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A PORTRAYAL OF MOTHER – DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN ANITA RAU BADAMI'S "TAMARIND MEM"

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ABSTRACT

Anita Rau Badami is one of the Contemporary Writer in Modern Indian Diasporic Writing in English living in Canada. With a sturdy voice of Modern Indian Diaspora, Badami has engraved a unique position among other writers in the field of Indian Diaspora. This article is attempts to explore about the mother-daughter relationship and to study the characters in Anita Rau Badami's Tamarind Mem. As a woman writer, Badami mainly portrays about the Mother-Daughter relationship and their different perspectives that adds more richness to her novel. Through analysis of the women characters, Badami brings out how mother and daughter struggle to maintain their relationship amidst the problems like misunderstanding, loneliness, lack of love and adjustment. By pointing out these problems, Badami emphasizes the importance of love and the human values of dignity, balanced attitude in life and the need for understanding life with all its ups and downs. It is from the clear vision of Kamini and Saroja's narration in Tamarind Mem, Badami reveals the relationship with their mothers in a different understanding approach that took a unique problem in their own life. In India, most of the people are mainly give importance to their children, especially the girl child who always surrendered with more protection from childhood to adulthood either she gets that from her parents or her husband. The girl child is the one can understand and adjust everything and act according to the family situation were men cannot. This attitude of male and female child is quite different from each other. This article is aims to bring out these fascinating aspects of Anita Rau Badami's Tamarind Mem, whereby the analysis of the characters and their relationship and also their problems in relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

In Tamarind Mem, Badami tells a tale of two Indian Women who are trying to make sense out of their own past which has diverse perceptions about their parents. It also deals with the misunderstanding between the older and the younger generation. Through the main protagonists Saroja and Kamini's recollection, Badami clearly envisioned how parents and children are related and

how they are having inner conflicts which they are not able to express because of society's pressure on them.

The novel is separated into two parts in which Badami tries to connect with the past and present life of Kamini and Saroja. The first part is narrated by Kamini, the daughter of Saroja and Vishwa. It is through her that her relationship with her mother is revealed. The second part is narrated

by Saroja, the mother who is trying to narrate her story and about her estranged relationship with her parents and her husband. Tamarind Mem is a sensational novel that express with the deep bond of love and bitterness that connect mothers and daughters everywhere in the novel. Marianne Hirsh says, "Mothers and Daughters tried to account for the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship ... in feminist scholarship and then to delineate the range and direction of the work done in this area" (qtd. in Rahman 91).

The novels opens in Calgary North Pole place (Canada), where Kamini, the daughter is pursuing her doctorate research in Chemical Engineering. From there, she used to make a connection with her mother, Saroja in India through telephonic conversation. In one of her telephonic conversation, it comes to know how Saroja is showing enrage towards her daughter, Kamini:

I called my mother every Sunday from the silence of my basement apartment, reluctant to tell her how I yearned to get away from those freezing cold city where even the traffic sounds were muffled by the snow. "Well, who asked you to go?" Ma would have demanded. Did somebody tie your hands behind your back and say 'Go-go to that Calgary North Pole place?.' (2)

Kamini always face a problem, especially with her mother who always ask constant questions and blame her for cooking up some stories in every argument by nagging at her. It reveals though:

Do you remember that trip with Dadda in his inspection saloon?. The Western Ghats. We are never went up the Western Ghats, Ma. You are talking about the Eastern Ghats. Don't tell me what I am talking about, snapped Ma ... You are making up stories. Why do you always believe that I am making up stories? I don't, I never have. I sighed and changed the subject. Ma still wanted to win every argument, she would never-ever change. (2-3)

It is quite evident that she reflects her aggressive frustration towards Kamini to compensate her longings for companionship in her life. Kamini didn't understand her mother's still aggressive attitude

towards her which she faced from her childhood itself.

After her conversation with her mother, Kamini falls back into her memory lanes and started telling stories about her childhood days in India where she find a way to spent her time with her grandparents' home in Mandya were her happiest moments starts. Regarding her mother's happiness, Kamini says, "Ma was a different person here, giggling with her sisters, allowing her aunts and cousins to pamper her. I wished we could live in that house forever" (5). There are many instances which Kamini recollects as happy moments when she felt close to her mother. "Now I turned twelve. I noticed that Ma spoke to me differently, almost like a friend" (8). Saroja stays with her parents' for three months to give birth to her second child. When the daughter would like to stay in her parents' house before and after pregnancy, Saroja's mother would not like to keep her married daughter for such a long period in her house.

While staying in Mandya, Kamini also notices the partiality treatment that her grandmother, Ajji has given to her. It seemed like complete lack of attention because she is her daughter's child whereas she treats her son's child, Aparna with lot of devotion, care and love. She herself acknowledges that when she buys dresses for her grandchildren. Kamini demands her grandmother about it, "Ajji, why mine less shiny than Aparna's? I demanded, piqued by the unfairness ... Ajji responds to her that, Aparna is my son's child, remember?" (8). Saroja's mother shows such difference because she believes that, "the children grew up and changed, disappointed their parents, filled them with sorrow, got married and left the house" (9). The parents always give priority to their male child, who they believe would live with them and share the familial responsibilities. However, when Saroja becomes pregnant; she suggests that her daughter eats some spinach or a mashed mess or boiled bottle gourd so that she will have more milk for her child. Through this, Badami expresses the concern of Saroja's mother who takes care of her daughter while she is pregnant. The mother is the one who knows everything about her

children though the treatment given to boys and girls quite different.

