Chapter 4
The Hero’s Walk

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses The Hero’s Walk written by Anita Rau Badami. Badami is a writer of Indian origin. A large number of writers of Indian origin have given voice to immigrants living in a foreign country through their works. V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Agha Shahid Ali, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Anita Rau Badami, Ruth Jhabwala, Kiran Desai etc. have contributed in Indian diaspora writings in English and their writings have been acclaimed across the globe and rewarded with many awards. There are many writers of Indian diaspora viz., Ajaib Kamal, Roop Dhillon, Shivcharan Jaggi Kussa, Sujata Bhatt, Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Dilara Hashem etc. who have written in regional languages also.

4.2. Life and works of Anita Rau Badami

Anita Rau Badami was born on September 24, 1961 at Rourkela, Orissa. She was educated at University of Madras and then at Mumbai. In her childhood she stayed at various places of India as her father’s job was shifted at many places. In 1991, she migrated to Canada with her husband and got the degree of M.A. from Calgary University. Badami is a writer of Indian Diaspora, living in Canada with a strong voice of
the modern Indian diaspora. Badami has written four novels viz., *Tamarind Mem*, *The Hero’s Walk*, *Can you Hear the Nightbird Call* and *Tell it to the Trees*.

Anita Rau Badami, one of the modern writers in the field of Diasporic literature, even with her few literary writings, has been able to carve a niche for her in the literary world. As Dr. G. Chennareddy writes:

Badami’s novels mainly focus on themes like—firstly it explores family tension, the changing possibilities of memory and the elusive nature of mind. Secondly, it explores the misunderstandings between two generations, by exploring the conflict between modernity and traditional values and thirdly, it explores the changing status of women from traditional roles to conflicting women characters (50).

Among the Indo-Canadian writers Badami has earned unique place in the vibrant field with her focus on psychological insights and concerns of her women protagonist.

### I. *Tamarind Mem*

Badami’s debut novel *Tamarind Mem* is a depiction of the relationship between a mother and a daughter who are trying to make sense of their past with different perceptions. *Tamarind Mem* grew out of her university thesis. The novel unfolds how the past cultural restrictions shape the personal lives and aspirations of the characters. The endless conflicts between mother and daughter lie at its core. The novel is bisected into two halves, and described from two viewpoints, the first half from daughter Kamini’s and second from mother Saroja’s. The theme of the novel is memory and isolation. When Kamini, the daughter, moves away from Saroja, the mother, both spatially (to Canada) and temporally (by growing up), she depends on memory to reconstruct the past she has left behind.

The novel holds many characteristics comparable to author’s own life, like Kamini Moorthy in *Tamarind Mem* is an inhabitant of India now residing in Canada. Like Badami’s own life revolved around the railway colonies of India so, does this book which is set in both India and Canada. But the author strongly claims that this story is not an autobiography. The title *Tamarind Mem* indicates Saroja’s acidic tongue that is her only defense against the rule bound world in which she finds herself. The two main
characters namely Kamini and Saroja never come face to face. Their interactions come to the reader through their storytelling. Saroja delights her fellow passengers with stories while traveling through India by train, after her husband is no more and her two daughters, Kamini and Roopa have settled abroad. On the other hand, in Canada, Kamini remembers her childhood days spent in the railway colonies in India, the moments spent at her grandparents house at the time of Roopa, her younger sister’s birth, her all-time effort to understand her mother. She does so by narrating the stories to herself from her Calgary apartment and recalling the other stories narrated to her during her childhood.

The characters in the novel use their memories to reach a final consensus of searching for their identity in relation to their separate but intertwined worlds. Each of them has a different memory of the same event of the past and finally towards the end, each of their perception becomes a reality that each starts believing in. The mother and daughter once seemed so dissimilar from one another because of their conflicts, suddenly sound and look similar after Saroja’s account of her own memories. Through, Saroja, Badami has portrayed an Indian woman brought up in an orthodox environment of restrictions where her wishes are crushed but she wants her daughters to follow their own choices. (Badami, Tamarind)

II. The Hero’s Walk

In The Hero’s Walk Anita Rau Badami portrays India in microcosm through life in a small fictitious town Toturpuram near Madras. It is about Sripathi Rao, his wife Nirmala, and their families. It intricately traces the lives of ordinary Brahmin people through extraordinary times of political and social transformations in power structures in Southern India, and the resultant shifts in individual values, expectations, and lifestyles.

Sripathi Rao is a middle class press reporter, struggling to fulfill his social, economic and family obligations. He is fifty seven, living with his widow mother Ammayya, unmarried sister Putti, wife Nirmala, son Arun. His daughter Maya goes to Canada, marries Alan, and both dies in an accident leaving their eight years old daughter Nanadana an orphan. The novel depicts Indian society, climate of Toturpuram, celebration of festivals, issues of women, political condition, casteism, issue of education, beliefs in astrology, religious and social rituals in Indian culture and tradition vis-a-vis the issue of settlement of Nandana-a foreigner in Indian tradition. Sripathi’s traumatic
loss of his daughter and his journey to Canada compel him to remember and reenact the past, mark him as a diasporic character.

**III. Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?**

Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* narrates the story of three women viz., Sharan, Leela and Nimmo linked in love and tragedy over a long span of time. The novel begins with the time before the partition of India and Pakistan, and ends with the explosion of Air India flight 182 off the coast of Ireland in 1985. The novel provides kaleidoscopic picture of daily sights, culture and society of both India and Canada. Rau combines fictional world with real events. Her understanding of human relationships makes the novel a masterpiece of integrating the memories of the characters residing in India and Canada. The plot of the novel focuses on the effect of the partition on the Sikh community abroad, specifically the Sikh diaspora in Canada. The novel embodies some major events like the Komagata Maru incident (1914), the Partition of India (1947), the two Indo-Pak Wars (1965, 1971), imposition of a State of Emergency in India (1975), Operation Bluestar (1984), the Assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1984), the Anti-Sikh Riots (1984), the Kanishka Aircrash (1985).

