

The Cultural Shift of Global to Local in *The Hero's Walk* and from Local to Global in *Tell it to the Trees* by Anita Rau Badami

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Abstract

Globalisation has erased the physical boundaries and made co-existence of different cultures possible. This co-existence of cultures actually means co-existence of two or more individual belonging different cultures is living in the same region. When two individual of different cultures come together, they bring to the table their own cultural identities which have been rooted in them traditionally. These ideologies, behaviours, manners, rituals, thoughts etc then get fused with one another and create a confluence.

*The present paper will examine the select fiction by Anita Rau Badami, an Indian migrant to Canada. Badami has ardently woven two cultures in her novels. Expounding *The Hero's Walk* and *Tell it to the Trees* by Anita Rau Badami with the elements of multiculturalism in it and how she connects global with local and vice versa will lead towards the conclusion of how Indo Canadian Literature represents the multiplicity of cultures.*

Key Words: *Global, Local, Cultural Diversity, Cultural Mosaic, Indo Canadian Fiction*

“We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic: different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, and different dreams.”

-Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter mentions that the mosaic prepared by different people, beliefs, yearnings hopes and dreams is beautiful. The term “melting pot”, if literally taken would be resulted into confluence of soil and nothing more. As if pots melt down soil (sand) melts down and it merges with another one. Whereas mosaic is something which even has been made up by separated parts when it comes together in a certain pattern gives a beautiful design. The separate parts lose their identity for playing a role in providing the whole design. This design of mosaic if deconstructed will not be beautiful and will remain only shattered, unsystematic parts. Literature too can be decorated and designed with such multicultural aspects.

Canadian literature has been coloured with so many different cultures as ‘Canadian society’ the word itself comes with the imprints of multiculturalism in the mind of a reader. Multiculturalism was adopted as the official policy of the Canadian government during the premiership of Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the 1970s and 1980s. For understanding Canadian Literature through the prism of multicultural element, following terms are necessary to keep in mind.

- **Multiculturalism/Cultural Confluence:**

Multiplicity of cultures in any particular field can be called as multiculturalism. Multiplicity tends the results like diversity, combination, hybridization and clubbed culture or society. While all these cultures get fused themselves with each other it is impossible to find out their distinctiveness. Their boundaries have melted into another and become a new form of clubbed culture like bowl of Salad and a cultural confluence came into existence.

- **Mosaic Culture:**

The federal government, under Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, declared in 1971 that Canada would adopt multicultural policy. Canada would recognize and respect its society included diversity in languages, customs, religions, and so on. In 1982 multiculturalism was recognized by section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was then enacted by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

- **Cultural Mosaic:**

Cultural Mosaic is a term derived from a French term "la mosaïque culturelle" which means the co-existence of distinguished cultures, languages and ethnic groups under the same roof. John Murray Gibbon had first used the word mosaic in his book *Canadian Mosaic* (1938) to refer to Canadian society.

Keeping in mind the demographic divisions of the world, so many distinct variations can be found as a result of their inheritance by nature and the environment they are living in. These variations or differences further will produce the peculiar distinctions like race, ethnicity, cast, gender and so on. All these when comes together and forms a unique pattern of living and behaving for a group gives birth to a new culture. Globalisation has erased the physical boundaries and so co-existence of different culture is possible. This co-existence of culture actually means co-existence of two or more individual of different culture is living in the same region. When two individual of different culture came together they come with their own cultural identities which have been rooted in them traditionally. These ideologies, behaviors, manners, rituals, thoughts, and many more will be fused with each other and creates a confluence. Looking apparently these may be differences while examining in detail they create a design like mosaic. This mosaic when represented in literature even the text becomes a mosaic of cultures represented in it. This paper aims at examining the *The Hero's Walk* and *Tell it to the Trees* by Anita Rau Badami.

Shift from Global to Local in *The Hero's Walk*:

The novel opens with a morning scene of a house of Sripathi Rao and the description of Brahmin Street of Toturpuram. In the third Chapter 'The Storm' Sripathi Rao gets the shocking news of the accident of Maya and her husband, Alan Baaker. Maya migrated to Vancouver as she was in love with Alan Baker, a Christian, and got married to him. Both of them died in an accident. However, fortunately Nandana, a daughter of them was not there with them at the time of accident so have been saved. At the same time the man who informed Sripathi about this accident said "As you are probably aware, Maya appointed you legal guardian and trustee sometimes ago." (p. 32) From her the journey of global to local has been started and Sripathi goes to Vancouver to take Nandana. Nandana's sudden shift from Vancouver to Toturpuram comes with turmoil in the life of Nandana as well as the family of Sripathi Rao. After spending one month at Vancouver, Sripathi Rao gets permission to take Nandana to India as a legal guardian. Nandana was still in a shock that even after coming to India. Nandana could not find the atmosphere convenient in India. Everything in India was new/alien to her. Nandana's shift was the shift of a new culture to the Indian traditional culture. The incidents and characters witness the clashes between cultures. Badami depicts a shift of a small girl from a modern culture to an orthodox one respectively from Canadian to Indian. A modern girl comes to an orthodox family changes the atmosphere of home. These shifts and changes have been shown very keenly by Badami.

