

EXISTENTIAL DIMENSIONS IN ANITA RAU BADAMI's TAMARIND WOMAN

Deepa Sarabhai

Assistant Professor, Department of Languages, Manipal University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

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ABSTRACT

The fights for the existence have always been the prime focus for all the species and with no exceptions to the humankind as well. Darwinian Theory of the 'survival of the fittest' emphasizes the aspect of natural selection. He also customized the phrase "struggle for existence" in his book 'On the Origin of Species' published in 1859. From then, this theory of the 'Struggle for Existence' has been the talk of the literary town as well. The 19th century saw the emergence of a movement named as Existentialism. It suggests that human beings are themselves responsible for all their choices and wills. Sartre is named as the first person who brought this philosophy in literature. Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus are known as the initiators of the philosophy. Later on, the mid of 20th century saw the rise of the new sensibility of Postcolonial Indian English writers in the same direction. Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri are named as the finest and prevalent ink slingers who have shown their fascination towards drawing this philosophy through their characters. Anita Rau Badami though relatively a new name also exhibits her inclination for this doctrine in her works. An Instigator of four excellent novels- Tamarind Mem, the Hero's Walk, Can you hear the Nightbird Call and Tell it to the Trees, Badami has her thoughtful way of looking at things, perceiving them and presenting them. The present study attempts to explore how Badami's characters choose different ways to survive and preserve their individualities. The Study limits its discussion to one of her most remarkable novel, Tamarind Mem, also known as Tamarind Woman, in the light of existentialism.

KEYWORDS: Existentialism, Struggle, Emergence, Postcolonial

INTRODUCTION

"Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes upon individuals' existence, freedom, and choice. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe." ("Existentialism - By Branch / Doctrine - The Basics of Philosophy"). The Researcher has explored how Anita Rau Badami, an Indo-Canadian scribbler, has disposed of her captivation for how female characters are bound to choose various ways to sustain their existence.

In the same way, as Badami has suffered the mental condition of being diverted from one place to another, her characters also enact. They suffer mentally and feel distance from their roots. They long for their homeland and roots. Badami marks her specialty as a keen observer of things, people, and situation. She depicts the things in the same way as she observes them. She states, "What keeps me anchored is the writing life. Writing is my passion and my profession. I translate everything I know, think, feel, experience, touch see or hear into written word." ("Kingston Writers fest - Anita Rau Badami...")

Badami's novels deal with the different issues like relationships, memories, nostalgia, culture and generation gap, the feeling of displacement, psychological turmoil, frustration, adaptation, children-parents relationships, etc. The dominant themes are an exile, migration, self-alienation, nostalgia, belongingness, rootlessness, and physical mobility. They not only talk about geographical dislocation but also emphasize upon a socio-cultural sense of dislocation and their psychological effects. They brought out the psychological sufferings of their characters. They depict their emotions of fear, nostalgia, and uncertainty. They present their identity crisis, mysteries of identity, psychological suffering and a strong sense of personal and cultural dislocation. Still, a big difference between their presentations of these can be noticed. They also portray their characters' assimilation in the newly acquired land.

The Researcher has observed that Badami's novels display a strong presence of Existential Philosophy. In *Hero's Walk*, a strong sense of disagreement of the third generation Nandana with her first generation maternal grandparents has been observed. In *Tamarind Mem* Kamini can be seen trying out to trace out her root connection into her mother. A dominant presence of the nostalgia and attempt for reuniting with the root can be found in her *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call. Tell It to the Trees* is a novel about migrated Indian family who is trying to preserve Indian values in a foreign land.

Objective

Badami's fiction is a wash with all the themes mentioned above. The research would take up the maiden fiction *Tamarind Woman* of Anita Rau Badami. At present, diasporic studies are in proliferation throughout the world. There is no dearth of study of Indian-American fiction but Indian-Canadian writings. Therefore, the study of Indian-Canadian fiction will give a new insight to the readers. Moreover, the objective of this research would be to study Indian females' perspectives and ways to secure their individualities and existence.