The partition is one of the most tragic events in the history of the world resulted into the loss of human lives and property. The partition leads to unnatural and forced migration of people. The situation of the motherland shaped the members of the community living in Canada, here Pa-ji and Bibi-ji who left undivided India before the Partition. The Sikh community faces struggle for identity in India and their unrest lead to agitation for Khalistan – a separate land for them. Involvement of military in golden temple and assassination of then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi are narrated in the novel. In multi ethnic Canada, the immigrants face issues of their identity. The novel interrogates the effect of political events in the home country and their effect on the actions of people living a diasporic existence in Canada. It illustrates the change that activities in the political and public sphere bring about in the personal and private domain. (Badami, *Can You*)

**IV. Tell it to the Trees**

Badami’s fourth novel *Tell it to the Trees* is focused on domestic drama about the impact of family secrets and the cost of preserving and protecting the family name. *Tell it
*Tell It to the Trees* is a story about a dysfunctional family of East Indian immigrants whose burden of secrets spells disaster for them and others. The story centers around the Dharma family, headed by Vikram Dharma who lives in the house that his father, Mr. J.K. Dharma, built years ago in the isolated wilds of Merrit's Point, British Columbia. Living with him are his mother- Akka, his second wife Suman, Varsha Dharma- 13 year old daughter of Vikram and his first wife Harini, and Hemant- the son of Suman and Vikram. Female voices are front and centre in *Tell It to the Trees*, as the suspenseful story unfolds from the multiple perspectives of 13-year-old Varsha, her stepmother Suman and Anu, who kept a notebook during her time living with the Dharmas. The events are recounted in the voices of Varsha, Suman, Hemant, and Anu Krishnan, the tenant. When Varsha was four, her mother Harini left her father and shortly afterwards she dies in an accident. Her father removes all evidence of Harini's existence in their lives, including pictures and all her personal belongings. Thus he sets the stage for the Varsha's determination not to ever lose someone again.

Eventually, Varsha's father travels to India and returns with a new wife, thirty year old Suman, who arrives in Canada six months after their marriage in India. She is quiet and not very pretty but she has a good heart and is willing to love Varsha. Suman learns almost immediately that Vikram is jealous, controlling and has a terrible temper. No matter what she does it is never good enough for Vikram, who demeans and abuses her and the children. She longs for her new husband to “love me into being.” Anu embodies in-betweenness, a theme close to Badami’s heart. She rents a cottage on the Dharmas’ land, but is not a part of their family. Of Indian ancestry, she has been raised in the West and embraces contemporary values. As an outsider, she breaks through the Dharma family’s boundaries, upsetting the precarious balance of their household, with tragic consequences. Vikram, is only seen and heard through the eyes and ears of others. This novel explores many issues including those of arranged marriage, wife and child abuse, immigrants in Canada, and especially identity. *Tell it to the Trees* vividly portrays the increasing isolation of the Dharma family in the Merrit's Point community - an isolation that is matched by Suman's isolation from the rest of this frightening family. (Brodoff)
4.3. *The Hero’s Walk: An Introduction*

In *The Hero’s Walk* Anita Rau Badami portrays India in microcosm through life in a small fictitious town Toturpuram near Madras now Chennai. Anita Rau Badami explains that “*The Hero’s Walk* is a novel about so many things: loss, disappointment, choices and the importance of coming to terms with yourself and the circumstances of your life without losing the dignity embedded in all of us” (“The Hero’s Walk”). The novel is about Sripathi Rao, his wife Nirmala, and their families. It depicts the life of ordinary Brahmin people through extraordinary times of political and social transformations in power structures in Southern India, and the resultant shifts in individual values, expectations, and lifestyles. The plot of the novel is constructed with the present mingling with the past events through the memory of characters. Badami has used a novel technique of informing about incidences in India and Canada separately within a chapter. About the title of the novel Badami says in an interview:

> In Indian dance there’s a hero’s walk and a villain’s walk -- with a few different flourishes. We walk that fine line between being completely good, completely bad and completely stupid…The hero in epics and mythology slays dragons, goes on a quest -- it’s slightly unbelievable in a modern-day context…Then there’s the absurdity of Bollywood [the Indian film industry], but there the hero is very much loved. And then there are people like you and me who walk through life and manage to sustain hope, from the beginning of life to death. That’s quite a heroic thing. The title refers to each and every character, and by extension each of us. They are all heroic simply to go on living. (“The Hero’s Walk”)

Sripathi Rao is a middle class press reporter, struggling to fulfill his social, economic and family obligations. He is fifty seven, living with his widow mother Ammayya- Janaki Rao, unmarried sister Putti, wife Nirmala, and son Arun. His daughter Maya goes to Canada, and marries Alan. Maya and Alan die in an accident, leaving their eight years old daughter -Nanadana as an orphan.

The opening of the novel describes early morning scene in the month of July in Toturpuram, a small town, situated on the east coast of Bay of Bengal.
IT WAS ONLY FIVE O’CLOCK on a July morning in Toturpuram, and already every trace of night had disappeared. The sun swelled, molten, from the far edge of the sea. Waves shuddered against the sand and left curving lines of golden froth that dried almost instantly. All along the beach, fishermen towed their boats ashore and emptied their nets of the night’s catch. (1)

Sripathi Rao’s mother remembers her youth. Her husband’s name is Narasimha Rao. After six miscarriages, Sripathi is the seventh child of eight children and only son to Ammayya. So, the family priest is summoned to predict infant’s birth chart. The astrologer predicts: “The boy has favourable stars shining on him. He will always be one step ahead of life and one step behind death…After one month, bring him to the temple for a special puja that will clear any lingering shani kata circling his future. Until then do not dress him in red clothes—not a good colour for this boy” (53). Sripathi has a younger sister Putty who is unmarried. Ammayya takes utmost care of Sripathi Rao in his childhood. “Ammayya fed him fat balls of fresh buffalo butter, basmati rice, almonds in milk. His grandmother told him gallant tales of heroism and cunning and wit and honour; of Arjuna the great archer…” (54). Narasimha Rao buys his son the complete Encyclopedia Britannica. He emphasizes his son to read and learn everything by heart. Later on Narasimha Rao becomes irresponsible for his family responsibilities and dies leaving young kids and a wife. After his death, the family faces financial crunch and seeks support from relatives. Sripathi gets admission in medicine but he does not like to work with the dead bodies and so leaves. He says, “I could not stand the smell of the dead. They say that even the hostel food is polluted by human blood. They cook vegetarian meals in the same pots used for meat” (67). Later on Sripathi gets job and the financial condition of the family improves.

