PAST CULTURAL RESTRICTIONS IN ANITA RAU BADAMI'S 'CAN YOU HEAR THE NIGHT BIRD CALL?' AND 'TAMARIND MEM'

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the thesis is to bring out the trauma of the immigrants who are stuck up by the nostalgic and glorious past in their alien world. The cultural and social restrictions faced by the characters who live in their separate but intertwined worlds are brought in a detailed manner. Anita Rau Badami, one of the newest writers in the field of diasporic literature even with her a few literary writings has been able to carve a niche for herself in the literary world. Badami has dealt with the complex problems faced by women. Tamarind Mem depicts the relationship between a mother and a daughter who are trying to make sense of their past with different perceptions. The novel unfolds how the past cultural restrictions shape the personal lives and aspirations of the characters. Can You Hear the NightBird Call? Badami narrates the lives of three women which are linked together through their experience of violence. In other words, the novel spans sixty years in the history of the Sikh community in Punjab and Canada.

In "Introduction" the purpose and aim of the present study is stated. It details some of the major events in the life of the author and her achievements which are relevant for the understanding of her characters, vision of life and her development as artist. "Estranged Relationship" deals with the problems prevailing in the family of the two novels Tamarind Mem and Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? Familial relationship is a universal issue and it has attracted the attention of many writers. "Shakiness of Memory" deals with the nostalgic reminisences in the two selected novels for discussion which psychologically affect the characters. Memory is a thought of something that one remembers from the past. "Conflicting Cultures" deals with the problems of the immigrants in a foreign land. Immigration is the movement of people to another country or region to which they are not native in order to settle there. Finally "Summation" recounts all the findings made in the various areas of the current research and also includes a discussion of further research areas viable in respect of the writer.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Partition, Culture, Relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Indian writing in English is an integral part of world literature. The history of English literature dates back to at least the early 19th century. It began to range from the most useful and functionary prose to the most motivated and determined verse-epics on the other hand. Its beginning had received their impetus from three sources the British Government's educational reforms, the endeavour of missionaries, and the response and acceptance of English language and literature by upper class Indians. In this modern era, it had acquired recognition and respect all over the world.

Contribution of Women Writers

Women writers play a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. The latter part of the last decade of the twentieth century witness a substantial growth of Indian English novels by a number of novelists who have enriched the Indian English literature. These novelists, have begun to write like their Indian predecessors in 1950s, 1960s and 1980s, unfalteringly about the multi-layered Indian experience, on Indian rural life in colonial and post-colonial time, and also they deal with human problems and cultural issues in Indian sub-continent, the problem of women in particular.

Fiction, being the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. Women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Veena Paintal and Nergis Dalal have

added new dimensions and depth to Indian fiction in English. The emergence of these women writers marks the birth of an era, which promises a new deal for the Indian fiction in English. They particularly share experiences of Indian women in general and presented them into fictional form. Women's inner self, their agonies, pleasures, cultural conflicts are better and more truly depicted by these women novelists.

The corpus of Partition literature which has rightly being termed as the "Literature of Anguish" has evoked a great body of work to literature. Historians, political analysts and social scientists have put forward heartrending chronological accounts of when, why, what and how. Literature lays aside history, and try to interrogate the entire issue differently and are more concerned with what out of it and what after it. They seek to foreground another history - the history of untold suffering, misery before and after Partition, and human agonies and traumas which accompanied Partition. A large number of creative writers in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu, Sindhi and scores of regional languages have been exploring Partition reading in their works, an activity which continues even today.

Women have been worst victims of Partition; their untold story finds expression by women writers including the Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Bengali writer Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epaar Ganga*, *Opar Ganga*, Parsee writers like Dina Mehta's *And Some Take a Lover*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, Urdu writers like Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Darya* and Attia Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, deal with the theme of Partition from a woman's point of view. They attempt to foreground women's experience during Partition which has largely been ignored by many others. In this context, Amrita Pritam laments the atrocities on women, calling upon Waris Shah who composed the immortal love legend *Heer Ranjha*, to sum up the victimization of women. There are several other Indian-English partition novels, the better known among them being Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Balchandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Shiv K. Kumar's *A River with Three Banks* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, each one of which deals with the theme of partition in its own distinctive way.

Anita Rau Badami, one of the newest writers in the field of diasporic literature, even with her a few literary writings, has been able to carve a niche for herself in the literary world. Swagata Bhattacharya links homeland and diasporas of the author as:

> *Badami's own resolution of the crisis of being diasporic is eloquently expressed in her affirmation of the blessings of double vision. 'We are both doomed and blessed,' she says, 'to be suspended between two worlds, always looking back, but with two gorgeous places to inhabit, in our imaginations and our hearts.' (145).*

Modern diasporic Indian writers can be divided into two groups. First one comprises of those who have spent a part of their life in India, and have carried the baggage of their life in India and the others have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. For them, according to Stuart Hall, homeland refers to a set of conditions or state of being, a condition or state to be striven for, emulated, or constructed, or a place of destination to which they hope to reemigrate, resettle, prosper and retire as V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Hanif Kureishi, Ramabai Espinet, Jhumpa Lahiri, K.S Manian, Sudesh Mishra, Shani Mootoo, Bharati Mukerjee, Mira Nair, Shyam Selvadurai, Sam Selvon, Subramani, and M.G. Vassanji. The other group comprises those who have been brought up or settled since childhood outside India. They view homeland from abroad as an exotic place of their origin. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement, whereas those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. In an article "Three Meanings of Diaspora" Steven Vertovec had discussed diasporas, especially South Asian diasporas, as "social forms, as types of consciousness, and as modes of cultural production. Diasporas and homelands are produced and constructed through narratives" (144).

1. Purpose of the Study

It is imperative on the part of the researcher to place on record here some of the major but, pertinent critical interpretations so far made about Badami and her works. Raj Sree says that "Badami's novels can be studied by

placing her works in the larger context of these writers' works. But, Badami's depiction of homeland is neither exotic nor nostalgic. She tries to present the homeland with all its struggles and turmoils, its rotten politics and atrocious riots" (27-8).

2. Nature of the Novels Selected

Of the novels selected for discussion, Tamarind Mem and Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?, the researcher deals with the sufferings and hardships met by the characters, when they leave their land inorder to be rooted in an alien land. Also, she points out the various facets which the characters undergo for their survival. Tamarind Mem depicts the relationship between a mother and a daughter who are trying to make sense of their past with different perceptions. The novel unfolds the past cultural restrictions, which shape the personal lives and aspirations of the characters. The endless conflicts between the mother and the daughter lie at its core: "An engaging depiction of a daughter's longing to know her mother and of our tendency to see things the way we want rather than the way they are" (*Sidhu)*.

Many characters in the novel are comparable to the author's own life, like Kamini Moorthy in *Tamarind Mem* who is an inhabitant of India now residing in Canada. Like Badami's own life revolved around the railway colonies of India, so does the novel which is set in both India and Canada. Just as the author who did not have a stable childhood because of her father's transfers, who was working as a mechanical engineer in railways so is Kamini's father works for railroads. Though Badami is grown up surrounded by the stories her family told, she strongly claims that this story is not an autobiography. She simply initiated writing through memories of her past that later came out to be a fictional story. She has followed the technique of storytelling in the novel, which in fact has served her purpose well.