Shift from Local to Global in *Tell it to the Trees*:

Badami has portrayed here a family of Vikram Dharma who is staying at British Columbia in a house built by his father. He lives with Suman, his second wife, Akka, his mother, Varsha, daughter from his first wife Harini and Hemant, a son born to him and Suman. Varsha's mother left the family, flew away and died in an accident during Varsha's childhood. So Vikram married Suman from India and brought her to stay with the family. It is the story of the isolation and immigration where many interesting incidents occur due to cultural clashes. Badami portrays the crisis in the Indian Family that had migrated to Canada which is the result of its migration.

The head of the Dharma family, Vikram Dharma, is living with his family at Merrit's point. Akka, grandmother of Vikram, came there to stay with them in Canada from India from the time of marriage of Vikram. Vikram was a brutal fellow who used to beat Varsha and Harini (Helen), Vikram's wife had left Vikram and her young daughter Vaarsha as she could not tolerate the beating by Vikram.. Helen died at in an accident and so Vikram has to travel India and got married with Suman. Suman gave birth to a son, Hemant. Suman was also beaten and

suppressed by Vikram but she could not leave the family because of Hemant and her financial dependency on Vikram. Although Akka have supported Suman to escape from the home as she knows the brutality of Vikram she did not escape.

In *The Hero's Walk* it was Nandana, a Canadian girl, has to migrate to India, here Badami portrayed Suman, an Indian lady's shift to Canada. This depiction shows clearly the shift of Indian culture to Canadian one. Badami, being an Indo-Canadian writer, has experienced life at both the countries. Badami has been migrated to Canada as she got married there. Badami has witnessed globalization and so multiculturalism too as a result of melting boundaries. She writes about India and Canada both in almost all her novels. Badami once stated in an Interview that...

"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. I am both doomed and blessed, to be suspended between two worlds, always looking back, but with two gorgeous places to inhabit, in my imagination or my heart."

The above mentioned statement clearly shows the ambiance in which Anita Rau is staying. By stating that she has one foot in Canada and couple of toes in India she admits that she has witnessed multiculturalism. She does not hold the opinion that this migration has put her in nostalgia or she is missing her homeland. Rather she says she is blessed too for generating this perspective. She is blissful enough that she inhabits both this culture which has provided her with the imaginations. Both the places for her are gorgeous which nullifies the aspect of diaspora or cultural clash. Any culture when has been introduced to a new culture some differences has been witness as these differences only can be the identity of any culture. Any culture has its own existence because it is different than another culture. These disparities when gets merged gives us a mosaic design. The pieces of various cultures come closer and provide a beautiful texture that is Cultural Mosaic.

Anita Rau Badami has represented the complete Indian life by showing Brahmin Street, Sripathi's emotional mother, typical unmarried sister in a home, an orthodox family, strict rituals, and many more. When Maya wanted to get married to Alan the family was not happy to accept it. Sripathi has abandoned Maya from his life as she got married against his will. This shows the shift of Maya into another culture which was chosen by her and so this willingly migration does not put her in bad situation or did not led her to nostalgia. Maya was not mourning for the homeland even. The Rao family was in problem as Maya had gone against the rituals constituted by the culture. Another shift of Nandana from Vancouver to Toturpuram was not chosen but imposed. Nandana's shift from global to local i.e. developed to developing country left her in trouble with adjustment. Nandana's mother Maya lost all her contacts with homelands gradually after her Marriage with Alan whereas as a second generation the one who is born and brought up upto seven years in Canadian style has been moved to typical Indian village. Nandana who has been cultivated in a global environment had to adjust in a local and conventional ambiance. Nandana, a girl with Indian name and roots, was not aware about the traditions of Indian families. Nandana's first dislike is her own grandfather who has legally adopted her as she heard during their parents' conversation that Sripathi Rao did not get agree to their love marriage. When Maya shows photos of her home in India to Nandana, Nandana used to ask that whether ghost live there? When she comes to station she finds it much crowded then in Vancouver. She was even noticing the difference between the squirrels of Canada and India. When Nandana stated "These teachers dump everything on them to do at home" (p.288) Badami portrays an Indian Education System. Nandana found the difference between celebration of festivals too as she was aware about Halloween whereas here Roas celebrates Diwali. Nandana not only brings her culture to this localities but ideologies and thoughts too, as her coming to Rao family Putti got courage go against her mother rebel. She started rising up against many cultural misconceptions. In spite of being a girl and that too from an Indian Orthodox Brahmin family she has managed to marry a Dalit man. It was a step taken by her but supported by modern (global) thoughts of Nandana. It was only through Nandana Sripathi got realization and regret for not having "known his daughter's inner life" (p. 147)