Rituals of Sripathi’s Yagnopavit and marriage in Brahmin family as well as post-death rituals in Indian society are narrated in the novel. Sripathi marries with Nirmala. She is very submissive and lives calmly with widow orthodox mother-in-law and unmarried sister-in-law. Sripathi has a daughter Maya and a son Arun. Three years after his wedding, Sripathi, bored by the routine triviality of his work, gets an opportunity to work as a newspaper reporter in Delhi. Nirmala was so excited too, mostly because it would mean a house of her own and freedom from Ammayya. At that time Ammayya
says, “Ayyo! ...Sripathi, you are the son, it is your duty to think about your mother and your sister. You want to abandon us like your father did. I knew this would happen some day. Oh God, why am I cursed with such sorrow?” (68-69) Sripathi rejects good job offer as a newspaper reporter in Delhi because he, being the only son, has to take care of his widow mother and spinster sister. Eventually, Ammayya’s tears persuaded Sripathi to refuse Delhi offer.

Badami narrates the incidences of meetings of Sripathi with his friends Raju Mudaliar and Kashyap and how they succeed in their career. At the later part, Raju feels alien that his sons are living abroad and he worries about his daughter Ragini who has been ill since childhood and decides to sell his house as could not afford expenditure. Ragini dies at the end. Political events are narrated through Munnuswamy, who keeps cattle in residential area and becomes MLA later. He indulges in instigating Hindu and Muslim voters on communal issues during election. Badami also sensitizes the issue of bikini-clad beauties on the beach of Goa and improper representation of Indian culture. Munnuswamy’s son Gopala tries to attract Putti. Putti also gets attracted towards his physique. Ammayya rejects many marriage proposals for Putti on several grounds. She rejects a lecturer saying that he may be stabbed during the examination by students. She also rejects a young engineer settled in America assuming “men from abroad already had white wives and used their Indian ones as maidservants” (81). Through the observation by Putti, Badami informs that in the era of computers, cars and telephones, the life of every citizen has become fast and stressful. Ammayya does not allow Putty to go for a job. Later on, a matchmaker Gowramma comes with a proposal of a groom who is B.Sc. in Computer Science. But as usual the proposal could not get materialized for one or the other reason.

Sripathi Rao’s daughter Maya gets visa to study in Canada. She studies there for three years and gets a degree. Badami narrates, “Then Maya had got letter of admission from the American University. Soon after came an offer of marriage, and Sripathi’s life began to acquire a glow” (70). Maya gets fellowship in America. Arun, the son of Sripathi Rao, is portrayed as inferior in comparison to Maya. He has been working on a doctorate in Social work for the past five years and is involved in various activist organization highlighting contemporary political issues.
Maya has been engaged with Prakash in India. Badami mentions about the expensive ceremony. Prakash’s father says, “We are not dowry type. We only want a decent girl from a good family, one who knows how to fit into life in the West without losing sight of our Indian values” (100). Initially, Maya used to write letters to her parents. Badami mentions:

The first year Maya replied as frequently, sheets of paper crammed with the minutiae of student life in a foreign country, detailed descriptions of her roommates, her professors, the long hours she had to put it. She worried about her assignments, and she was amazed by the library system. She grumbled about the food she had to eat and wished that she had listened to Nirmala and taken a few extra bottles of pickle because she yearned for her mother’s spicy cooking. She was lonely in the beginning and didn’t like the smell of meat when her roommates cooked in the shared kitchen. Her letters were events, and the family discussed every detail for weeks, until her next letter arrived. (105)

Maya sends photographs also with an old Agfa camera that Sripathi has purchased and given as a surprise to Maya. But soon from second year onwards, frequency of Maya’s letters has decreased and even the meager replies have been stopped and all they receive is a New Year’s card with a few hastily penned lines, and increasingly rare telephone calls. Later on, after three years of completion of her study, Sripathi receives a letter from Maya informing her wish to marry Alan Baker, and to shift to Vancouver, where Maya has found a job and Alan has got admission in Ph.D. Maya informs this fact to her friends thus:

My dear Mamma and Appu,

I don’t know how else to say this, so let me be direct. I want to cancel my engagement to Prakash. I am in love with Alan Baker…We want to get married and with your blessings….I know this will come as a shock to you, but I hope that you will understand…I will be writing to Prakash, and I know that he will understand…I miss you all and am anxious to hear from you, so that we can make plans to come home and get married. (108-109)
This decision creates great upheaval at the homes of Sripathi and Prakash. Ammayya blames that because of Maya, Putti may not get a good match. Badami conveys the miserable condition of Nirmala- the mother, “Did we not bring her up properly? Must be that foreign place. Their ways are different, all right for them perhaps, but for a girl brought up here, it must be difficult to resist temptation”(111). Sripathi replies Maya in anger, “Don’t be silly. You are throwing away a good match. Think of Prakash’s feelings…Our reputation has to be considered” (112). In a phone call he threatens Maya never to show her face in the house again. He considers her to be dead for him. Maya sends her wedding invitation card, and photographs of her and Alan that she has taken outside the registrar’s office. After one year, Maya sends photos of her daughter Nanadana and requests Sripathi as a legal guardian of Nandana because Alan has no immediate family. Initially Sripathi resists signing the documents but with the intervention of Raju Mudaliar, Sripathi surrenders Nirmala’s pleading and signs.

During her eight years of stay in Vancouver, Maya writes letters to her mother and calls every week, though Sripathi does not like it. Nanadana has been staying at Uncle Sunny and Aunty Kiran’s home as a day care child when her parents go for work. One day Sripathi receives a call from Vancouver from Dr. Sunderraj. He informs that Maya Baker, (as her surname is Baker after marrying Alan); working in Bioenergics has died in an accident. Her husband Alan has also died. Maya’s car had crashed off the highway. Alan dies immediately, and Maya had internal damage so she also died. Maya was thirty-four and Alan was thirty-six. Nanadana wasn’t with them. She was safe in Dr. Sunderraj’s home, with his wife, Kiran and their daughter. Badami portrays a bewildered child Nanadana, who remains silent, thinking that her parents will return someday.