3. Revealings of the Novels Selected

The novel is bisected into two halves, and described from two viewpoints, the first half from Kamini's and the second from her mother Saroja's. Storytelling envelopes the novel from the beginning to the end, which happens at many stages in varied ways. The basic structure is very interesting because the two main characters namely Kamini and Saroja never come face to face. Their interaction comes only through storytelling. Both of them are entirely isolated from each other and they just narrate their stories in flashback. Saroja delights her fellow passengers with stories while travelling through India by train, after her husband is no more and her two daughters namely Kamini and Roopa have settled abroad. She recollects the happenings of her strange marriage, displacement from one station to another, her childhood home, her shattered desire to be a doctor, the biased behaviour of her parents and relatives, and finally her relationship with the mechanic Paul da Costa who had offered her a substitute to her estranged marriage.

Kamini, on the other hand in Canada, remembers her childhood days spent in the railway colonies in India, the moments she had spent at her grandparents' house, with Roopa her younger sister and finally 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. Claim of memories on both the mother and the daughter, from childhood through maturity, the love and loss, reflect the same past through different recollections and different circumstances. "In large measure, it is at least as much a book about the universal habit of storytelling as it is about the misunderstandings that arise between a mother and daughter and the reconciliations that the time and maturity effect" (Sidhu).

In the next novel taken up for discussion *Can You Hear the NightBird Call?* Badami narrates the lives of three women which are linked together through their experience of violence. In other words, the novel spans sixty years in the history of the Sikh community in Punjab and Canada. Events like the Partition of India in 1947, the assassination of Indira Gandhi which is followed by anti-Sikh riots in 1984, the radical Sikh separatist movement for Khalistan, and the bombing of the Air India Flight in 1985, form the backdrop of this novel, highlighting the devastation of innocent lives that fall victims to violence which they have done nothing to provoke. The background of this novel is recounted by the author as:

We were heading down to Delhi by bus next morning; we didn't cancel our plans because we thought, What's going to happen? On the way, any Sikhs that were on the bus were being asked to get off by the bus driver and told to go home because it was safer for them at home or in a hotel somewhere rather than in bus. The bus driver had a sense of what might be happening along the way. And sure enough, all along, in all the little towns along the way, we could see spires of smoke. We could see shops burning, presumably shops that were owned by Sikhs. There were these elements in society who were taking out their anger over the murder of Indira Gandhi on local Sikhs. We actually saw a Sikh man being tossed over a culvert into a dry riverbed, and he had apparently been burned alive, and he was dead by that point. (Tancock).

The author does not let history eclipse the characters in her story, because she skilfully adds nuances which highlight the pain and sorrow that engulf their personal lives. She brings to light the violence which is an inescapable part in the personal and social lives of her characters, through the tumultuous political events. The protagonist Sharanjeet Kaur who is later called as Bibi-ji, an Indian immigrant to Canada manages to change her economic condition by using her beauty and feminine wiles in order to ensnare a rich groom who has been actually promised to her plain looking elder sister, Kanwar. The other character Leela from Bangalore, white and Indian by race, Hindu by religion, follows her high-caste husband to Canada, along with their two children, in 1967. Finally, Badami focuses on another Sikh, Nimmo, Bibi-ji's long-lost niece, whose entire birth family disappeared when she was five years old, during the brutal Partition of India and Pakistan. It is her appalling fate to lose her second family, her husband and children, in the bloody anti-Sikh riots following Indira Gandhi's death, and then, her whole grasp on reality.

"Estranged Relationship" deals with the problems prevailing in the family of the two novels *Tamarind Mem* and *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* Familial relationship, which is a universal issue has attracted the attention of many writers. In *Tamarind Mem*, the researcher tells the estranged relationship of Saroja and her husband Vishwamoorthy, a senior railway officer who travels to many places and the reader finds lack of communication between them. It depicts the typical Indian familial relationship in a patriarchal system. Saroja longs to take revenge on her husband and has an illicit relationship with Paul da Costa. The husband's absence from home creates a void in the family leading to a lot of problems. On the other hand the relationship between the mother Saroja and her daughter Kamini is a strange one for they have different perceptions about life. Kamini's childhood is not good with her mother as her mother always supports her younger sister Roopa.

In *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* too the researcher shows the estranged relationship of Bibi-ji with her mother and her sister. Bibi-ji's stealth of her sister's fiance and the son of her niece Nimmo, make their relationship a little more strange. Then Leela's estranged relationship with her mother and relatives started when she was referred by her family as half-half and makes her feel marginalized by the world. Assuming her mother as a ghost, her childhood life was spoiled. The researcher vividly depicts such problems in Indian livelihood through the characters.

"Shakiness of Memory" deals with the nostalgic reminisences in the two selected novels for discussion which psychologically affect the characters. Memory is a thought of something that one remembers from the past. The reminiscences of an immigrant who is standing alone in an alien world, remembering the childhood days are clearly depicted by the researcher. In *Tamarind Mem*, Kamini the daughter finds that her childhood memories are not happy moments. On the other side, the mother also had nostalgic childhood memories. She is strongly disturbed by her married life as her husband travels from place to place due to his work. After her husband's death and the settling of her two daughters, she goes on a journey remembering her past.

Like the *Tamarind Mem,* the three women in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? are also possessed by their past memories.* Both Bibi-ji and Leela are displaced from their homeland to a foreign land where Bibi-ji is haunted by the childhood memories and Leela too had cherished memories of her married life and perished memories of her

childhood as she was considered as half-half by her relatives. The researcher beautifully presents the pain of a person through the character Nimmo, who gives away her son Jasbeer to her aunt Bibi-ji and also had lost her mother, husband and daughter in the anti-Sikh Riot. Nimmo starts to live in her nostalgia of her family and the writer sensitively has built the character. The betrayed memories pierce the heart of Bibi-ji who takes away the man of her sister. She feels so bad in her married life. The researcher says that even though one is filled with riches, one cannot live a peaceful life with haunted memories. Isolation, marginalization and alienation are also dealt with by the researcher through the characters Bibi-ji, Nimmo and Leela.

"Conflicting Cultures" deals with the problems of the immigrants in a foreign land. Immigration is the movement of people to another country or region of which they are not native but they go in order to settle there. In *Tamarind Mem*, Kamini immigrates to Canada because of her job and she suffers from loneliness. Still she likes the country which is covered by snow and she feels that she is in a fairy land. She feels that she had left her mother alone in India.

In *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* the main cultural clash is with the characters Bibi-ji and Leela immigrating to Canada and the partition riot between Sikhs and Hindus. Leela is caught between the cultures of two countries because of her parents' marriage – father an Indian and mother a German. The other women characters Bibi-ji and Nimmo too suffer because of communal conflicts. Partition destroyed many lives due to cultural clash.

4. Estranged Relationship

Familial relationship is an important aspect of the immediate social environment. In a family structure the relationship between husband and wife, mother and daugter, parents and children acquires great complexity. Such a relationship is a universal issue and it has attracted the attention of writers and readers worldwide. Their role is complementary, and only with the support and help from each other one can fulfil the duties and obligations of married life.

Badami's *Tamarind Mem* is constructed around stories through the narratives of the mother and daughter, Saroja and Kamini. They shared memories about themselves and their families and neighbours which make the daughter and the mother to speak in turns. Badami provides two versions of the same story. Kamini's life in Vancouver and her younger sister Roopa's life in the US. The relationship between the mother and her daughters is a strange one which arises an endless conflict between Saroja and Kamini. Sengupta comments that it is a "unique relationship that exits between mothers and elder daughters: that uneven mix of dependence, love and irritation that most mothers and daughters will recognize."(18).

Mother-daughter relationship explores at a particular historical moment in North American feminism in which the matrilineal discourse seeks to bond women together. Such a relationship has been increasingly explored in books and films. Badami uses the voice of the daughter Kamini and the voice of the mother Saroja to narrate the novel.