Research

This paper will explore the various ways specifically chosen by the titular character and protagonist Kamini's mothers Sarojato sustain her existence. This research paper will reconnoiter how common things and natural incidences, attached to a person's birth time have a deep impact on the child's future.

Badami suffers double marginalization first as a woman in the male-dominated society and second seclusion and distance from the homeland. This marginalization is also present in her fictions. She put emphasis on the sufferings which affect the subsistence of a woman.

Tamarind Woman is a fiction swamped with female characters. The story has a female protagonist, Kamini, and the entire thread is woven around her realization of the disturbed relationship between her parents, her mother's relationship with her and her sister and her mother's relation with other relatives. Thus, it's narration about a woman's life from the eye view of another woman, who is her daughter. It is a fascinating reason for the researcher to understand a female's perception of another woman in the realm of being.

Kamini, the central character, and voice for the entire narration of the novel shows her deep attachment to her mother Saroja and also speaks that she has to suffer because of her eccentric ways and strange character. She even feels that her mother shares the same traits as are possessed by a tamarind tree. Now, how Saroja opts multiple ways to secure her individuality and to be not only in her family but also in the society, and how natural events put an impression on her

being, has been explored.

Omens at the Birth Time

The very first thing that marks the value and significance to Saroja's birth, is Good Natural omens. The circumstances at the time of her birth add value and strength to her presence.

"That year the sugarcane yield was so good that everybody who came to see the Baby said that she was Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, incarnate." (p.9)

"The month that your Ma was born," continued Chinna, trying to lace Ma in history for me, "the sugarcane was being harvested and rivers of juice turned the soil to mush. If you stuck out your tongue, you could taste the wind laden with sweetness. (p.10)

A significant observation gives insight that every good omen at the time of Saroja's birth is related to trees, fruits or harvest. Females also symbolize Nature that bears fruits of human birth. Saroja has been compared to tamarind tree, the tree that possesses sweet and sour tastes. Kamini is the result of sourness and Roopa is a result of sweetness, because she further carries a married and blessed life while Kamini is left with alienation. Such is the plight of a woman who strives for her individuality. She is similar to her sweet fruit bearing trees, but because tamarind tries to choose a separate path for itself to grow and maintain its real taste, it is always looked at with despise, in the same way, Saroja also has to fight to survive. The title itself foretells the place of a woman who tries to maintain her individuality; she is compared to a Tamarind tree that maintains its real taste, bearing no artificiality. It is believed to be a home of spirits according to folklores, because of its weirdness to stand apart from others, so is the case with Saroja, who strives to stand different from others. Such is the life of a woman in Indian society.

Tamarind fruit is more remembered because of its sourness, so Kamini, Saroja's daughter, also suffers sourness in her mother's behavior. Throughout the story, she is always willing to bring her mother more close to herself. She can't accept her mother's sour distance.

"I waited for her to interpret my silences between my words to sense my loneliness, to say, "why don't you just come back home, I need you, I am getting old." I would drop my work and catch the next flight back." (p.15)

Birth status is another very important social factor in Indian society because it guards the Natural Principle; that only the mightiest has the right to dominate and produce. Brahmins in Hindu society are treated as the People of the highest order, thus, having more advantage over their compulsory presence in the society. So, Saroja also chooses another Brahmin, so that she can have better chances to survive and future reproduction.

Saroja likes **pampering and chatting** when she is at her parents' home. It is another way to connect oneself with others. It was completely a different face of Saroja than that of at her husband's home. It reflects truly how doubly marginalized woman has to opt different ways to preserve her existence and durability. Communication helps a person to establish ties which are essential to fit in the social structure.

"Ma was a different Person here, giggling with her sisters, allowing her aunts and cousins to pamper her. I wish we could live in that house forever."(p.5)

On the contrary, after being married, she is left alienated, miserable and hopeless. The Researcher finds that

Saroja is occupied with the quest for meaning, value, and freedom.

Another element of survival can be quoted from the reference of *besharam* plant. It teaches that One has to cross the lines of comfort if one wants to survive.