Examining the *Tell it to the Trees* by Badami, it is Suman who has migrated for an Indian family at a foreign land. She stated in the beginning...

My name is Suman Dharma. For thirty years, from the moment of my birth until I left for Merrit's Point, I lived in one of four streets that form a quadrangle around a famous and very old temple in Triplicane in the city of Madras. People believe our neighbourhood has been around since the first

century BC. Since then, it has seen crowds of foreigners from Portugal, Italy, France and England, but has somehow managed to retain its past. It still has the feeling of a small town frozen in time, even though it has become, in reality, just a tiny corner of a large, bustling, modern city. Our home was on the third floor of a rickety old building and in order to get to it you had to enter through the living room of the ground-floor tenant Rama Shastri, a priest at the temple, slapping aside damp bedsheets and pyjamas, striped underwear, dhotis, saris, petticoats and diapers, dozens of them, that always hung like banners from the low roof, as if to celebrate the teeming life within that small space.(p.18)

The description penned by Anita Rau Badami by Suman's narration keenly shows a picture of her locality. The idea of Suman before migration was living in a typical Indian society. Even when she was living in a street of Madras she has felt the glimpses of globalization as her photograph by a foreigner might have travelled to the unknown country and to the unknown people's album. Here the boundaries have been melted down and we can see the imprints of multiculturalism. Before her migration to Canada she has witnessed globalization when she states...

Once, near the temple tank, a group of tourists asked if they could take a picture of me and my aunt Madhu Kaki, and so my photograph went out of India before I did, into the wide and foreign world. Somewhere out there in Germany or England, Italy or America, I live in the pages of a stranger's album of family photos a girl of sixteen with hope in her eyes and the trustful certainty that nothing could go wrong.(p.19)

Even Suman was living in Indian society it cannot be said that she was contented with the homeland. She has many complaints with her own society too.

...marriage, marriage, marriage was all those wretched gully-people thought about when they saw a girl. Not just in my gully, it seemed to me, but in every road and alley, every single home throughout the country. The economy of India runs on marriages. Weddings are big business. (p.33)

The above mentioned statements form Suman left the reader with her localities and ideologies. Suman, imbibed with Indian culture has to move to Canada after marriage with Vikram. "Even after eight years with him, I feel on shifting sands, fearful of his reactions to everything, anything." said Suman once in Canada as she was beaten by Vikram many a times. She got chances to leave that place as Akka said her "Go, leave today. Run. Run." (p.38). Suman replied "How? I have no money, how can I leave? Where do I go?"(p.38) describes the homeless Suman in a foreign land. If it was India she could have settled to leave and stay somewhere. She is even financially reliant on Vikram. When Akka managed for money she did not leave as she has been imposed by Varsha to stay there and not to leave. Even her passport has been vanished and she could not even dare to ask Vikram about it. Suman was doubly suppressed, suppressed at home by Vikram at the same time she is depending on Vikram for everything as it was a foreign country. She follows the word of her father that marriages are there to stay together and so even after temptations to escape she did not. She has witnessed winter as the harshest season which in India is the symbol of freshness.

Badami's own understanding of both cultures has been represented in her texts. Both the texts taken here for study have its own flair of looking at the culture of foreign country. It looks that Badami herself has migrated Canada and so both the texts evaluate the aspects of Indian and Canadian culture. Whether character is migrating from homeland to hostland or reversing to roots after acquiring attributes of a particular culture. The shift of Nandana and Suman in both the novels respectively in *The Hero's Walk* and *Tell it to the Trees* has been symbolized for connecting global with local. This evaluation leads us to conclude that all these novels have the common thread of multiculturalism in it. It is the fusion of Indian and Canadian ideologies and the ways of lives that creates what is apparently a multicultural mosaic in literature. Sharmistha Lahiri argues, "Literature, in this context, is an embedded discourse and a narrative tool to negotiate one's position between two cultural realities" Obviously what she means is that the immigrant can negotiate his/her ideology, thought, imagination, identity and creativity within the experience he/she found between two cultures.

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