Confronted with the bereavement and the fresh obligation, Sripathi gradually initiates to reevaluate his deeply ingrained convictions and dispositions. This expedition is contemplative of a profound inner conflict, one that echoes with the universal motif of adjusting to transformation and discovering approval (Badami, 2001).
2. **Secondary Characters' Growth:** The supporting characters in *The Hero's Walk* also display noteworthy development in reaction to cultural clashes. Nirmala, Sripathi's spouse, transforms from a submissive character to one who becomes increasingly confident and self-conscious as the story unfolds. Likewise, Arun, their offspring, embodies the younger cohort's battle with convention and contemporaneity. His development is characterised by a progressive comprehension and harmonisation with his family's principles and his personal ambitions.

B. Coping Mechanisms and Adaptations

The characters in *The Hero's Walk* display a variety of coping strategies and adjustments in reaction to the cultural clashes they encounter. Sripathi's preliminary repudiation and subsequent embrace of his daughter's preferences exemplify the intricate process of acclimating to alteration. Nandana's hush and progressive adjustment to her fresh existence demonstrate the fortitude and flexibility of the youthful cohort. These adaptive strategies emphasise the protagonists' challenges and their endeavours to attain equilibrium in an evolving society.

C. Resolution of Conflicts and Character Arcs

The resolution of disputes and the fulfilment of character arcs in *The Hero's Walk* are emblematic of the broader theme of conciliation and individual development. Sripathi's ultimate embrace of his granddaughter and his altered viewpoint towards life symbolise not only a resolution of his personal dilemmas but also a wider commentary on the flexibility of individuals in the presence of cultural changes. The book ends with a feeling of optimism and comprehension, implying that progress and adjustment are achievable even in the most demanding situations.

In essence, *The Hero's Walk* skillfully portrays how cultural strife can result in substantial individual development. By means of the perspective of its assorted characters, the book showcases a captivating tale of metamorphosis, fortitude, and the human capability for alteration in the midst of cultural turmoil.



V. Thematic Analysis

In *The Hero's Walk* by Anita Rau Badami, a lavish thematic fabric is intertwined, capturing the core of individuality, affiliation, kinship dynamics, and the innate human attributes of adjustment and fortitude. These motifs are adeptly intertwined throughout the storyline, providing a deep examination of the characters' existence and their reactions to the obstacles they face.

A. Themes of Identity and Belonging

One of the most prominent themes in *The Hero's Walk* is the investigation of identity and inclusion. The personas in the book are consistently bargaining their identity in connection to the changing cultural terrains surrounding them. Sripathi Rao's persona, for example, is profoundly entrenched in his conventional convictions, which is contrasted against the setting of a globalising planet. This clash between his inner principles and the outer realm generates a feeling of discord in his sense of self, prompting him to ponder where he genuinely fits in. Likewise, Maya's existence in Canada and her sorrowful demise provoke inquiries about diasporic individuality and the feeling of fitting in a territory distant from one's cultural origins. Nandana's expedition likewise reflects this motif, as she grapples to discover her position in an unfamiliar realm, distant from her accustomed existence in Canada (Badami, 2001).

B. Exploration of Family Dynamics and Relationships

"Family" is a pivotal theme in Badami's novel, intricately delineating the dynamics and connections within the Rao clan. The book showcases an authentic depiction of a customary Indian household, united by customs yet tested by personal ambitions and hidden truths. Sripathi's connection with his spouse and offspring is filled with unexpressed animosities and letdowns, indicative of the intergenerational and philosophical divides. The incorporation of Nandana into the family serves as a metamorphic catalyst, questioning the entrenched family dynamics and paving the path for novel connections and comprehensions to flourish. The book explores the intricacies of kinship affection, duty, and the compromises individuals undertake for the betterment of their relatives (Badami, 2001).