Saroja is not happy in her husband's home. Kamini is the one who witnesses her mother's attitude changes when she comes to her husband's. Since from her childhood, Kamini has failed to sense her mother's angriness towards her. Possibly, she could have observed the estranged relationship between her mother and father. At the time, Kamini is in great confusion when Saroja's husband is at home; she makes herself busy cutting cloths for her children. While he goes on duty, her mother disappears with her friends. As a young child, Kamini is not able to understand her mother's nature. She says about the dual nature of her mother, "Ma was a two-headed pushmi-pullyu from Dr. Dolittle's zoo, or the Ramleela drama woman with a good mask on her face and a bad mask on the back of her head, changing her from Seetha to Soorpanakhi in a single turn" (48-49).

Kamini has acquired knowledge and freedom to make decision on her own, unlike her mother, Saroja who could not able to take own decision in her life because of social restrictions were her wishes has been crushed. Kamini always charged her mother for being so annoyed with her and with her father. She likes her father more than her mother: "I adored my father for his gentleness, for his willingness to listen to me, to tell me those wonderful stories when he was home" (45). In Kamini's memory, Dadda is her beloved and loving father who came home from his trip loaded with number of stories and gifts for his two daughters. He is also the man her mother who treated him with either complete disinterest or with sharp, angry words. He is the husband who constantly travelled while he made his wife and children live among strangers that were to be run strictly according to his rigid standards in the Railway Colony.

Even when Kamini was a child, she came to know about her mother's secret relationship with Paul da Costa who comes every Sunday to work on her father's car. When her father comes home she complains to him about her mother's outing with her friends. Dadda would be angry with Saroja for leaving his daughters alone. Unlike Kamini, Roopa doesn't poke her nose into her mother's secret. She

never tells anything about her mother to her father and she always maintains the secrets within her. So Saroja likes Roopa more than Kamini. Because of this reason, Saroja is angry with Kamini. When Kamini complains about her mother's partiality for Roopa, Saroja says, "You are both the same to me" (127). But Kamini continues to say that "you rub almond oil on her skin and mustard on mine. You never scold her when she gets her sums all wrong. You love my sister more" (127).

After Dadda's death, Roopa leaves India to get married to an unknown person whom they have not met and settled down in U.S.A. It happens during the period of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Few months later, Kamini also gets ready to go to Canada to continue her higher studies. Saroja is not at all happy with her decision; she insists that Kamini studies in India. But Kamini did not listen to her mother's words and left for Canada the daughter's attitude towards their mother reveals about the relationship they had with their mother. For this reason, Saroja shows her anger towards Kamini. One of Saroja's arguments with Kamini, when she asked about her mother's journey to India by trains, "where are you going? "Everywhere," snapped Ma irascibly. Do I ask you all about your coming and going? Do I ask you why you have to live in the North Pole, hanh? Did I ask your sister why she ran away?" (30). Saroja is now lonely in the house in India. Because of her loneliness, she expresses her frustration towards Kamini. Kamini feels guilty that she has left her mother alone in India. To compensate her guilt she requests her mother to come to Canada. But Saroja refuses to come, she says firmly, "I don't want to go anywhere, I need to rest my tired feet" (260). Saroja doesn't have any happiness or joy in her life; moreover she is deprived of love and affection either from her parents or from her husband.

Even though, Kamini is away from her mother she still feels covered by her mother's warm through her past recollections and dreams. It seems like protecting Kamini from all kinds of fears and uncertainty. Finally, Kamini realizes about her mother's situation that was trapped by the family shackles and restriction which she acknowledges herself through her father's attitude, "Perhaps

Dadda was to blame for the person Ma had become. He shut her into rooms from which there was not even a chink of an escape. He himself had left again and again and every time he came back, he needed to be readmitted into lives altered daily during his absence" (147). She also realizes that her mother's dream of her makes her choose on her own freely. She understands that it must have been very complicated for her mother in her constant dislocation when she was not able to have any 'lasting friendships'.

Saroja's diverse perspective of her past shows a highly marked than her daughter. She herself narrates her own story in a train tour with her fellow passengers. May be Saroja's past life is the only resolution for the question of her daughter, Kamini who always have curious to find out her mother's angriness towards her. Here, Badami depicts about the frustration of Saroja whose life is caught in a traditional bond society because of that she is unable to fulfil her own dreams. Saroja takes up this journey after her husband's death and her two daughters have settled down in abroad. Now, she is a travelling woman and she recollects the past life with her parents and husband.

I rest my forehead against the window grille and let cool morning air brush my skin. Beggars have touched these windows, spit from a thousand mouths has dried on them, they carry the germs of millions who have travelled before me. If Dadda was here, he would have rebuked me sharply, told me to wipe the bars with Dettol. Ah! Poor man, so worried about tinytiny details that he missed the big world around him. Butbut now I travel alone, not even my daughters to watch me, wonder if my mind is decaying along with my body. (154).