Hearing this, the family of Sripathi gets shocked, and as Sripathi is a legal guardian of Nanadana, he has to go to Vancouver to pick up Nanadana. But it requires fulfilling financial papers, death certificate, cremation etc. He has to make arrangements of passport and money to take Nanadana in India. The whole family realized that they should be able to sacrifice on the past, especially Maya’s death and think about the future consequences that are still yet to come, clearly projected through Nirmala’s words, “What is gone is gone. I will always miss my Maya, but tomorrow’s meal still has to be cooked, no? The child’s future is more important than past sorrows” (323). After one month’s
arrival in Vancouver, Sripathi gets permission from the Social Services Department to take the child to India. Since her early childhood Nanadana has heard about her grandfather’s stubborn nature and life in India. She is unwilling to come to India. After her arrival in India, Badami mentions that Nanadana could not adjust food, stay, and social life. Through Nanadana, Badami narrates the difficulty of adaption of foreign culture to an alien Nanadana. At Madras railway station, the experience of Nanadana is narrated thus:

She snapped awake as soon as they reached the station, though, and gazed around wide-eyed at the crowds that were boiling on the platforms, even at that late hour. It must be strange and disorienting for her, thought Sripathi, the steady roar of sounds- vendors, children wailing for their parents, coolies shouting for customers, beggars, musicians-the entire circus of humanity under the high arching roof of Madras Central Station. With her small fingers, the child clipped her nostrils together to block out the stench of fish, human beings, diesel oil, food frying and pools of black water on tracks. (151-152)

At the time of departure from Vancouver Nanadana refuses to leave her mother’s red winter coat, and Alan’s grey coat. Nanadana is very much shocked on the death of parents. She feels so alien in India that even after one month of her arrival she does not speak a word. Nirmala asks various questions to Sripathi regarding post-death rituals of Maya. She asks, “Did they close her eyes with coins? And put one in her mouth as well?” (173) She further asks, “My poor child has gone like a beggar, without any proper rituals, and you say it doesn’t matter? Her soul will float like Trishanku between worlds. It will hang in purgatory forever. Did they at least dress her in unbleached cotton?” (173) After returning from Vancouver, Sripathi has changed from a rational man to a deeply superstitious man. He becomes angry when Putty asks him where he is going. He believes three cows are a portent of death, a coconut with four eyes meant a fatal illness, black cats and lumps of vermillion-stained mud are all ill omens. One day Nanadana goes out of her home and after a long search, a mechanic named Karim brings her back. At school Nanadana feels alone and different atmosphere than that of Vancouver. Nanadana like the company of Arun, her maternal uncle but does not like Sripathi. Nanadana has been admitted is second standard in a convent girl’s school. Nanadana could not find any
celebration of Halloween with pumpkin in India. She does not like Indian fruits. Nirmala makes her ready for Deepavali celebration. Nandana have not seen electric water heater in Vancouver that Nirmala uses here for heating bathing water. For Nandana, mosquitoes causes unrest and she plays hide and seek with friends.

Arun as an activist brings some harsh realities about India. He says: “See, you had your Independence of India and all to fight for, real ideals. For me and my friends, the fight is against daily injustice, our own people stealing our rights… no water to drink, electricity keeps getting cut off, you can’t even play on the beach without getting all kinds of rashes on your legs”(239). There is a cyclone, heavy rain and flood situation in Toturpuram and Madras and even the chief minister has to shelter in a boat. Ammayya gets ill and hospitalized and she dies there. The jewelry that she preserved after the death of her husband is found fake. At the end Nandana consoles Sripathi on the death of Ammayya that not only he but she has also lost her mother in past.

4.4. Critical study of parameters

The researcher has carried out extensive narrative analysis to study various parameters to understand the elements of diaspora in the novel. The same are discussed as under.

I. Time and type of migration

As the novel is written by a writer of diaspora, Badami mentions migration of various characters in the novel. Sripathi Rao’s daughter Maya goes to America for study. She gets fellowship and migrates. It is for her study but it is clear from the conversations of her fiancé’s father that she may get settled there after completion of her study. She is engaged with Prakash who is also an engineer and so in future both Maya and Prakash may get settled in America if job opportunities arise. Maya leaves India in her early twenties and hers is a voluntary migration, temporary at an initial level which becomes permanent later on. The country where she goes for study is America but after completion of three years of study there, she gets job in Vancouver. She loves Alan Baker, a White Christian and decides to settle in Canada. She breaks her engagement with Prakash Bhat in India and marries Alan. Thus, as it generally happens with many immigrants, Maya’s migration becomes permanent.
In the novel, the plot develops in a different way and after the tragic death of Maya and Alan in a car accident, their daughter Nandana, a second generation immigrant, born in Canada, returns to India. Sripathi Rao is a legal guardian of Nandana, who is just eight years old. Here, the return of a child from a developed country to a developing country creates the issues of adjustment. The migration of Nandana to India is an involuntary, compulsion because she is an orphan to be taken care by her grandfather- a legal guardian. Sripathi Rao’s visit to Canada is for a short period to take his granddaughter to India.

Apart from Maya’s immigration, Badami mentions migration of the sons of Raju Mudaliar, a friend of Sripathi Rao. The older son of Mudaliar moves to California and the younger to Switzerland. They migrate for career and settlement. Within India, the internal migration of people is narrated that in a small town, people have settled from villages for employment.

II. Glimpses of homeland in the novels under study -its geography, polity, economy and locale

Place attains a discrete identity of its own, very often acquiring the status of character, in two ways: first as having distinctive features which seem to bear down on characters, producing responses that would not have been occurred elsewhere; and second, resembling a human with specific features, identity and set of values. Anita Rau Badami has spent many years in India, before migrating to Canada. She describes the streets of the town, its ancient heritage and the touch of modernity to it. River Godavari situated near the town is considered pious providing water for good quality of rice. Toturpuram is situated on the sea-coast of the Bay of Bengal, but it faces acute drinking water crises. The town is three hours by bus from Madras. Though it was middle of July Southeast monsoon has not appeared yet. The opening of the novel describes humid hot climate of morning in the month of July near the seacoast.