The main theme of the novel is the struggle of Kamini to understand how to escape from her mother. The voice of Kamini and Saroja dominates the novel and possesses the gift of sharp tongues and have the skill to turn their memories into stories. Saroja, when she was a young girl was forced by her mother to eat bitter guard to blunt the edge of her tongue trying to teach Kamini to club her tongue. The novel arouses curiosity regarding the source that inspired the author to name her work after a sour fruit found in India. The preface explains the title: the fruit is sour and can turn a ceremony ill-omened and unrewarding. The tamarind tree also is believed to be the home of spirits and it does not let anything under it survive.

Kamini as the first narrator returns again and again to the problems she had with her mother, because of her constant questions and her propensity for telling stories. She complains what she perceives as her mother's unjustified anger toward her father. She also contrasts her mother's harsh treatment towards her, with the love and attention her mother had for her sister.

The very first passage of the novel introduces the arguments between the mother and the daughter, which arise from their very different perceptions about life and memories. The words exchanged are often bitter and

sometimes painfully humourous. Since childhood Kamini as a daughter had failed to understand her mother. Even as a child she was curious to know every detail of her mother from her widowed aunt Chinna. Possibly, she could observe the estranged relationship of her mother and father and wonder with a little child's perplexed heart.

Kamini, unlike her mother, succeeds in joining a Doctorate in Chemical Engineering at Calgary, Canada, inspite of her mother's initial protest. There are many instances that show Kamini recollecting the happy moments when she felt the strike of friendliness in her mother. "Now that I had turned twelve, I noticed that Ma spoke to me differently, almost like a friend" (*TM* 125). In *Tamarind Mem*, Badami beautifully portrays the mother-daughter relationship. Kamini loves her mother and father, but she hates her mother when she makes Kamini to stay with Linda Ayah while her dad is not in home. She also hated the way her mother loved her younger sister Roopa than her. Eventhough her sister who was not good enough like Kamini in studies and beauty, her mother liked her sister, whereas when both the sisters started to live abroad, Roopa did not think much of her mother. It was Kamini who always thinks of her mother. This shows a strong inward relationship between the mother and the daughter. A blurb in *Tamarind Mem* says, "*Tamarind Mem* is a beautifully evocative novel about the ties of love and resentment that bind mothers and daughters."

The strained relationship between Kamini and her mother Saroja who yearn for each other's affection, and resent for their irrational moods. Kamini has attained knowledge, freedom and has explored places, unlike her mother Saroja, who was deprived of affection and love from her parents as well as from her husband.

Next the strange relation between the father Vishwa Moorthy and her mother Saroja is clearly depicted. Indian families follow a stereotypical patriarchal system with father as the head of the family who in most cases act as the sole breadwinner of the family. Life after the birth of Kamini, Saroja calls him Dadda, a word she can utter without feeling discomfort. Now marriage is not escaping from one locked room into another, marriage is a silent war. For Saroja, Dadda was an emotionally cold, much older man with whom she had been forced to marry. While her daughters are away, the widowed mother insists on staying back in India, planning trips around the country, particularly to all the places where her husband refused to take her. Vishwa Moorthy a railway engineer, was at home only for brief intervals since his joy demands him to travel to different parts of the country to lay rail roads and mend broken tracks. His absence from home creates a void in the family which leads to a lot of problems in the domestic front and after a point there is no communication between the husband and wife. It becomes Saroja's responsibility to raise her two children.

Kamini senses the estranged relationship of her parents. Saroja's bitterness towards her husband becomes evident at many points in the story. He is portrayed as an exhausted man who is excessively inclined towards his job and it seems almost impossible for him to form any bond with his wife and daughters. The crudest expression that Saroja uses for him is probably,

> *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 (TM 216).*

But, behind this sour tongue lies the heart of a woman who has no affection and care of her husband. Possibly the lack of love has lead to Saroja's present nature. Her mother finds some reason and takes to her bed when her father comes home or springs into activity on his departure, depict the strange affinity between her mother and Paul da Costa, the Anglo motor mechanic. The frustrations and discontents that her unhappy marriage provides her make her a moody, sharp tongued, irritable person and hence she is called a 'tamarind mem.' Her husband expects her to play the role of a perfect member but she likes to join him in his railway tours and acts as a dutiful mother and a failed wife. In almost everything they differ and there is marital disharmony. Badami depicts colonial legacy through the characters' language, schooling and other institutions of the railroad. She also shows men's reputation as chauvinism in India. They expect their wives to behave in a certain way, being at home, having several children, looking after the house, cooking proper meals, and being a good wife.

The episode with Paul is not Saroja's real revenge against her husband. Paul hanged himself, when Saroja would not go away with him to make a new life. Her revenge and her transformation are in the choice she has made when her daughters leave home. She refuses to stay at home playing the role of a quiet widow waiting for her daughters to visit her once in a while. She insists on travelling around by herself in trains, aimlessly to give herself freedom which was denied by her parents who cut short her education, to marry her off to an older man who continued to treat her as a chattel. Through Saroja, the work also unfolds how past cultural restrictions affect women in their personal lives and aspirations. The lessons that Saroja's mother taught her, worked as barrier between Saroja and her husband. She could never feel comfortable with him. Badami writes graceful evocative prose and plays complex variations on her themes. All her characters are vibrant and deftly drawn, and her narrators' opposing points for view create a poignant irony.

In *Can you Hear the Nightbird Call?* also one could come across estranged relationships in a family. All the three main characters have encountered a sort of strained relationship. Bibi-ji's relationship with her mother shows the typical Indian parenthood. As a child she wanted to enjoy life like the other children in the village. Her mother Gurpreet Kaur is more partial, burdened Bibi-ji's little hands with several household duties. She dislikes Bibi-ji because of her beauty, which is a hindrance for the marriage of her elder daughter Kanwar. Finally, she steals away the suitor of her sister Kanwar and leaves her motherland. Gurpreet curses her to the extent that made her not to become a mother.

Nimmo, the daughter of Kanwar is psychologically affected by the mother-daughter relationship. She was orphaned in the violence of 1947 and lives perpetually haunted by the dark memories of her mother who is being raped and then committed suicide. Sometimes when she heard water running at night, she was reminded of her mother's furious washing and her nostrils would fill with the smell of the pale violet soap. As much as she tried, she could not rid herself of the memory of a pair of feet dangling above a dusty floor, their clean pink soles smelling delicately of lavender soap. These horrific memories haunt throughout her life. As a mother Kanwar saved her daughter from the hands of the revolutionaries. She picked up Nimmo and lowered her gently into the large wooden bharoli of grain in the dark corner of the house. Though there is good relation between the mother and daughter the relationship is a sort of a strange one.

Next the husband-wife relationship in *Can You Hear the Night bird Call? is portrayed* through Harjot Singh and Gurpreet Kaur. Harjot Singh's dreams for a better life marked a space between himself and his wife. He desperately wanted to go abroad in search of wealth but his ship *Komagota Maru*, carrying several passengers like him on the lookout for good jobs, was forced to retreat from the shores of Canada. Disappointed with life and luck, Harjot Singh resigns himself to his cot all day and night and finally he disappeared. Gurpreet Gaur's life becomes bitter. Though outwardly she mourns for her husband, in her heart she curses him. Family is a bondage with love, care and affection. Badami brings out the problems of the family which arise due to lack of care and concern and hence forth betray the members of the family.

Bibi-ji returns back to India to meet her sister's daughter Nimmo. She destroys the life of Jasbeer, the eldest son of Nimmo by taking him with her to Canada as she does not have a child of her own. She helps Nimmo's family financially and promises her that she will provide him with all sources. At this following juncture, Badami tells

> *'You have done so much for us. Ask what it is you want. I don't have much, but I will try to do the best I can.' 'Let me take one of your boys back with me to Vancouver,' Bii-ji said . . . Bibiji rushed on. 'I know it is a big thing to ask, but he will be always be your child. I will merely take care of him for a few years, give him the best education I can afford' . . . 'All I want is to help my family for you are the only family I have. The child will have opportunities that you cannot give him here, and all our love and care.' (CYHNC 181-82).*

Bibiji struggles to reclaim her lost family by paying off for her niece and succeeds in taking Jasbeer with her.

