



Defiant Daughter in Anita Rau Badami's "*The Hero's Walk*"

Ms. M. Kokila

M.A., M.Phil., Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and
Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

S. Thavamani

M.A. English, Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and
Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

Women are an essential part of cultivation. No civilization or country can ever progress without an active participation of women in its overall development. Although the place of woman in society has differed from culture to culture, yet one fact common to almost all societies is that woman has never been considered the equal of man. Right from birth, a woman is thrust with social images, rewards and punishments that are carefully designed to ensure that she does not develop the qualities associated with men. Thus, gender discrimination starts from birth itself. Unmarried girls feel the constraints of parents and of the society to which they belong. As in life, women portrayal of meek, submissive who plays a subservient role to father, husband or son.

Importance of Marriage

India is a country which gives a lot of importance to family and its values. Indian families follow a stereotypical patriarchal system with father as the head of the family who in most cases acts as the sole bread winner of the family. Family is the strength of each individual and one is identified and revered based on his family and its history. Marriage is a very important ceremony in Indian families, and in Hindu homes horoscopes are matched, priests are consulted, relatives are called forth and after a lot of such formalities marriages happen. Arranged marriages and the events that follow are portrayed with such relish by Badami.

The arrival of the prospective groom and his family to the bride's house, the discussions about jewellery and the elaborate snacking arranged provide a very familiar picture for the reader. When ceremonies are

followed strictly and with much care, the people who are to be married are not asked for their consent and liking. The elders decide and the young are expected to accept it wholeheartedly without any grudges. The pathetic condition in Indian homes is that in spite of being a mother, women are denied the opportunity to make decisions for their children. Education can bring about changes in the condition of women in society, which is why Maya insists on educating her daughters.

Sripathi Rao and his family

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. 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. Sripathi has a younger sister Putty who is unmarried. Ammayya takes utmost care of Sripathi Rao in his childhood.. 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. 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. 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.

Maya

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. His daughter Maya goes to Canada, and marries Alan. Maya and Alan die in an accident, leaving their eight years old daughter -Nandana as an orphan. Sripathi Rao's daughter Maya gets visa to study in Canada. She studies there for three years and gets a degree. 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 activists' organization highlighting contemporary political issues. Maya has been engaged with Prakash in India. Badami mentions about the expensive ceremony.

Initially, Maya used to write letters to her parents. 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.

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. 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. Nandana has been staying at Uncle Sunny and Auntie 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 Bioenergies 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. Nandana wasn't with them. She was safe in Dr. Sunderraj's home, with his wife, Kiran and their daughter. Badami portrays a bewildered child Nandana, who remains silent, thinking that her parents will return someday.

Nandana

Nandana refuses to leave her mother's red winter coat, and Alan's grey coat. Nandana 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. One day Nandana goes out of her home and after a long search, a mechanic named Karim brings her back. At school Nandana feels alone and different atmosphere than that of Vancouver. Nandana like the company of Arun, her maternal uncle but does not like Sripathi. Nandana has been admitted in second standard in a convent girl's school. Nandana 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 has 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.

CONCLUSION

Maya's family in Vancouver is alluring, there is the lovable father Alan, the beautiful and intelligent mother Maya and the talkative cute daughter Nandana. Nandana and her father Alan share a very lovely relationship. Alan is the one who introduces her to books her to books and she develops a liking for them. Her father paints and designs her dresser drawer for her; they do many activities together as a

family, which makes the little girl miss her parents a lot. Though there are no separate chapters on Alan, he is beautifully pictured and one yearns for such a father.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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