

Research Article**Cultural Ambivalence in Anita Rau Badami's Tamarind Mem****S.Shabana¹, Dr Sajna Raj N²**

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Abstract: The article explores the theme of Cultural Ambivalence in Anita Rau Badami's novel Tamarind Mem. 'Ambivalence' is a product of decolonisation of African and Asian nations. It is the situation where one can notice dilemma or dual nature. Cultural Ambivalence can be noticed through one of the main character Kamini, who migrated to the West. She neither can fully abandon the culture of her mother nor can adapt the new culture. This ultimately leads to an ambivalent situation. Badami establishes the idea of cultural ambivalence by projecting two communities: The Indian and the Western. The protagonist is rooted by her own Indian culture, and at the same time her feelings are shifted to the Western modern culture. It explores the mixed culture or uncertain life of the protagonist. She loses her identity which causes frustration in her. While analysing her past, Kamini herself gives her quest for cultural root and identity. The novel depicts the diasporic and hybrid characters of constructing identity. The present paper 'Cultural Ambivalence in Anita Rau Badami's Tamarind Mem' is an attempt to explore the cultural trauma faced by the protagonists: Kamini and Saroja.

Keywords: Ambivalence, decolonisation, culture, hybrid, diaspora.

Cultural ambivalence is one of the key aspects in Anita Rau Badami's novels. The present novel taken for the study; Tamarind Mem has a deep insight of cultural ambivalence. The term ambivalence is much linked with the human life and their cultures. Oxford Dictionary defines it as a term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite.

Badami opens the novel with the nostalgic monologues of the protagonist, Kamini who always desires to return to India. She calls her mother every Sunday from her basement apartment and is yearned to get away from the freezing cold city where even the traffic sounds were muffled by the snow. Kamini, Saroja's daughter desires to be with her mother. She longs to return to India. Whenever Kamini expresses her desire to be back to her homeland, she could receive a cold reply from her mother: "Well, who asked you to go?" "Did somebody tie your hands behind your back and say 'Go-go to that Calgary North Pole place?'" (2). In a Globe and Mail interview, Badami stated, "I find that the distance gives me perspective and passion." I have some toes here and a foot in India since I was in India for twenty-nine years and here for ten. Being in between two worlds, constantly looking back, yet having two beautiful locations to live in, either in my heart or in my imagination, is both a blessing and a curse." The novelist reflection captures the complexities and details of living a global, multicultural life.

Leaving her mother Saroja and culture behind, Kamini now resides in Canada. Love of her culture, and being in foreign cultural practice keeps her in a hybrid situation. The novelist tries to balance the opportunities and obstacles of the orthodox family setup and the conflicts that arise between the East and the West by raising her voice to change the narrow outlook towards women. In the novel, Saroja's mother asserts, "A woman can read and study all she pleases, her words mean nothing after all. So why you are wasting your youth and our money? Get married. Get married" She also says. "A woman without a husband is like sand without the river. No man to protect you and every evil wind will blow over your body. Listen to your mother"(158). Here, Saroja's mother is pressuring her to get into a marriage, demonstrating the impact of orthodoxy. Though she wants to continue her studies, she is forced to stop her education. The repetition of the words 'Get married' depicts us clearly how her mindset of an average Indian mother. Saroja pleads to convince her parents in many ways. She strongly protests that she wants to become a doctor, but all her efforts go in vain. Later, she was forced to marry Vishwa Moorthy, who is fifteen years senior to her. Vishwa Moorthy, to whom Saroja married, 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) With just six years separating them, he is nearly as old as her father.

When Saroja realises her plight, as her husband's behaviour is unusual, it shocks her into silence and questions herself, "why did my parents have to get me married to this old man? I could have finished my studies, found a job and supported myself."(187) The responsibilities and duties of Saroja are demeaning. So, she becomes hostile and disagreeable most of the time. Unlike her parents, Saroja wanted her daughters to be independent as much as possible. Her sufferings made her to realise the importance of education and freedom, and so, she always encouraged her daughters, "you have to be one step ahead of the rest of the world," "better than the best. Don't let anybody be ahead of you."(119). Saroja has become a victim of her own family's restrictions. Now, she does not wish her daughters to be the victims of cultural restrictions like her. She expresses to her daughters "At least one child of mine should get a chance to achieve all that I wanted. It is your duty to keep your mother's head high." (121). At any point of their lives, she wishes her daughters should never experience suppression in any manner.

Vishwa Moorthy left her in a chaotic situation. She could realise his attitude when he says "Do you mind if I smoke?" The man taps a pipe-a pipe! Does he think he is an angrezi sahib or what? (184). Saroja wishes to spend valuable time with her husband by sharing their views, feelings and opinions. She has lot of dreams but contrary to it he asks her a question whether she minds if he smokes, and doesn't wait for her reply. Instantly, he takes out a pipe and begins to smoke. She exclaims and thinks that he is imagining himself an Angrezi Sahib. In the Patriarchal society the dominance of men in social or cultural systems is still continuing. In this novel, one can come across such numerous tales in the story. Patriarchy finds its roots in the core principles of male dominance, centrism and control. Despite the progress, women living in the modern world still face many issues of discrimination.