Badami again brings out the character of Bibi-ji as negative. Bibi-ji's dreams of giving the best to Jasbeer turns out to be bad. He, who was separated from his parents,

starts to hate his parents, turns to be mischievous. Eventhough he was provided with all sorts of luxuries, he was not able to get his mother's love. Though Bibi-ji is affectionate with him he could not accept her in his mother's place. Jasbeer does not write to his parents and behaves differently to them when he comes to India to meet them. As far as Indian family is concerned, a child needs his mother's care and affection that which shapes the child's character. As Jasbeer does not get his mother's love, his behaviour in Canada is ultimately changed. Bibi-ji is heart broken as her promises to Nimmo is going to ashes. She lies about Jasbeer in the letter to Nimmo, because the truth is that Jasbeer is not doing well at all. The relationship between Nimmo and Jasbeer, Jasbeer and Bibi-ji has been estranged. The researcher amazingly depicts the problems of the middle class family, in which he believes that as a punishment for stealing the good fortune of her sister. The thought increases her frustration and dissatisfaction with her life.

Next mother-daughter relationship of Leela and her mother Rosa who is a foreigner is portrayed. Rosa is mentally tortured due to her marriage to a Hindu Brahmin and is not able to cope up with her in-laws. She separates herself from the other members of the family and even from her daughter. As a child Leela longs for her mother's love and care but it is totally refused to her. She considers her mother as a ghost and feels a kind of fear in her mind whenever she is called to meet her mother. She is doomed to walk on the earth as a half-and-half. Her childhood is scarred between identity and the great unhappiness of her mother. She often takes the nails or hairs of her mother and keeps it in front of the Gods and incinerate as though she is doing black magic to curse her mother. As a baby she is brought up by the kitchen cook as no one cared her neither her father nor mother. The death of her mother makes a trauma in her mind. It also highlights the adverse effect that such victimization has on a young child as it creates a deep sense of inferiority in her and forces her to prematurely cross the threshold of adulthood. Henceforth, Leela becomes wily and cunning and she cleverly grabs her father's affection as well as his purse-strings and consequently undermines her grandmother's authority over him. Most actions of Leela are attempts to overcome the feelings of inadequacy that are a residue of her miserable childhood. She considers marriage to a prosperous groom to be the only way of extracting herself from the peripheral position that has been assigned to her since birth. Leela, as a strong woman, leads a very happy life after her marriage and got the love and care which she did not get from her relatives. She as a mother took care of her two children with love and care. Both her son and daughter are so much attached to her.

> *She devoted herself to her father, Hari Shastri, bringing him his slippers when he came home from work, taking his tray of food to him in his room, asking him to explain this or that to her and generally insinuating herself into his life. She anticipated his wishes – ensuring that his pens were full of ink and that he always had sharpened pencils on his desk . . . Before Akka knew it, the grey-eyed grandchild whom she thoroughly distrusted had somehow taken charge of her son's life. (88).*

Badami possesses great facility with the language and she uses it with a malleable elegance that is a pleasure to read. Her recall of detail and the ability to blend it into characters is remarkable. Badami through the lines vividly tells the wily and cunningness of Leela because of her marginalization in her childhood. Discarded familial relationships affects a family's economic success, physical and mental health, the readiness and success of children in school, and the engagement of youth in a positive and productive roles. In short, the strength of family bonds is crucial to a family's capacity to provide, nurture, and care for its members.

5. Shakiness of Memory

Memory is a thought of something that one remembers from the past. The concept of memory and isolation forms an important part of this novel. It is particularly so in families where each member of the family uses memory to connect with parents and siblings. In *Tamarind Mem* Anita Rau Badami projects the memories of two women, a mother and a daughter, and artistically depicts their relationships which float on a sea of memories connecting the families. Kamini, the daughter, moves away to Canada from Saroja, the mother, both spatially and temporally she depends on memory to reconstruct the past she has left behind. She remembers

My mother, who had seemed unchanging as the Dhura star through my childhood, looked so different in my memory now when viewed from the distance that separated us. Her hair once abundant, was a pathetic clump of white, her this fingers no longer smooth and sue in their myriad tasks . . . The same eyes had softened and glowed when she was pleased or proud of us. (TM 15)

The spatial difference is not able to separate the mother daughter completely.

Though Kamini, as an immigrant in the alien world, stands alone, always heavily burdened by her nostalgic but glorious past, she still constantly feels enveloped by her mother's warm shadow through her warm recollections of the past. Not only through her recollections but also through her dreams, the mother seems to be protecting her child from all kinds of fears and insecurities. Kamini, vividly remembering her mother's anger and love, their conflicts and resolutions throughout her life and finally realizes the social restrictions that her mother faced. She believes that her mother makes her realize her dreams. She also feels, it must have not been an easy relation for her mother, and her continued displacement never let her have any lasting friendships.

The modern family situation is like the life of Kamini. When her mother is pregnant, she feels that something strange is inside her mother and feels that her mother is a ghost. She hates the moment her mother who does not care her, but she is happy with her relatives around when the baby is born. She is more attached to Linda Ayah who takes care of the household chores. As an observing child, she takes everything to her mind and fears of everything. The ghost stories told by the Ayah affected so much that she could not have a peaceful sleep. Also, she is afraid of her mother who says that she will leave them and go somewhere due to her frustration with her husband. These harsh memories of Kamini in her childhood reflect throughout her life. They are glad memories in her later life and makes her to feel better in the future and helps to be emotionally attached with her family. Anita Caroline points out about memory in *Tamarind Mem* as "*Tamarind Mem* is based on shared memories and storytelling between a mother and her daughter. By making the daughter and the mother speak in turns, Badami provides us two versions of the same story." (291)

Badami beautifully portrays the loneliness of a married woman through the character Saroja. Her married life is a fragmented piece of the past which gave pain and haunted her.

Before my Marriage, the world seems a smooth found place. My father is a true patriarch. As long as Appa is in change, we don't have to worry about anything . . . Nothing is steady after my marriage. I have no friend to talk to without feeling that I am revealing my inadequacies as a wife. Friendship is like a tree, it needs time to mature, and we never stay in one place long enough for that! And my husband is a gypsy who I see for a short while every month. (235-36)

Kamini's nostalgic memories in her childhood with her grandmother Putti and others are presented with sympathy and emotion. As her husband does not spend time with her, she is attracted to an Anglo Indian Paul da Costa in order to take a real revenge against her husband. Isolation of married women in Indian society is vividly portrayed through the character Saroja. As a small child Saroja had a sharp tongue and she was called Tamarind Mem. After her marriage there is no one to understand her. She has people with her but is left isolated. Isolation comes through her husband who is rarely at home. There is no communication between the two and their relationship is without any bond. After becoming a widow, she travels to many places in train where her husband had refused to take her. Memories can often create troubles in life. Here Sengupta observes:

Rau Badami displays a sure touch at creating and developing characters, especially the female ones that possess an earthy realism. Saroja, as she tells her story, is very real. She reminds me of a lot of intelligent women who carry old resentments about thwarted dreams and ambitious through a lifetime of acid anger. Women who are never satisfied with what life gives them, marvellously adept at counting what they did not get and utterly inept at remembering the blessings. Taking it out on their families, meddling and

over-demanding women who never know any peace. (18)

Isolation is a major theme in *Tamarind Mem*. Both the characters Kamini and Saroja experience isolation but in different ways. Kamini experiences the feel of isolation when she moves to Canada where everything is surrounded by snow. She remembers her past and calls her mother to get rid of her loneliness. She is invaded by all the memories of her past. On the other hand her sister Roopa living with her husband in the U.S leads a complete happy life. Though the concept of homeland remains with her, Roopa claims that she does not remember the memories of her mother who is like a mosquito in her head. The author affirms, "Memories were like ghosts, shivery, uncertain, nothing guaranteed, totally not-for-sure" (73).