“Ma told us that besharam meant shameless, and the plant was called that because it was parasitic and grew anywhere you throw it.” (p.22)

Same is the condition of Saroja, she is dependent on her husband, and is bound to make a refreshing start at new places, her husband. A woman has to roam around on her husband’s wishes. But then too it is her strength that she survives even after so much of strife to sustain at new places.

Kamini’s mother Saroja chooses her ‘**moody silence**’ as her expression to secure her fortitudes whereas her father secures his existence in the life of his daughter through his traveling stories. Human beings are such; they only focus on preserving their identity. Kamini’s mother shows how a person lives different identities in one’s lifetime and how unpredictable human nature is. The researcher finds her a true follower of existential philosophy.

Story presses that **Silence** is the mightiest tool for survival in bitter conditions of life. Tamarind tree is sour and lives a long life. Saroja also chooses silence and gets herself engaged silently in the works of her interest. She even advances for her sexual quest and approaches a car mechanic. She has to go through raising eyebrows and rough words and expressions. Saroja craves for the fulfillment of her psycho-emotional needs.

Saroja is fond of *Women at Home* magazine. **Education** is another weapon in today's time which helps you to state that your being as an educated person is more valuable than that of an uneducated person. Saroja also believes in it, so she not only follows it in her life but also ready to take pains in granting best education to her daughters. She reads stories from there and tries that her daughters should follow her ways.

The postcolonial time has replaced physical labor to intellectual achievements by emphasizing upon the strength of education, especially knowledge of English language. Saroja always wants her daughters to study in convent schools.

“...without English they will be like servants’ children what the difference is then, you tell me? Argued Ma. (p.37)

Thus if her daughters will not learn the language, they will be subjugated and will not be able to live independently. Unlike her ancestors, she does not ask her daughters to learn household chores. Only the fittest can survive. And for a woman, beauty, and her mental abilities can provide her secure harbor in the postcolonial time.

AT one time she **bursts out** on her daughter Kamini when she is enquired about her wellbeing by Kamini, she says,

“Do I ask you why you have to live in the North Pole, hanh? Did I ask your sister why she ran away?. What is the worst that can happen to me? I will die, that’s all. And if I die, the apartment and all that I have it can be shared between you and Roopa.” (p.30) “Go why should I care what you do?” my father would say sometimes,...And don’t forget to take your daughters with you?” (p.31)

A woman is not cared about, nobody is bothered to cater her emotional needs, what is important, a man’s needs. Moreover, it is always the prime duty of a woman to take care of the children. Thus they become a burden to carry.

To live with pride and respect in the society is equally valuable as to survive one's life. Therefore, it is one's prime duty to announce her liberty and strength to live.

Badami's women characters are modern as well as conservative, loving as well as caring. Saroja is very careful about her daughters. She is conscious when a beggar pinches Kaminiat Ratanpura junction. She wants her daughter to learn well and look beautiful. She is ready to bear her social responsibilities willingly. Thus **fulfilling one's responsibilities** also give pleasure, decor, and meaning to one's life. A meaningless life is a waste.

One more way to safeguard humanity is **traveling**. Humans have traveled so far to avoid loss of their mortality. Badami has beautifully carved the niche how today also, traveling, motions, space and time affects one's character traits and individuality. At the end of the story, Saroja has preferred traveling as her medium to live freely where she need not give any explanations for her actions. Nature works on the principal of passing on what she has, and so the things keep **sharing and moving**, then only they can have a life. Movement provides new strength and life to survive. Saroja also shows her submission to the same theory.

CONCLUSIONS

This research is a contribution to the acknowledgment of Anita Rau Badami.

The study concludes that Saroja, the titular character bears all the colors and traits of existential philosophy. She chooses and prefers things and people, silently but strongly fulfills her inner self, and molds herself to adjust to given situation. She enjoys her Nature giving feminine rights over a man, where she decides about her daughters' education. She bears all the responsibilities but as a Master, not as a servant. She is a true follower of existential belief.

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