Viswa Moorthy feels as Saroja's saviour and warns her, "You wouldn't be living in this fine house with all these servants if I wasn't. Don't forget that."(72). Saroja curses her husband because of his sahib ways. She declares that you are the ordinary son of an ordinary priest from a village and not a pink angrez big shot. He strongly protests and immediately responds that he is a big shot and because of him she is leading a luxurious life in a fine house with all the servants.

Saroja gets attracted to a dark-complexioned young Anglo-Indian motor mechanic, Paul da Costa and when she realises family and her responsibilities, she ignored him and reconciled

her Indian culture and motherhood. "I want to reach out and touch his warm skin, watch his clear smile. But words like duty and loyalty clamour in my ears. I think of Roopa and Kamini, their soft skins smelling of milk, their heads so vulnerable. They hold me with their helplessness and they twine about me as tenacious as bougainvillea." (229). She continues her unhappy married life for the sake of her daughter's future.

Though, Saroja had bitter experiences with her husband, she, as a common Indian wife prays to God for her husband's health. "Ma broke coconuts at the Kali temple in Guwahati. But nothing helped. Poor Ma, sneaking to the temple, reluctant to believe in superstition, yet afraid not to, furious with the goddess for failing her, furious with all the gods in the pantheon, angry with Dadda for giving up so easily. Ma was always there for me and Roopa and Dadda, no matter where Dadda's trains took him, no matter where he took us in those same trains. Was it wrong for her to expect some return for her services to him?"(138). She had wanted to "die first, as a sumangali, with her marriage beads about her neck, the vermilion bright on her forehead."(139). In spite of his avoidance, Saroja felt extremely sad when she came to know about his illness. Since from childhood and after marriage Saroja has to follow the instructions and restrictions. She can't lead her life freely according to her will and wish. Only after her husband's death and her daughter's immigration to Canada, Saroja could leave her traditional role and travel as she pleases.

Cultural Ambivalence can also be seen in the works of Homi K. Bhabha's *Of Mimicry and Man* he says that "The Menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object" (Bhabha 1994:126). The colonizer does not successfully impart his beliefs on the colonized, and the colonized will forever be "not quite/not white." Interaction with other people from many regions makes one person know other person's culture. It can happen not just to one individual but also to communities, populations, groups etc. According to him, Mimicry is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as 'almost the same, but not quite (Bhabha,1994:89).The copying of the colonizer culture, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized contains both mockery and a certain Menaces that mimicry is at once resemblance and Menace (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin,2007:125). Homi K Bhabha(1994:114)introduces hybridity as a problem of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that the other denied knowledge enter upon the dominant and estrange the basis of its authority, it's rules of recognition. In the novel, Kamini, Saroja's daughter, represents the new generation- ambitious, assertive and keen to accept the opportunities offered by a globalized world. This division highlights the ambivalence experienced by diasporic families, where adherence to traditional values often clashes with the allure of individual freedom.

The novel highlights the perspectives of Saroja, the mother whose life is steeped in Indian traditions, and her elder daughter Kamini, who struggles with the Western ideals of independence and self-expression. This kind of dual perspective not only enriches the narrative but also emphasizes gap between the generations and the cultures they represent.

Cultural Ambivalence is also noticed in many diasporic Indian writers. For example, In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake* (2003) aims to explore the ambivalent experiences of immigrant's generation experienced by Nikolai Gogol as the main character. Nikolai Gogol, born in America by Indian immigrant couple confronts different culture between India and America which ultimately leads to ambivalence experiences. The main character's ambivalence prefers to be an American by his imitation to American lifestyle but his heritage of Indian makes him still an Indian and lead him to mix both of American and Indian culture. In this novel the main character named after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, as per his father's wish. Finally, naming

after the Russian author automatically has the namesake and makes him confused about his own identity. The name does not represent his identity, neither Indian nor American but his name remains Russian. He is torn between his American, Russian, and Indian identities. He disliked it because his name is neither Indian nor American. After changing his name, Gogol feels free and feels like a free bird that is free from its prisoner. He is very happy that he is Nikhil. Additionally, the ambivalence is evident in the language aspect. Gogol mixes his Indian language and English in his conversation with his wife, Moushumi.

Cultural Ambivalence can be noticed in the works of some poets also, such as W.B. Yeats in his poem Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen (1928) which has six sections. It exhibits the conflict between the English and the Irish in which he manages to avoid taking sides in the conflict and instead shows the futile violence used by both sides. He was a highly ambivalent Irish poet- play wright. He contributed to Irish culture by reviving and constructing the identity of Irish and traditions through his works. In his works one can find that there is ambivalence and a hybrid view of colonialism. He had conflicting opinions about himself.

The novelist intricately explores tradition, modernity, homeland, diaspora, familial expectations and personal aspirations. She employs language, narrative structure, and character development to foreground the conflicts of cultural hybridity and ambivalence. Saroja and Kamini's alternating perspectives provide a comprehensive view of the generational and cultural conflicts. This emphasises the subjectivity of experience, illustrating how cultural identity is shaped by individual perceptions and conditions. By weaving together past and present, the novelist highlights the impac of cultural roots on contemporary lives.

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