The story of Saroja from her childhood till her later stage is chronically like Kamini. For Saroja, the memories after her marriage have blurred and moulded together, as they move frequently from place to place. She longs to study for doctor but all her dreams have been evaded and fragmented into pieces by her marriage to an older man who is a railway officer and does not have time to admire which she longs for. As the train goes fastly her dreams also go away like the passing train. Kerns tells of their memories as "Both women posess the gift of sharp tongues and have the skill to turn their memories into stories" (117).

Kamini reminiscences the deep ties of love and resentment that bind her and her mother. As a small child Kamini is so much attached to her parents than her younger sister Roopa. Whenever her dad comes from a travel she asks stories about the place he had travelled. On the other hand, she feels that her mother likes Roopa than her. Kamini gets scolding for every mistake committed by her sister Roopa. Sometimes she complains about her mother to father but still she loves her mother so much. After moving to Canada she calls her mother often and she stands against her when she decides to travel to places without any destination. Kerns points out

Kamini remembers how she tried to share a memory of a travel episode in India with her mother during one of their Canada-India phone conversations and how her mother had denied that the event ever occurred. Her mother had once again accused Kamini of making up stories. (118)

The mother too refuges her daughters after they both go abroad. Roopa who is not worried about the travel of mother says "Oh, leave her alone . . . Ma is properly having a wonderful time" (50).

The author clearly tells the generation gap by brooding over the past. He finds that the love between the mother and the daughter remains the same. The mother does not want to be a burden to her daughters but to be a free woman living her life on her own choice. As she loves her daughters so much she cares and lives for them when they are small children. Even though she often said she will leave them and go, she never does. Even after the death of her husband, she curses him for not taking care of the children when he was alive.

The pivotal figures in the memories of both the mother and the daughter are the usually absent railway officer Dadda and Paul, the car mechanic who committed suicide. In Kamini's memories, Dadda is her beloved and loving father who comes from his travels laden with stories and gifts for his two daughters. He is the man her mother treats with either complete detachment or with sharp, angry words. He is the emotionally cold, much older man she has been forced to marry. He is the husband who constantly travels away while he makes her and their two daughters live among strangers in a series of houses that are to be run strictly according to his rigid standards. Paul hangs himself when Saroja is not ready to go away with him to make a new life. Kamini is bewildered by her memories of the possible relationship between her mother and Paul. All she does remember with certainty is the thrill of being the first one to discover Paul hanging dead in the billiards room of the exclusive railway club.

Badami weaves a tale of bittersweet nostalgia, imbuing her descriptions of Indian domestic life with achingly palpable details as she explores all the small ceremonies that make family life so simultaneously rich and infuriating. The novel is filled with pungent sights and sounds and poignant memories. It proves that each person in a family experiences that microcosm differently. Only by synthesizing these disparate views do the readers grasp the

full flavour of events. The mother and the daughter, the husband and the wife try to make sense of their past with different perceptions. It unfolds how the past cultural restrictions shape the personal lives and aspirations through the characters. The endless conflicts between mother and daughter, parents and children lie at its core.

Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? also possesses by the past and beautifully portrays the memories through the lives of the characters Bibi-ji, Nimmo and Leela. Due to displacement from their homeland to a foreign land they suffer from marginalisation. Displacement underlines situations which is a common feeling of loss, alienation, marginalization and plethora of such related emotions. Bibi-ji is haunted by the childhood memories and Leela is possessed by her cherished childhood memories. Here the problem of immigrants is vividly told by the author through the character Leela who longs to go to her homeland, even though she adapted herself to the new environment in Canada. Every year she thinks of going to India but every time it fails. She wants to meet her death in India:

> *'Although, when Yama the death God comes for me, I want all the ceremonies,' she said firmly. 'I want to be cremated with wood from the mango trees in the grove behind and house in Bangalore. And don't forget a small piece of sandalwood to scent my journey' . . . 'And what if the Death God cannot find his way to you here in Canada? What if he doesn't have a map of the world?' Arjun joked.*
>
> *'That's why I'm saying I have to go home to die. No confusion and lost roads for Yamar-raja.' (CYHNC 232)*

Badami also depicts that memories will haunt everyone who has done any betrayal or hypocricy towards anyone. Bibi-ji when she was young had stolen the man of her sister, and after many years, she took away the son of her sister's daughter. As consequence, she had lost her friend Leela in the Air India flight accident and her husband was shot dead just in front of her. All these memories haunt her, and after the death of her husband Pa-ji she lives with these memories. She thinks that Pa-ji's death and Leela's accident are due to the betrayal to her sister, Kanwar, and to her daughter Nimmo. She often hallucinates her mother's voice:

> *'Greedy girl, Sharanjeet Kaur, Gurpreet says, shaking a thin finger at Bibi-ji, One day you will pay for all that you have stolen from others. You will pay."I have, Amma,' Bibi-ji whispers. 'I have.' Not once, but twice. She has learned that for everything you gain, you lose an equal amount. She had grabbed her sister's fate, and Fate had turned around and taken that sister away. Then she had taken Nimmo's son, and he had so warped her sense of right and wrong that she had sacrificed her friend Leela to the gods. (394-95)*

Badami, beautifully presents the pain of a person. For instance Nimmo had lost her mother at her childhood. She gave her first son to Bibi-ji and lost her second son Pappu, her daughter Kamal and her husband Saptal in the riot between Sikhs and Hindus. She cherishes her memories of her husband and children, faces the most dreadful memories of them, their death. She hopes that one day, "They will come back . . . Nimmo lays out her banquet and opens the doors, and opens the windows, and waits in the stillness of the night. They will come" (401). The writer sensitively has built the character Nimmo who is emotionally challenged from her childhood. She tells "She's such a fearful woman and when she thinks that she has conquered fear, that she might have left her traumas behind, everything just comes back to haunt her, and I really felt for her" (Tancock). The fragmented memories of Nimmo who is very young at the time, had witnessed the whole ghastliness of her mother's death which haunted her till the death of her daughter, husband and son. The partition struggle reminded of her childhood. Badami tells us the haunting memories of Nimmo as,

> *The morning had drifted by in silence, a peculiar silence, when Nimmo recalled it . . . there was a commotion at the far end of the mud lane . . . Her mother . . . came rushing inside the house and locked the door. She picked up Nimmo and lowered her gently into the large wooden bharoli of grain in the dark corner of the house . . . Nimmo heard fists pounding on their door . . . The sound of footsteps entering the house and insistent male voices. Her mother's voice grew higher and angries. It altered and became pleading, and then abruptly she uttered a*

single scream, which turned into a sound like the one a stray dog had uttered when they found it dying in the gully behind their house. (154-55)

So after the death of her mother, the smell of the lavender soap brought her the haunted memory. Badami's keen eye for eccentric details of the dialy life renders memorable and robust characters. The lavender fragrance comes to acquire morbid overtones, when it is forever etched in the young Nimmo's mind. With the soap her mother used to cleanse herself with, she cleansed herself after her rape during the partition riots. It is the very fragrance that, years later, Nimmo will allow to connect with her Canada-settled aunt, Bibi-ji,