C. Discussion on Adaptation and Resilience

The motif of adjustment and fortitude flows as an undertone throughout the book. Every individual, in their unique manner, showcases the capacity to adjust to fresh situations and discover fortitude in the presence of hardship. Sripathi's progressive embrace of his fresh position as Nandana's custodian, Nirmala's fortitude in uniting the family, and Nandana's eventual adaptation to her novel existence are all evidences of the human capability for tenacity. These chronicles emphasise the notion that, notwithstanding the inescapability of transformation and deprivation, individuals possess the fortitude to adjust and flourish. The book, therefore, functions as a poignant reminder of the tenacity intrinsic in the human soul (Badami, 2001).

The Hero's Walk is a thematic investigation of the intricacies of selfhood, the complexities of familial relationships, and the unwavering spirit of human fortitude. Anita Rau Badami's story is a proof of the lasting human ability to adjust and evolve, even in the presence of deep cultural and personal turmoil.



VI. Comparative Analysis with Other Works

The Hero's Walk by Anita Rau Badami, with its profound examination of cultural clash, individuality, and kinship dynamics, presents a fertile terrain for comparative examination with other literary compositions. This juxtaposition not only accentuates the distinctive facets of Badami's storytelling but also situates it within the wider framework of South Asian literature and juxtaposes it with Western narratives on analogous subjects.

A. Comparison with Similar Themes in South Asian Literature

South Asian literature is abundant with tales that explore the intricacies of cultural clashes, familial connections, and identity dilemmas. Badami's book exhibits thematic echoes with other South Asian pieces, such as Jhumpa Lahiri's "*The Namesake*" and Arundhati Roy's "*The*

Deity of Minuscule Matters". Similar to *The Hero's Walk*, Lahiri's "*The Namesake*" delves into the trials of individuality and inclusion encountered by migrants, concentrating on the diasporic battle to harmonise cultural legacy with fresh-world actualities. Both books emphasise the intergenerational disparities in addressing cultural individuality and the feeling of estrangement that can emerge in an unfamiliar territory. Roy's "*The Deity of Minute Matters*", meanwhile, presents a parallel investigation of kinship dynamics and communal conventions in a diminutive Indian village, resembling the backdrop of Toturpuram in Badami's creation. The elaborate depiction of familial connections and the influence of societal constraints in both novels offer a deep comprehension of the human predicament within the South Asian cultural milieu (Lahiri, 2003; Roy, 1997).

B. Contrast with Western Narratives on Cultural Conflict

When juxtaposing Badami's work with Western narratives on cultural strife, conspicuous disparities arise in the depiction of individuality, assimilation, and familial interactions. In Western literature, cultural discord is frequently portrayed through the perspective of selfreliance, as observed in pieces such as Jeffrey Eugenides' "*Middlesex*" or Amy Tan's "*The Joy Luck Club*". These chronicles have a tendency to accentuate personal challenges and individual voyages towards self-exploration and embrace, frequently within the framework of migrant encounters. Although *The Hero's Walk* does centre around personal development and individual challenges, it places a greater emphasis on familial connections and societal obligations, mirroring the communal essence of South Asian traditions. This juxtaposition emphasises the diverse strategies towards concepts of selfhood and adjustment in distinct cultural contexts, accentuating how cultural heritage moulds storytelling techniques and thematic emphases (Eugenides, 2002; Tan, 1989). The comparative examination of *The Hero's Walk* alongside other South Asian and Western literary pieces enhances the comprehension of Badami's novel. It amplifies the distinct viewpoints presented in South Asian literature regarding familiar subjects of cultural strife and individuality, and underscores the cultural particularities that distinguish these stories from Western equivalents.