Saroja's husband, Dadda, as a railway engineer travelled constantly. Saroja hates her husband's transfers because she has to pack and move from one station to another. In spite of the differences that existed between them, her husband remained silent in his room without uttering any words against her wife's sharp words. Whenever Dadda comes home with a transfer order, Saroja says that he has to do something about it, "Why do you have to keep

getting transferred? Can't you say your wife is sick, you are allergic to new places, something, and stay here?" (35). But nothing seems to work out as a result of his transfer Saroja is neither able to relate to the new place nor she is able to relate back to the last one. Because of this transfer Kamini and Roopa have to change their schools. But Dadda could not understand why Saroja is stubborn that Kamini and Roopa should be sent to the nuns' school. He demanded, "What is wrong with a Central School education?" (36) that makes Saroja very furious and she breaks out, "You want them to learn a different language everywhere we move? Bengali in this place, Assamese there, Gujarati somewhere else? Poor things, as it is they are confused with first language, second language, third language and all. You want them to go crazy or what?" (37). Kamini is the one who witnesses the way her mother talks to her father. She does not know why her mother is always angry with everyone, especially Dadda, "Her fight with Dadda had begun long before I was born, so I could not understand it at all" (42). Instead of enjoying her status as the wife of a railway officer, Saroja is seen complaining and regretting her frequent transitions. She could not get the stability which she expected from her marriage. Saroja remarks:

But what is one to do with a life like mine, scrawled all over the country, little trails here and there, moving, moving all the time, and never in one fixed direction? As if the seven circles I take around the marriage fire with Dadda dance out like ripples from a stone dropped in water, carrying us on wider journeys every time. That is the life of a Railway memsahib (155).

The only house, Saroja has been able to relate to, is her childhood home with her parents'. As a child, Saroja seems to be a very protective girl in her parents' home. After completing her high school education, she wanted to pursue her higher studies in Sri Ram College in their typical town of India. With the aim to study in higher, Saroja argue badly with her Appa to join in college. But Saroja's parents dropped Saroja from her school and they wanted her to be married instead of continuing her education. Because of this reason, Saroja dislike her

parents, especially her mother who remains very silent in the moment she argues with her Appa. She expects her mother's support but she "... receive nothing but a non-committal silence" (158). Through Saroja, Ajji and Kamini, Badami has expressed the past and present Indian culture with problems that arise due to generation gap like misunderstanding, tolerance etc. are felt intensely. Badami also portrays how the older ones have strong faith in their values, religion and community whereas the younger ones who adopt the new culture tend to be very different from them. Hence, there is a clash between tradition and modernity.

In the past, the parents wanted their daughter to get married instead of pursuing a higher education. As a result, Saroja married to a man who does not show any love and affection towards her. He always busy with making trucks and railroads. He has no time to take care of his own wife and children that makes Saroja frustrated in her life. This lack of love and affection both from her parents and her husband has lead to Saroja's present nature which is seen when she made an argument with her daughter, Kamini. The bumpiest expression that Saroja gives for her husband, "I . . . am married to a man who has no feelings to spare for a wife. A dried-out lemon peel whose energies have already been squeezed out caring for a sick mother, worrying about his sisters, inheriting his dead father's unfinished duties. It ate up his youth" (216).

Whenever she could not feel comfortable with him, the lesson that Saroja's mother taught to her, worked as a barrier between Saroja and her husband. "I have been married seven years and the lessons my mother drilled into my hand hang like a sheet between Dadda and me" (224). Saroja initially hates to travel but towards the end, she herself willing to take up journey from one station to another without any restriction from anybody like a gypsy. She thinks that the time has come for her to be the ruler of her own life. "Yesyes, it is time for me to pack up and go. Once I travelled because my husband did. Now it is time for me to wander because I wish to, and this little apartment with the gulmohur flowers will be here for me to return to when I am tired of being a gypsy" (265). At last, Saroja herself doesn't know why she liked that Paul

da Costa. May be due to her deprivation from love and affection of her husband, she was longing to have companionship with him. Because of the priorities on her two daughters, she denied Paul da Costa who offered her to come out of her traditional bond life. She thought that if she goes with him what would her daughters think and the society will blame her for leaving her daughters alone. So that she refuses his offer and starts to accept the reality of life and her important role in the family as a wife and mother.

Conclusion

Saroja does not wish her daughters to be trapped in cultural restriction like her own self. So she let her daughters to take their own choice and goes with a different path and lives freedom as they wishes. Finally, Kamini comes to know about the social restriction that her mother had faced in her life and Saroja also breaks all the cultural restrictions and travel as she wishes. After her husband's death and two daughters settled abroad, it is the first time; she is feeling free to take her own decision in her life. Through Saroja and Kamini, Badami beautifully portrays about how the past life affects the present life of the two Indian women and also she reveals their relationship between Mother – Daughter through the problems of loneliness, longing for companionship, misunderstanding and selfishness can be overcome by love and affection.

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