The lavender soap, thus, jostled across a number of different emotional, and historical registers becomes a tangible symbol of aspiration, desire, wealth and opportunity, on the one hand, and of violence, death and traumatic memory, on the other. (Rajender Kaur 280)

The Lavender soap thus becomes the trigger that sets off the memory of significant events such as Bibi-ji's betrayal of her sister and her consequent emigration to Canada with her husband and finally the death of her sister in India's partition. The traumatizing effect that violence leaves on victims and their pitiable plight is portrayed through Nimmo. Nimmo's firsthand experience of death and violence at a very early age keeps her frightened all throughout her life and she never trusts anyone and feels safe only within the walls of her house. The author rightly ponders how one can possibly take advice when one knows how easily a 'happy' life can be cast under. Memories of the past continue to haunt the characters. Agarwal points out:

The novel Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? is an argument to establish that the lingering shadows of national disintegration distort the positive perception of the phenomena of national consciousness and it gives birth to a 'divided-self' in which the wholeness seems to be nightmare. (112)

Badami writes about the pain which pierces one with the past rather than just the glory of reinvention. When Bibi-ji finds out Nimmo in India, she is happy and she does not reveal the real encounter which had happened between her and her sister Kanwar. She broods over the past while talking with Nimmo. The past pierces her and by way of return, she wants to do something good to her niece.

Later the riot in India torn the family of Nimmo and Bibi-ji and the life of Leela. The dreams of the three women have lost trace because of their perished life. Bibi-ji after coming to Canada becomes rich and forgets about her old poor life in her childhood, in return, she helps the new Indian immigrants in Canada. When she comes to India to meet Nimmo, she surprises them through her foreign gifts and helps Nimmo's family financially.

Badami shows the opportunities, which lay around them like pearls on the land of Canada which are visible only to people with sharp eyes like Bibi-ji. As a cunning lady Bibi-ji prospered her life in Canada. The author flawlessly weaves events such as the Golden Temple incident, Indira Gandhi's assassination and the subsequent massacre of the Sikhs through which the memories have been fragmented. The first fragmentation of the past is the period in which Bibi-ji lives a prosperous life in Canada and the plight of her sister in India. The next fragmented past is Nimmo who had lost her mother during the Partition period and the brooding memories of her family made her grieve. Leela a child of an Indian father and a German mother is never accepted by her brahmin family as she is half-half, is another fragment. Her mother's death caused trauma in her mind for so long, as she feels she is the reason for her mother's death.

Isolation, marginalization, alienation, fragmentation are some of the themes in Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* Leela is isolated from her family but her married life took away her isolation:

For almost ten years she had lived the comfortable life of Mrs.Bhat – a full and happy existence, punctuated by weddings, birth and death ceremonies, and the dozens of festivals that marked the Indian Calendar. She had borne her husband a son and a daughter, Arjun and Preethi, and had believed him as satisfied with their tip as she was. (CYHNC 94)

After going to Canada she felt isolated in the foreign land surrounded by white people. Badami clearly portrays the

marginalization of Indians in a foreign land. In the end of the novel all the three characters Bib-ji, Nimmo and Leela are isolated and are accompanied only by their memories.

The feeling of sadness is mixed with pleasure and affection when one thinks of happy times in the past. The characters Nimmo and Leela are accompanied by nostaligic memories and had good cherished memories of their married life. Even though Nimmo had lost her family she remembers the happy moments she had with her family. Even though Bibi-ji is with riches she could not think of the pleasant memories she had from her childhood or adulthood. As a child she lived a poor life, "picking up the hot, stinking shit that the family's two cows dropped in the courtyard. Then she had to make balls of the disgusting mess and pat them into circular cakes against the walls of their house" (6) and as a young girl she had stolen the man of her sister and in the adulthood she stole Nimmo's son. All these memories haunted her and she did not have any pleasant memories to remember. The haunted memories left trauma to her. Badami says even though one is filled with riches one cannot live a peaceful life with haunted memories.

Violence pushes Badami's three resilient heroines to their limits. To the author's credit, the reader experiences the tragic memories of Badami's women through their lives, thoughts and experiences. While Bibi-ji loses her husband in India and faces the consequences in Vancouver, Nimmo loses her entire family except her son, Jasbeer and endures the suffering in India. This shows that communal violence crosses borders despite their differing locations in Vancouver and India, respectively. While Bibi-ji suffers the consequences in Amritsar after the immediate impact of her loss of her husband Pa-ji, and then in Vancouver, Nimmo suffers through the daily reminders of her lost husband, son, and daughter in the house where they inhabited together for many years. The tolerant Bibi-ji takes a mild revolt, after her husband's death, by carrying a placard and shouting "Khalistan forever!" – an activity that allows her to fall into a deep and dreamless sleep for the first time in months.

6. Conflicting Cultures

Badami establishes herself as a post-colonial writer who is able to assert and foreground her Indian experience in a powerful way. Partition, which ranks as one of the most tragic events in the history of the world, resulted not only in the loss of human lives and property but also impinged on cultural issues. The enormous unnatural migration due to partition, is linked inextricably with horrific tales of massacres, looting, arson, rape, abduction of women and children and other acts of savagery. People immigrate other country in order to settle there to which they are not native. It is a result of a number of factors, including economic and political reasons, family reunion, natural disasters or the wish to change one's surroundings voluntarily.

Badami builds her characters brick by brick rather emotionally than traditionally. In *Tamarind Mem* the author beautifully portrays the cultural clash through different incidents, and the landscape of Canada is portrayed through her character Kamini. The place in which Kamini lives is surrounded by snow and she identifies herself in a fairy land. She could barely see another colour other than snow. Ferns, tree branches, buildings are all severed by snow.

> *Some mornings I woke to find on my window pane. If I peered at the window I could see the perfection of each icy-crystal. And when I leaned away, there was a glittering filigree of ferns, silver frond, tree branches as delicate as the ones in those fairy tale books my Ma used to buy for me. (TM 14-15)*

Still Kamini feels a kind of loneliness and talks to her often as she has no one in the alien land. When she tells her mother about her loneliness, her mother blames Kamini for leaving her alone in India. Badami shows the readers the riches of Canada where they grow wheat and cows. Kamini's mother comments

> *'Here itself when it rains you wear three-four sweaters, shawls, Blankets and go hurru-hurru with cold!' 'But Ma …' 'And if you want to look at cows just glance out of the window, hundreds of cows you will see shitting on the roads.' 'What a strange thing to say, Ma!' (149)*

The main cultural clash in this story is seen with the pronunciation of Indian names. The very name Kamini is

spelled so very differently by her colleagues.

> *Greta and Bob, who turned pink with embarrassment when they tried to pronounce my name, apologizing profusely each time they transformed it into something different: Kemani, Kimini.*
>
> *Why you don't tell them it is Kaa-mee-nee? What use telling me? asked Ma. (15)*

In *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, also Badami has more in a way of depicting the lives of Indian migrants to Canada, including how they adapt themselves to the conflicting cultures, and to a lesser extent how they change the communities they move to. She also depicts that anger is translated very easily into violence which could blow up a plane, blow up a place, blow up a building. The lot who cause this violence are also the immigrants and many are left as widows and orphans due to this, collecting what is left after the wars and holding it all together.

The novel moves back and forth between the growing desi community in Vancouver and the increasingly conflicted worlds of Punjab and Delhi, where rifts between Sikhs and Hindus are growing. In June 1984, just as political tensions within India begin to spiral out of control, Bibi-ji and her husband Pa-ji decide to make their annual pilgrimage to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest of Sikh shrines. While they are there, the temple is stormed by the Indian government troops where Sikh extremists hiding themselves in the temple compound. The results are devastating. The tide of anger and violence spills across borders and floods into distant Canada, and into the lives of the neighbours of Bibi-ji and Leela and also into the life of Bibi-ji's niece Nimmo who is in India. The novel weaves together the personal and the political conflicts of Indians and India respectively and beautifully brings the reader into the reality of terrorism and religious intolerance.