In a few hours the heat would hang over the town in long, wet sheets, puddle behind people’s knees, in their armpits and in the hollows of their necks, and drip down their foreheads. Sweaty thighs would stick to chairs and make rude sucking sounds when contact was broken…the power had gone off and the ceiling fans were still.(1)
People longs for December to get Northeast monsoon. The cyclone, torrential of rain and its aftermath in the season during the month of December is narrated thus: “…the sea became a towering green wall of water that dissolved the beach and flooded the streets, turning roadways into drains and bringing dysentery and diarrhea in its wake”(2). In the town they are not getting water every day but on particular days of the week. The people rush to store water on water day. Saline water is supplied throughout the day but that has made the clothes yellowish and seemed always unwashed.

Here, the past and the present are mingled through the routine life of Sripathi Rao and glimpse of the golden days that he has spent there are mentioned. Badami describes the streets of the town Toturpuram, its ancient heritage and the touch of modernity to it. Sripathi Rao lives in a Big House on Brahmin Street, the street belonged to Brahmin community in past but now people of different community lives there.

Instead of the chanting of scared hymns, the street had chanting of scared hymns, the street had become loud with the haggling of cloth merchants and vegetable vendors, the strident strains of the latest film music from video parlours whose windows flaunted gaudy posters of busty, thick-thighed heroines, and beefy heroes with hair rising like puffs of smoke from their heads. (5-6)

There is mention of Mudaliyar Street, Lingayat Street, Andaal Street, Tagore street etc. The poverty scene is narrated thus, “Woman continued to scrub listlessly at aluminum vessels around the tube-well that had recently been installed by the Lions Club of Toturpuram, or to spread out ragged clothes to dry on flat stones beside the festering drain. Naked children played with tops and marbles on the dusty road” (56). Sripathi used to write to the editors of newspapers and magazines under pseudonym on various issues like garbage strewn on the roads, corruption in the government, and even on films. Contemporary situation of industry and pollution caused by it is mentioned: “…the heavy-water plant that had opened on the outskirts of Toturpuram…was dumping its waste directly into the sea”(15). There is a mention of poor telecommunication facility in the town at the time. In India, politicians get the work done if their personal goal or benefit is concerned. As a press reporter, Sripathi Rao narrates the incident of cleanliness because of marriage of Chief Minister’s son.
Dear Editor,

The streets are suddenly full of verdant trees, the garbage has been picked up (after months of being ignored by the municipal powers that be), and our walls have been whitewashed overnight. A new government? A government that has suddenly realized that it is of the people, by the people, and for the people and has decided to stop taking coffee breaks and holidays and get down to work? Ah no! Unfortunately not. All this amazing work is in honour of the chief minister’s son’s wedding…(10)

Through the disliking of Sripathi Rao, Badami depicts the secular Indian Society and their tradition of worshipping God. The community based politics for votes during election time has always remained a big issue in Indian politics. Munnuswamy’s political agenda propagates Hindu-Muslim unrest.

In the novel, contemporary political and economic condition of India is mentioned like partiality in implementation of laws, inflation in Indian economy etc. After independence, India faces severe problems which were not too much acute before independence. Arun as an activist brings some harsh realities about India. He says: “See, you had your Independence of India and all to fight for, real ideals. For me and my friends, the fight is against daily injustice, our own people stealing our rights… no water to drink, electricity keeps getting cut off, you can’t even play on the beach without getting all kinds of rashes on your legs”(239). The cricket fever among the people is discussed through mention of it in dailies. Political upheavals in Assam are mentioned. Hike in the prices of commodities is always a concern for common man in India and it is mentioned through hike in the price of rice from Rs.5/Kg to Rs.7.20/Kg.

III. Glimpses of hostland in the novels under study -its geography, polity, economy and locale

About expatriate writing and the focus of the expatriate writers, Indo-Canadian writer Uma Parameswaran writes to her fellow expatriate writers, “Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too, and I would hope that we write about the world around us and not about the world we have left behind” “(291).

Badami narrates the glimpse of hostland society but unlike other diaspora writers, her focus is more on homeland. She mentions about the education pattern in America
through the letters that she writes to her parents in India. The plot of the novel develops in such a way that Maya’s contacts with the homeland people cuts down because of her marriage with Alan. Later on, Maya shifts to Vancouver, Canada and Badami narrates the houses, lifestyle and Nandana at day care. Nandana as a small child of seven years, stays at the day care home of Uncle Sunny’s house and one day her parents do not come on time to pick up her. They live at 250, Melfa Lane, Vancouver, BC, Canada, North America. One day when she stays at Aunty Kiran’s house, she calls her mother, “Mummy, Daddy, please come and take me home”(18).

As Sripathi is the legal guardian of Nandana, he has to take Nandana after death of her parents. Badami mentions about the legal procedures and perfection in law and procedures in Canada. In Canada, the social activists approach Nandana, an orphan, asks her several questions regarding her stay at Aunty Kiran’s home. The difference of the environment of hostland and homeland is narrated through the memories and comparison of little child Nandana who comes to India as an orphan.

IV. **Attitude of the diaspora group towards other migrants and the homeland**

In the novel the attitude of diaspora group towards other immigrants from the homeland is not much focused by the novelists. Maya migrates for study and she keeps in contact with her parents through letters and phone calls. Gradually, because of burden of study she could not keep in touch. After her decision to marry Alan, she losses her contact with homeland. In Canada Maya’s contacts with other immigrants are not depicted but Maya keeps her contact live through her letters in spite of her father’s dislike. Maya has sent information like clippings, books, and materials to Arun, her brother, who wants to join social activism.

The novel represents the formation of diasporic identities as an empowering process shaped by multiple changes on the local level rather than by transnational mobility. Sripathi Rao has to cope with the death of his daughter, Maya, and his Canadian granddaughter, Nandana in the midst of new global environment and local social changes. The novel does not focus more on Maya, the novel’s most conventional diasporic subject. The major focus of the novel is on Sripathi’s multiple displacements.
and rerootings. The novel also throws light on Nandana’s reversed journey to the Old World.

The novel mentions about Arun’s activities against injustice. Arun insists that his work is about a fight against daily injustice, against our own people stealing our rights and against globally sanctioned ecological irresponsibility. Arun’s activism represents an intra-national concept of diaspora. The novel narrates diaspora as a political category of identity not necessarily dependent on transnational mobility. It explores the intersections of local and global genealogies of belonging and displacement.