VII. Conclusion

The expedition through Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* reaches its zenith in a lavish tapestry of sentimental profundity and societal self-reflection. This novel not just narrates the tale of Sripathi Rao and his family but also serves as a looking glass reflecting the countless intricacies of contemporary Indian society. By means of its characters and their interconnected lives, the book encapsulates the core of the human encounter amidst cultural turmoil. Badami's story, immersed in the subtleties of Indian heritage and the trials of global integration, provides a deep exploration into the core of a community struggling with swift transformation. The book's examination of topics such as individuality, inclusion, familial interactions, and tenacity offers a perspective from which readers can observe the influence of cultural discord on personal development. The characters' voyages through anguish, bereavement, embrace, and adjustment are symbolic of a broader societal metamorphosis, one that strikes a chord with readers from various cultural heritages. The comparative examination of *The Hero's Walk* alongside other South Asian and Western narratives enhances our comprehension of Badami's distinct storytelling methodology. It emphasises the unique cultural subtleties that mould her story, distinguishing it from Western viewpoints on comparable subjects. The book's focus on kinship connections, communal responsibilities, and shared sense of self presents a juxtaposition to the frequently encountered individualistic stories in Western literature. This comparative perspective elucidates the various ways in which narratives can be narrated and comprehended, contingent on their cultural milieu. Moreover, this examination highlights the significance of perceiving literature as a medium for cultural discourse and comprehension. Badami's work, in its exploration of the intersection between the personal and the cultural, contributes significantly to the broader discourse on identity, belonging, and the human capacity for change. *The Hero's Walk* stands as a noteworthy addition to modern literature, providing a touching and perceptive examination of cultural clash and individual development. Anita Rau Badami's adept storytelling, coupled with her profound comprehension of human sentiments and cultural intricacies, renders this book a captivating and contemplative read. The tale of Sripathi Rao and his kin transcends the limitations of its pages, beckoning readers to contemplate their own encounters with transformation, bereavement, and adjustment. In a globe progressively characterised by cultural intersections and metamorphoses, *The Hero's Walk* functions as a reminder of the enduring potency of literature to link us with the ubiquitous veracities of the human encounter.

VIII. References

1. AHMED SARA (2010). "Happy Objects", In: M. Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.): 29-51.
2. AHMED, SARA 2004 (2014). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
3. BACHELARD, GASTON. 1942. (2006). *Water and Dreams. An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, Texas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.
4. Badami, Anita Rao. *The Hero's Walk*. London: Bloomsbury.2001.



5. BADAMI, ANITA RAU (2000). *The Hero's Walk*, New York: Ballantine Books.
6. Badami, Anita. *Tamarind Mem*. New York: Viking, 1996.
7. Badami, Anita. *The Hero's Walk*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2001.
8. Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press and Women's Press, 2000.
9. Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An introduction to literary and Cultural theory*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. 1995.
10. BERTELSEN, LONE & ANDREW MURPHIE (2010). "An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers: Félix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain", In: M Gregg and Gregory J. Seighworth (eds.): 138-157.
11. BLADOW KILE & JENNIFER LADINO (2018). *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
12. CIRLOT, J. E. (2002). *A Dictionary of Symbols*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
13. COHEN, JEFFREY JEROME AND LOWELL DUCKERT (eds.) (2015). *Elemental Ecocriticism. Thinking with Earth, Water, and Fire*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
14. DELEUZE, GILLES & FÉLIX GUATTARI (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
15. DHAWAN, NISHA (2005). "Women's Role Expectations and Identity Development in India", *Psychology and Developing Societies*, Vol. 17, No. 1: 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F097133360501700105>
16. GILLER, ESTHER (1999). "What is Psychological Trauma?", Sidran Institute of Traumatic Stress Education and Advocacy. <https://www.sidran.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/04/What-Is-Psychological-Trauma.pdf> accessed 28 August 2021.
17. GREGG, MELISSA & GREGORY J. SEIGWORTH (eds). *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, London: Duke University Press.
18. KÖVECSÉS, ZOLTÁN (2000). *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
19. LAKOFF, GEORGE & MARK JOHNSON (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
20. LAKOFF, GEORGE & MARK JOHNSON (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York: Basic Books.
21. Parameswaran, Uma. *Writing The Diaspora, essays on Culture and Identity*. Jaipur:Rawat. 2007. Oxford References: Cultural Mosaic Theory.