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## A Journey of Shadows and Light: A Diaspora Perspective on Anita Rau Badami's "The Hero's Walk"

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### Abstract

This paper is an attempt to articulate the tapestry of human relationships as woven by Anita Rau Badami in her poignant novel 'The Hero's Walk'. Set between the sun-drenched streets of India and the alien landscapes of Canada, the narrative follows the perspectives of two characters with different surroundings and cultural milieus. Badami has divided each chapter from the point of view of Sripathi Rao, a fifty-seven-year-old man, alongside the narrative of his seven-year-old granddaughter, Nandana. Both the old Sripathi and the young Nandana are grappling with the echoes of culture and searching for belonging. Through their intertwined journeys, Badami illuminates the nuanced struggles of the diaspora experience, where past and present converge in unexpected ways.

**Keywords-** Indianness, Generation displacement, Self- identity, Cultural milieu.

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Anita Rau Badami is one of the renowned Indo-Canadian diaspora writers who has acclaimed her position with her evocative storytelling and Indianness in her portrayal of characters. Her works often explore themes of self-identity in an alien land and the immigrant experience, which connects the diaspora readers across the globe. "The Hero's Walk", published in 2000, stands as one of Badami's most acclaimed novels with multiple awards for its extraordinary perspective towards immigrant experience. It has won the Regional Commonwealth Writers Prize, Italy's Premio Berto, and was longlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Orange Prize for Fiction, as well as a finalist for the Kiriyama Prize.

Indian culture and its traditions are unique because it deals with the essence of their homeland. Diaspora writers often blend cultural intricacy by highlighting their cultural hybridity in their works. Anita Rau Badami's narrative techniques of blending culture and tradition in the alien land for self-identity are a hallmark of her writing style. She follows a non-linear storytelling method to portray the past and present life of the character in India and Canada. Her works frequently employ non-linear narrative structures, jumping between different time periods and narrative voices. In "The Hero's Walk", we find Sripathi, Nirmala, Putti, and Nandana sharing their thoughts through nostalgia and narrating the story according to their perspective. Badami has divided each chapter, which at first describes Sripathi's life in India and the life of Nandana, his granddaughter in Vancouver, after the death of both parents in a car accident.

Badami's narrative technique has woven a special thing in this novel, as we find the main character Sripathi Rao who is in his 60's learns to accept the current generations decision after a tragic incident, which shattered the life



of his and his seven years old granddaughter Nandana, and most peculiarly we see his granddaughter who was born and brought up in Canada adjusts herself to Indian life to the best she can.

Sripathi's life journey is indeed a compelling story that captures the essence of cultural displacement and identity. The narrative weaves together the past and present, India and Canada, to illuminate the struggles of identity formation among displaced individuals. Sripathi Rao, the protagonist of Anita Rau Badami's "The Hero's Walk", experiences the world through a deeply personal lens of loss, responsibility, and cultural dislocation. Sripathi, as a father, faces social problems when his daughter Maya, who has been engaged to Prakash Bhatt for marriage after her higher education in Canada, decides to go against her family and marries a foreigner whom she met and fell in love with while pursuing her collegiate education in Canada. Sripathi's dream of getting his daughter married in a renowned and respectable family is devastated. He breaks all contact with his daughter Maya, and he does not even allow his daughter to visit his home in India. Though Sripathi has broken all his relationships with his daughter but his wife Nirmala continues to shower her love towards her daughter, which also portrays the Indian mother's affection towards their children. Here we find Sripathi as a strict father who wants his children to be disciplined and obedient to their parents. From Sripathi's point of view, the novel unfolds as a journey of grappling with familial expectations, ageing, and the shifting identities of his diasporic family.

In "The Hero's Walk", Badami introduces a seven-year old character who takes the novel to a different angle. Nandana, a seven-year-old girl living in Vancouver, navigates a world marked by loss and confusion after her parent's tragic accident, which is told to her three days after the tragic incident only to hand over her to the proper guardian who is none other than her grandfather Sripathi Rao, who never thought that he would reconnect his relationship with his granddaughter again after excluding her mother Maya from the family. Badami has beautifully portrayed the Indian concept of destiny and the will of God, which no one can change. As the story persists we are very sorry to find Nandana in an alien place, which is her homeland, but not according to her, she wants to go to Vancouver to the extent that she tries to run away from Sripathi's House instead of going to school. Through Nandana's eyes, the world is a mix of fragmented memories of Vancouver, where she was happy with her parents, and the stark reality of her new life in India, which she tries hard to accept. Nandana's narrative voice reveals her struggles to grasp the complexities of adult emotions and cultural displacement. Nandana's perspective is one of innocence, curiosity, and a longing for connection amidst change. She never talks to anyone in the family; perhaps she clings to her grandmother, Nirmala, who bestows her love and care towards her granddaughter. Her parents' death has left a void, and she is struggling to find her place in this new reality. She is unable to understand the language and emotion, and finds her world in a jumble of confusion. Through her eyes, we see the world as a fragile, confusing place, where love and loss coexist.

Sripathi Rao and his granddaughter Nandana's character is a poignant reminder of the resilience of self-consciousness and its ability to adapt, and its capacity to love and heal. Through the journey of both grandfather and granddaughter, we see the power of storytelling, the connection between generations, and the search for identity in a rapidly changing world.

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