V. Attitude of the diaspora group towards the hostland and citizens of hostland

After the death of Maya and Alan, their daughter Nandana comes to India. Prior to that, in Canada, she heard about the poverty in India and the life style in India. Here, India becomes hostland for a second generation immigrant who has never seen her ancestral land and has to come to that land by compulsion, as being an orphan, minor and legal ward of her maternal grandfather. Though only seven years old, Nandana has heard from the conversation between her parents that her grandfather has not approved the marriage of her parents. So, Nandana has a feeling of dislike for Sripathi Rao and it continued even when Sripathi reaches Vancouver to bring Nandana to India. Nanadana likes her maternal uncle Arun. She even tries to adjust with Nirmala, but does not even smile or utter a word in front of Sripathi. It is only at the end of the novel that she consoles Sripathi on the death of Ammayya saying that her mother has also died.

Thus, in the novel the notion of homeland and hostland is different for two characters—the mother and the daughter. For Maya it is voluntary migration. Her attitude towards the hostland and the people of hostland is positive whereas migration is a compulsion for Nandana and the hostland remains hostile for her, a place of dislike and discomfort throughout the novel.

VI. Search for identity and feelings of alienation

In the diaspora novel, immigrant’s search for identity is narrated through his/her interaction with the hostland and comparison of that society with that of homeland. Badami scarcely mentions about the issue of search for identity that Maya faces in a foreign land. She writes letter but never mentions about feelings of alienation. But
through the worries of Maya’s mother Nirmala, Badami narrates that the alien land creates problems for the immigrants and the new environment keeps the immigrant busy and occupied to glance and think about her relatives. Usually Maya calls on Sunday mornings. “It six-thirty when, as she knew, her mother would be waiting, sitting on the cold, tiled floor of the landing, right beside the phone. And every Sunday, for several years now, Sripathi had avoided that moment by setting off for a walk at six-twenty” (4).

Though born in Canada, Nandana feels alien there as no one is free to talk with her and at Aunty Kiran’s home, Nandana feels alone. Her parents warn her not to talk to strangers and not to take anything from unknown person. Aunty Kiran informs her that her grandfather is coming from India and she has to go India with him. This is very alarming for a small child who has just seen her grandfather in a photo and has not heard or seen India.

At the beginning of the novel, Sripathi appears as a contemptuous, egocentric, and paternalistic character. Embarrassed by his son’s work as an environmental activist and unable to forgive his daughter Maya for having married a white Canadian rather than the man of his choice, Sripathi has isolated himself from his wife and children. Instead of finding the reasons for the present disintegrated state of his family, Sripathi finds it easier to express his deepest thoughts in letters to the editors of various local newspapers. Ironically, he writes these letters under his chosen pseudonym “Pro Bono Publico.” By signing these letters as “on behalf of the people” (9), he imagines he would be a secret hero, “a crusader” of “the “world in pen and ink” (9). But in fact this escapism justifies his impending unemployment as a writer and emphasizes his increased alienation from his family and social community.

*The Hero’s Walk* can be considered as a form of cultural critique that questions the very categories of identity. It interrogates the nation and its quotidian regimes of normalization from within rather than against their global, cultural, and political discrepancies. This feature makes the novel a productive category of cultural knowledge production.

**VII. Nostalgia, memory and their role in the present**

The diaspora novel depicts feelings of nostalgia and memory. After going to America for study, Maya writes long letters elaborating the pattern of education there and
food and culture of America. Nirmala feels sympathetic for Maya. In a foreign land, Maya comes in contact with Alan. She wants to marry Alan and expresses her willingness to go and meet her relatives in India. But unfortunately, her father does not approve her marriage and her relation with parents gets cut off. Later on after the birth of her daughter, she requests her father to become a legal guardian of Nandana. She continues to write letters to her mother and calls her every week. This shows that just by migrating one cannot leave his/her attachments to motherland. Either in the form of memory or telephonic or postal communication, it continues.

In the novel, for Nandana, Vancouver is her homeland as she is born there and has never visited India with parents. Nandana feels awkward in Indian culture at the railway station, home, school and other public places. However, like other diaspora novels the feelings of nostalgia and memory are not acute and they are not focused in detail. In contrast to Nandana, Maya acts as the novel’s most conventional diasporic character. She is the defiant and heroic daughter who “had dared everyone” (46) and lives as a haunting presence in her father’s and brother’s consciousness.

VIII. Issues related to alien language, social mobility and politics of struggle for survival in the hostland

The plot of the novel develops in India and the problem faced by Maya in a foreign land is not discussed at length. Further, her migration to America is after passing examinations of GRE, IELTS and TOEFL etc. Maya goes to America for study, following legal procedures. Her migration is neither for career, nor a compulsion after marriage. The diaspora writers are like a person standing on a threshold. They also try to focus image of India as perceived by a foreigner. Here, Nandana, as a kid in Canada, used to listen about India from Maya, her mother. When Maya has shown pictures of her house in India, Nandana curiously asks whether there are ghosts inside house.

When Maya’s husband Alan brings second hand furniture at home, Maya comments, “In India we never accept leftovers. Only beggars do” (91). Nandana feels queer on arriving at Madras railway station and the overcrowded trains, foul smell etc. Nandana finds squirrels in India are small with grey fur and two stripes down their backs where as in Vancouver they were big black ones that dug up all her mother’s precious bulbs and nasturtium seeds. The issue of adjustment to a new environment is narrated
through Nandana’s efforts to adjust in Indian education system. India’s Current education system and its weakness are mentioned through Nandana’s confusion, “These teachers dump everything on them to do at home. I don’t know why we have to pay such high school fees and do everything ourselves only” (288).

There is a mention of Yugadi festival in India. Sripathi Rao is a stranger when he goes to Vancouver to take his orphan granddaughter Nandana and Nandana could adjust her in India. Food, clothing, people, rituals and culture are alien to her. There is a mention of Halloween celebration in Canada and Deepavali in India.