Badami, a fluent and somewhat old-fashioned storyteller, uses all these debacles as the highly concentrated end-point of the novel. She calmly and empathetically introduces her major characters, both Sikhs and Hindus to the readers. In Vancouver Bibi-ji opens a cafe called The Delhi Junction, a meeting place for the entire subcontinental community of the city, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. Another character, Leela from Bangalore born to a German mother and a Hindu father, white and Indian by race, Hindu by religion. She is doomed to walk the earth as a "half-and-half." Her father married a German woman who was separated by her colour, religion and the way of her living and was considered as outsider by her in-law. Her childhood in Bangalore is scarred by her in-between identity and by the great unhappiness of her mother, Rosa, an outcast in their conservative Hindu home. Cultural clash in Leela's mother's life is very miserable. As the connection between her and her family was disconnected after the Second World War she could not return to Germany. Badami portrays the difficulties of a woman on the basis of colour. When Leela was made fun by her relatives, her mother who was not even supported by her husband would curse the in-laws. Badami expresses cultural conflicts through the following lines.

> *Rosa would press Leela close to her spongy body and murmur in a mixture of languages that Leela only half understood. 'Never forget you are mine. Even though you have their brown skin, you see the world with my grey eyes. They are wicked, filthy creatures, pigs, dirtyevilpigs.' (CYHNC 82)*

Years after Rosa's shadowy death, Leela has learnt to deal with her in-between status,and marries Balu Bhat, a man from a family of purebred Hindu Brahmins, thus acquiring status and a tenuous stability. However, when Balu insists on emigrating to Canada, Leela finds comfort and understanding amidst cultural conflicts. She gets the multicultural nature of her adopted country almost from the start and refuses to be sucked into the increasingly acerbic relations between Sikhs and Hindus in Vancouver.

Finally, Badami focuses on another Sikh woman, Nimmo, Bibi-ji's long-lost niece whose entire birth family disappeared when she was five years old, during the brutal Partition of India and Pakistan. Later she is married to a young Sikh mechanic in Delhi, and raises her children in decent near-poverty. She tries to control the fear of violence and abandonment which is her legacy, from childhood. It is her appalling fate to lose her second family, her husband and children, in the bloody anti-Sikh riots following Indira Gandhi's death, and then, her whole grasp on reality.

Badami focuses entirely on the Indian and Sikh communities of Vancouver, their ties to the homeland, and the lives of certain individuals leading up to the disaster. Many of the Sikhs, decades before the assassination of Indira Gandhi lost their lives followed by massive and murderous retaliation. All of this culminated in the disaster of the Air India flight killing 329 souls over Ireland, in which it is believed that Sikh extremists based in Canada planted a bomb on the flight bound for Delhi from Toronto.

As events move toward the tragic denouement Badami strongly represents what is happening even in an alien land. Leela was marginalized by her family in her childhood and this marginalization is repeated and reflected in her infliction of her own prejudiced notions on to her future white daughter-in-law. She refuses to accept the white girl with open arms and criticizes her for her attempt to place herself in two different worlds. The scars of her marginalization and victimization run deep into her and finally the white girl brings once again all the depressing memories. Leela even in Vancouver holds deeply to Indian values, fussing over whether her son and his white fiance have chosen an 'auspicious' date for their wedding. On the other hand, she comes to realize what she and her family have built in Canada outweighs the traditions of the old country: "She had tried very hard to dislike Vancouver, to keep it at arm's length. And now . . . she discovered that the city had stealthily insinuated itself into her mind and her heart" (392). A moving and illuminating thought, as she proceeds into a dark future, gives her clothes to beggars in India, and when arrives in Vancouver she accommodates herself at a rented house decorated with secondhand furniture.

> *Somehow, without her noticing it, seventeen years had gone by since they had left Bangalore. The world had come apart since then and had fitted itself together again with altered borders . . .*
>
> *Nowadays, goras who came here wandered around with a dazed look in their eyes as if they were foreigners in their own country. (307-08)*

Leela's unfortunate death marks the unfinished journeys of immigrants who never make it back home.

The novel does not delve much into how Leela manages to adjust so well from being a socially busy upper class housewife in India to a middle class woman in Canada. With so much free time she starts to work at the mall, but still she feels "What a blessing it is to die in your own bed, under your own roof, with your family surrounding you, full of the knowledge that you have lived as thoroughly as you wanted to"(101).

Again, in Bibi-ji's and Pa-ji's Indian grocery store and cafe, Badami sketches the rise of immigrants from a village background to a Canadian life. When a regular customer to their Restaurant, Samuel Hunt had passed his uncomplimentary sentiments towards the immigrants that they do not share their racial heritage, Bibi-ji retorted that he could neither witness nor understand the changing cultures. Whatever his feelings towards the desis who gathered at The Delhi Junction, Samuel could not resist the spicy Indian food. After twenty five years in India, the man had developed a taste for curries and is compelled to taste it atleast once a week in The Delhi Junction. In short, Bibi-ji realized with some amusement, that Samuel had been transplanted to Canada during the split between the two cultures, just like the desis were.

Badami tells a compelling tale of the rise of the Sikh separatists in India and how their cause affects the desis in the diaspora. Jasbeer, Bibi-ji's adopted son gets involved in the movement while living in Canada, whereas Bibi-ji disdains to favour a homeland separate from India. It is a sad indictment on current affairs and how terror by state or group initiated can shrink the concept of community. Even the diaspora desis at The Delhi Junction separate into Pakistanis and Indians and, during the events of 1984, the Indians break apart into communal groups ie. Punjabis, Southies, Bengalis etc. In 1947, India was partitioned on the basis of the two-nation theory, which was accepted by both the Muslim League as well as the Congress, the inference being that the Muslims and the Hindus could not happily coexist within a single political entity. Thus, the Indian subcontinent was split into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. Rajendra Kaur says:

> *In Anita Rau Badami's Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? (2006), we finally have a novel that shatters the near total silence and cultural amnesia that has surrounded*

> *the anti-Sikh violence which, in November 1984, followed in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Because a Sikh security officer had a hand in Gandhi's assassination, thousands of innocent Sikhs were brutalized and killed in North India, especially so in New Delhi, the capital of India. Twenty three years and nine judicial commissions later, hardly any perpetrators have been punished for those killings, despite the well known involvement of some important political leaders of the ruling Congress party. (279)*

The search for a sense of belonging, the validation of the importance of the cultural lives, expressions and experiences of the immigrants living in a foreign land, is primarily a response to the feelings of loss and hopelessness that plague many persons who live away from their native land. Bibi-ji as an immigrant experiences feelings of hopelessness due to the loss of her maternal family.

Jasbeer represents all those young hot-blooded men who claim to be rebels and revolutionaries, fighting against all kinds of injustices. He gets completely swayed by the violent rants of the radical preacher called Dr. Raghubir Randhawa who comes to Vancouver in order to incite the Canadian Sikhs to come and join the Sikhs' violent efforts to form a new homeland called Khalistan. Bibi-ji comes to know from Kanwar the Partition of India and Pakistan and the Sikhs' demand of a "new sovereign state . . . called Khalistan, though some people are against further partitioning of the country" (Bryjak 28). This fight for Khalistan leads to the confrontation between the Indian government and a group of religious extremists led by Saint Bhindranwale. Jasbeer becomes a victim of this discourse of separatism because of his vulnerability and the feeling of abandonment that resides in his heart due to his separation from his family. In an attempt to emerge from this sense of abandonment that pervades his mind, the final recourse that he takes is to of being violated as well as the violent choices that one willingly makes in response to such situations.