Through the death of her parents, Nandana experiences the instability of her home environment and the illusion of safety and harmony often attached to the notion of home. Moreover, Sripathi’s resolution to “take her home to India” (143) further complicates the ways in which Nandana negotiates home as a locus of diasporic displacement. More specifically, Nandana brings the postcolonial moment of what Homi Bhabha has famously termed the “unhomely” (9) into the privacy of the Big House, Sripathi’s family home. The “unhomely” reconfigures domestic space as “sites for history’s most intricate invasions” (9) and confuses “the home and the world” (9). Thus, the “unhomely,” as Bhabha argues, enforces a “vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). This experience of cultural disorientation literally shapes diasporic forms of embodiment, as Nandana’s loss of speech and Sripathi’s disappearing body parts amply testify. If Nandana is an agent of the “unhomely”, carrying in her bag the global realities of displacement and uncertainties of belonging, her arrival in India also unsettles the neatly gendered and “patriarchal … symmetry of private and public” spaces (Bhabha, 11). For example, with Nandana’s entry into the lives of the Rao women, Putti, Sripathi’s sister, finally manages to rebel against her manipulative mother and, against the caste prejudices rampant in her family and society, marries a man from the Dalit caste.

In Seyla Benhabib’s words, Maya serves as “the symbolic-cultural site” in Sripathi’s life upon which Sripathi inscribes his patriarchal “moral order” (Benhabib 84). It is only with Maya’s admission to an American university and “an offer of marriage” that “Sripathi’s life began to acquire a glow” (70). Indeed, Maya’s engagement to Prakash Bhat, the son of a rich family who “had just started a job in Philadelphia” (99), is a match that would have permanently marked Maya as a diasporic subject and increased
her father’s social and financial standing. As a dutiful daughter, Maya is expected to honour her father’s name and wish and, as her prospective father-in-law remarks, as the wife of a middle-class Indian expatriate, she is also expected to “fit into life in the West without losing sight of our Indian values” (100). She would be the custodian and nurturer of cultural traditions to foster an imagined unified and self-sufficient cultural community with strong ties to the Old World. But Maya cancels her engagement with Prakash to marry a Canadian man. By defying her father’s wishes and forsaking her family duties Maya, on the one hand, initiates her own transformation into a diasporic subject with multiple belongings and groundings; on the other, she confronts Sripathi with the changing reality of his social, personal and work environment and the decay of the civil society of India’s nation-state. Maya’s death is not an accident but a symbolic necessity that facilitates Sripathi’s diasporic transformation.

IX. Issues related to religion, racism in homeland and hostland

Badami discusses the issues of Hindu and Muslims on homeland. Early morning worship to God by people of different religion is marker of our identity as a secular country. Through the disliking of Sripathi Rao, Badami depicts the secular Indian Society and their tradition of worshipping God in the early morning. Sound of the Krishna Temple bell and nasal call of mullah from the Thousand Lights Mosque on a parallel street is mentioned. The temple bell had become deafening and though Sripathi Rao complained about it, nobody had done anything about it. Mosque has mega phones and Ganesha Temple, Krishna Temple all make loud noise in the morning. India is a secular country and people of all religion are living with equality and harmoniously. But Hindu-Muslim relationship has become the point of discussion for politicians and general public since Ages. There is strife between political parties on the issues of voting. They quarrel for their places of worship. Munnuswamy’s political agenda in propagating Hindu-Muslim unrest is narrated:

Munnuswamy’s “Boys”-a euphemism for his horde of hard-eyed thugs-specialized in religious unrest, fasts- unto-death (or at least until the newspapers arrived on the scene) and suicide squads. Its services were most in demand during elections, when political parties were ready to try extreme tactics to garner votes. If, for instance, a party needed Muslim
votes, the Boys spread rumours among Toturpuram’s Muslim population about violence being planned by an opposing Hindu party, churning up rage and rioting as easily as they did butter. And if it was the Hindus who needed a stir, the Boys ran over a cow or two and blamed a Muslim truck-owner for the outrage. (74-75)

In India post death rituals are equally important to get peace and solace after death and to get better birth in the cycle of birth and death. When Sripathi comes back from Canada with Nandana, Nirmala asks him whether death rituals have been followed properly in case of Maya or not. She asks, “Did they close her eyes with coins? And put one in her mouth as well?”(173) She further asks, “My poor child has gone like a beggar, without any proper rituals, and you say it doesn’t matter? Her soul will float like Trishanku between worlds. It will hang in purgatory forever. Did they at least dress her in unbleached cotton?” (173) She remarks, “if she had died before her husband, it would have been better for her. She would have gone to Yama-raja as a Sumangali in her bridal finery with her wedding beads around her neck and kum-kum on her forehead” (173). Generally, in a Hindu Brahmin family to eat non-veg or allow Muslim in the home is considered to be unholy things. Nanadana could not adjust herself with Indian food at that time Miss Chintamani, a neighbour, comments that foreigner eat meat of cow, goat and pig. After the foreigner has left they have to do a special cleansing ceremony in the house. Caste and religious consciousness has remained part of Indian identity since Ages. Karim, a Muslim mechanic comes to drop Nandana who has gone away without informing anyone, could not enter into the house as Ammayya may throw bucket of Ganga water on him to purify the house.

The colonizers exploited India. There are posters with slogans against foreigner “Foreign ships Go Home! Thieves and Robbers Go Home! and You Have Taken Our Fish and Left Behind Only Blood!”(272) Ammayya mentions about the caste and roots of Alan and how can Maya marry an alien without knowing his roots. There is a mention of dislike for the whites by Ammayya and she compares her cultural practices with Alan’s.