Badami writes in a heartrending way the sequence of tragic events faced by particular communities in the name of religion. According to Sikhism, "cutting of hair is forbidden both for men and women" (Axel 418). In Vancouver Dr. Randhawa, an extremist aroused the Sikhs' feelings by mentioning his life experience saying that his mother, sensing the danger which is spreading everywhere, "took a pair of scissors and hacked off my hair, crying bitterly at the sacrilege that her hands were obliged to commit" (291). Pappu too fearing the danger in Mohan's house, cuts his hair. His father Satpal is not allowed to board in any of the transports saying that it is not safe for him to travel in a bus on that particular day. He realises "his turban and beard made him a clear target" (368). Bibi-ji too had surreptitiously broken the rules of god-fearing Sikhs by cutting her hair a few inches to even out the ragged ends. Though they know that they are doing sacrilege, they cut their hair in order to accommodate and adjust to the situations. They did not feel secured even in their own land because of religious intolerance. When Bibi-ji finds her adopted son Jasbeer's behaviour at school is inappropriate, she feels

> *Was he teased or bullied at school for the colour of his skin or because he wore his hair in a topknot like all good Sikhs? Should she ask Nimmo whether they could cut his hair—the marker of his Sikh identity—as so many other Sikh parents in their community had done for their sons, so that Jasbeer could blend in?. (197)*

Bibi-ji and her husband Pa-ji are caught smack in the middle of Operation Bluestar, where soldiers stormed the Golden Temple to capture the radical Saint Bhindranwale. In the brutal assault lasted the entire night, civilian losses were estimated to be in the thousands. Soon after, Indira Gandhi is shot by two Sikh bodyguards, the enmity unleashes a mania of revenge killings of Sikhs in the following days.

Badami has exposed a dark chapter of India's history. She fails to draw a convincing connection between the violence against Sikhs in India and the act of bombing of Air India Flight 182. She has failed at some level to capture the trauma of the Sikhs abroad at the regime's suppression and reprisals. Pa-ji's benevolent mantra of "live and let live" and "separation is a bad thing" was not a popular attitude, but there could have been more empathy towards Dr. Randhawa's point of view without dismissing it all as self-

aggrandizing hot air.

The narration is with extraordinary compassion and humour. Nimmo though always at constant threat leads a happy life with her family. Politics and war intervene the whole family which is destroyed, making Nimmo realize that no place is safe, not even her home. Nimmo thinks the same way like her mother that bharoli is "the last safest place in the world, that bin of grain; stay there my daughter, stay there, you will be safe. Don't make a noise or they will get you" (361). Nimmo's words show her concern and love towards her family and the importance of one's life.

> *I don't want to walk, I want to sleep, I want to go where my children are. I want to see my Kamala again, and my sons,like pillars on either side of me, and my Satpal who has left nothing but his handprints on the walls of this house. I want to go to them. (380)*

Badami's novels weave a web around the readers as all good stories do and clasp them in its embrace. It is a fine creation with sensitivity and perspicacity and with the right balance of interesting characters, conflict and conspiracy. Rich with her warmth and humanity, and the daily sights, scents and sounds of both India and Canada, she shows the tumultuous effect of the past on new immigrants, and the ways in which memory and myth, the personal and the political, become nheartrendingly connected.

Badami gives a glimpse of the importance of family name and its relations and the complexities of Indian family life with the cultural gap that emerges when Indians move to the west. Her writings capture most effectively the work culture, the general ethos of a small town, of the shifting changes in times and values. They argue the readers to consider that it is not simply the conflicts between the east and the west that are striking, but the conflicts within one's own and his evolving tradition.

Badami skillfully captures the victimization and dehumanization of innocent people who were made a scapegoat to the sadism and misguided notions of two communities during the partition. The major cultural clash between the Sikhs and the Hindus are vividly portrayed by the author. Another political violence in the novel is the declaration of a state of Emergency in India by Indira Gandhi in 1975. Badami shows the positive aspect of the emergency rule where she tells that its imposition has brought an improvement in the management of social and economic centres of the government.

Conclusion

Anita Rau Badami's novels mainly focus on subjects like family tensions, changing possibilities of memory, nature of mind, conflict between modernity and traditional values, and finally the changing status of women from traditional roles to modernity. Her themes, however, remain universal focusing on love, loss, separation, heroism, despair and happiness. Geeta Doctor lays down the basics of Badami's writing style as:

> *Badami plots her stories with the zeal of a terrorist laying out a minefield. She makes sure that we see the smoking gun, long before it goes off. She has for instance provided excerpts from news reports of both the Delhi riots and the Kanishka bombing at the beginning, besides dedicating her book to the 'memory of the man on the bridge in Modinagar and the victims of Air Indian flight 182.' (7)*

Tamarind Mem contains many aspects similar to the author's own life. As the author's life revolved around the railway colonies of India, so does the characters in the novel. The father, a mechanical engineer for the railroads, moves frequently from place to place, leaving his family. Just as Badami grew up surrounded by the stories her family told, the characters are also constructed around numerous tales. Still, Badami claims that this story is not an autobiography, she simply began writing this novel through memories of her past and moved into a fictional story.

The novel is largely about memories and their vastness. The characters 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 who once seemed so dissimilar from one another because of their conflicts, suddenly sound and look similar after the mother's account of her own memories. It is only after one is enlightened with the other's point of view of the past.

Badami portrays the characters who are brought up in an

orthodox environment of restrictions where their wishes are crushed but who want their daughters to follow their own choices. The novel is written in a playful and poetic prose. Saroja the mother and Kamini the daughter, vastly differ in their views about their past. Based on the themes, Badami divides the novel into two parts, one focused on the daughter and the other on the mother. Each character is a unique personality. Saroja has the nickname "Tamarind Mem" which originates from the sour fruit of the tamarind tree because of her increasingly hostile attitude. The tamarind tree can be found in Indian folklore in which travellers avoid the tree when they are seeking shelter, because it is supposed that the tamarind tree is the home of spirits which do not allow anything under it to survive. In *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?,* also memories are embedded in the overall narrative flow which foregrounds the very processes involved in remembering and thus problematizes both communicative and cultural memories. The novel inscribes and refers to a real historical framework which is viewed as a medium and artifact of cultural memory in its own right.

A fluent and somewhat old-fashioned storyteller, Badami continues to use her special narrative technique by interspersing thoughts with the narrative voice. Both sad and humourous, vivid, sensual descriptions of sights, sounds and smells fill the novel and lead it into descriptions of culture. Also Badami raises the relation between caste, class, and colour. She stresses the Indian inclination to hold on to the colonial legacy depicting through the characters' language, schooling and other institutions of the railroad. She uses all these debacles as the highly concentrated end-point of the novel. She calmly and empathetically introduces her major characters, both Sikh and Hindu to the readers.

It is found that Badami has a wider canvas and scope, a highly sophisticated language and a wider range of life situations. This is because of the larger circle in which she moved, her experiences with contemporary Indian writers, her competitive spirit and her profound aesthetic vision of life born of the untold sight she had on her honeymoon trip, on her way back to Delhi after their honeymoon. In her novels she shares her vision of life regarding the issues and problems in a family.

It is pertinent to point out some of the viable areas available in the works of the writer for further probing and research. One may take up for study the women characters who are psychologically and physiologically strong, whereas the men are weak particularly towards their feeling of religious tolerance. Badami's novels can also be compared and contrasted with that of other Indian women novelists like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande in post feminist stance.

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