Thus, Badami has focussed more on the depiction of religious and racial issues in the homeland. As Maya is shown busy in her study in hostland and later on her decision
keeps detached from the relatives in homeland, there is a little mention about racial issues in hostland.

x. **Issues of subaltern, especially condition of women in homeland and hostland**

As a writer of Indian diaspora, Badami mentions about the subaltern status of women. She writes about Ammayya-Nirmala relationship. She also writes about women as a house wife in patriarchal set up. Indian culture considers woman as a Laxmi-Goddesses of wealth. But in patriarchy, her condition is subordinate, submissive to husband and his family. Traditions of Indian culture are reflected through dressing of people. *Bindi* is considered to be an identity of a married woman. Nirmala sticks round bindi on her broad forehead, which she is used to stick on mirror in bathroom while bathing. The ceremony that Ammayya, as a widow had to undergo after the death of her husband is narrated:

To Sripathi’s embarrassment, she insisted on having her head shaved like the widows of the previous generation and ordered Shakespeare Kuppalloor, the barber, to come to the house every month to remove the new stubble. It didn’t matter when relatives pointed out that even her own mother-in-law, Shantamma, had maintained her snowy fall of hair and that there was no need for such old-fashioned observances. She wore only maroon cotton saris, even though she continued to wear her gold chains and bangles. She was afraid that her jewellery, the only thing of value that she owned, would be stolen by thieves…. She swore off certain vegetables. Like garlic and onions, that were believed to have aphrodisiac qualities and were therefore forbidden to widows. She dug up archaic fasts and rituals and became more rigidly Brahmanical than the temple’s own priest. (65)

Nirmala is a master in *Bharat Natyam* and she coaches students at her home, but it is common that Badami mentions, “A good Hindu wife had to maintain the pretense that her husband was supporting the family” (14).
In patriarchy, men are exempted from fidelity in married life. Girish Karnad’s *Nagmandala* also depicts the relationship between Rani and her husband Kappanna in this regard. After the birth of her sixth child, Ammayya noticed that her husband had taken a mistress. She approaches her mother’s home weeping, but she was consoled favouring her husband that she should be proud that her husband could afford two women. The person like milkman’s son Gopala can have relationship with women, but the case of Rukku, a widow who slept with three men has been considered as outcast, a whore and unmentionable in decent homes.

The novel focuses on relationship between sister-in law and mother-in law. Putti, sister of Sripathi, asks Nirmala, about helping in household activities and Nirmala replies in grimacing, “No, you’d better go to Ammayya,” (21). Ammayya boasts about how she cared for her mother-in-law and compares it with the present situation, “Nobody cares for old people. Such is this modern world. My mother-in-law was blessed, truly. Because of me she stayed alive till she was ninety years old” (23). Ammayya couldn’t tolerate her daughter-in-law to talk in private with the maid Kutti. She says, “Plotting something no doubt. I am not safe, even in my own house” (215). Ammayya considers daughters-in-law to be crooks. The incidence of theft of Maya’s coat and the search of her room thereafter makes her angry. She says, “Insulting me in my own house! Accusing me of theft! Kali-yuga has indeed, arrived and I, unlucky one, and still alive to witness it!” (254).

Badami has depicted the issues of women, who are considered as subaltern in patriarchy.

4.5. Conclusion

The novel represents more about the issues of local than on the diasporic settled land. In the novel, however, the local neither equals anti-modernist traditionalism nor provides a source of romantic liberation ideologies. Rather, it designates, in Arif Dirlik’s words, “a critical site for the working out of the most fundamental contradictions of the age of global capitalism” (23). The novel’s renderings of the local facilitate competing readings of diaspora as alternative configurations of social space and human connections. As Heike Harting says, “*The Hero’s Walk* dramatizes the formation of diasporic identities.
as an interdependent process of individual self-discovery and social reconnection on a local rather than a global level” (Harting).

Sripathi occupies a diasporic space when he has to move his granddaughter Nandana from Canada to India. But such a space, as Avtar Brah argues, is “inhabited not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous…concept of diaspora space…includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying out’ ” (209). *The Hero’s Walk*, is a diasporic writing in different political, social, and psychological regimes. Sripathi and Arun emerge as diasporic characters precisely because they “stay put” and witness the ways in which the material effects of global developments transform their lives. In *The Hero’s Walk* it is Sripathi’s traumatic loss of his daughter and his journey to Canada compel him to remember and reenact the past, and, eventually, mark him as a diasporic character.

The news of Maya’s and her husband’s fatal car accident functions as the trauma that inaugurates Sripathi’s cultural and personal process of transformation and is played out on different levels. His daughter’s death requires him to travel to Canada to arrange for his granddaughter’s reverse journey to India, a move that marks her as doubly diasporic. What Sripathi calls his “foreign trip” to Vancouver turns out to be an experience of profound psychic and cultural dislocation, for it completely “unmoor[s him] from the earth after fifty-seven years of being tied to it” (140). To Sripathi, however, Nandana’s presence acts as a constant reminder of his regret of not having “known his daughter’s inner life” (147) as well as her life in Canada. He now recognizes that in the past he denied his daughter his love in order to uphold his authority over his family in light of a materially alienated and politically insecure world around him. To maintain a sense of patriarchal control, if not power, Sripathi relies on culturally purist narratives of belonging and disavows what appears to have shaped his life all along, namely his fear of social demotion and the diasporic reconfiguration of his family and social relationships. Both of these aspects are connected in that Sripathi is initially unable to consider his situation in the larger context of Toturpuram’s belated entry into global modernity. After his return from Vancouver, he becomes more aware than ever that the world is full of unseen things, of memories and thoughts, longings and nightmares, anger,
regret, madness. When Sripathi finally agrees to accompany Arun to the beach to watch the arrival of the Olive Ridley turtles, he develops a sense of the importance of his son’s work. For the first time, Sripathi is able to relate not only to his son but also to his dead daughter.

In the words of Harting:

*The Hero’s Walk* question such notions as the ancestral homeland and transnational mobility as foundationalist determinants of diaspora. From different perspectives both novels illuminate the theoretical fallacies that consist in turning the concept of diaspora into another all-encompassing allegory of postcolonial subjectivity. Perhaps more than *Anil’s Ghost*, *The Hero’s Walk* elucidates the ways in which becoming diasporic relates to the ruptures and rituals of everyday life and necessitates the abdication of one’s privileges of gender, cultural location, race, and class. (Harting)

As Ganguly writes, “through the figure of Sripathi, *The Hero’s Walk* suggests that being diasporic is not a cultural given but “a mode of operating within a cultural and historical canvas of understandings and misunderstandings about the emergence of this particular diasporic subject” (13).

The concept home gets problematised since it exceeds the limited geographical and physical association and it also connotes political, social, cultural and emotional territories that are often transgressed and reconstituted by the diaspora. The novel focuses on various issues of diaspora in the global – local nexus and provokes to think global and national forms of belonging in diasporic terms as modes of reading and critique of both capitalist late modernity and the normalizing role of the nation-state. Badami has portrayed various issues of diaspora, with more focus on issues of homeland.
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