

## CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN ANITA RAU BADAMI'S NOVEL *THE HERO'S WALK*

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### **Abstract:**

*Hybridity has become a master trope across many spheres of cultural research, theory, and criticism. It is one of the most widely used and criticized concepts in postcolonial theory. It refers to any mixing of eastern and western culture. Anita Rau Badami, one of the modern writers in the field of diasporic literature, even with her few literary writings, has been able to carve a niche for her in the literary world. Badami in her second novel *The Hero's Walk*, which won her the 2000 Common wealth Prize for fiction, analyses the concept of cultural hybridization through the immigrants who take up their traditional practices in their alien land. It brings an analysis of cultural hybridization through the characters Maya and Nandana. This article portrays that hybridity is a conceptual inevitability, and proposes an intercontextual theory of hybridity, which comprehends global cultural dynamics by articulating hybridity and hegemony, providing an initial theoretical platform for a critical cultural transnationalism.*

**Key Words:** *Hybridity, globalization, mimicry, ambivalence, diaspora.*

Hybridity refers to any mixing of eastern and western culture. It is commonly referred as the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridity can be social, political, linguistic, religious etc. It is not necessarily a peaceful mixture, for it can be contentious and disruptive in its experience. Hybridity denotes the meaning of a thing made by combining two different elements when used as a noun. When used as an adjective it denotes the meaning of something of mixed character. During the nineteenth century the world had a derogatory meaning which had been referred to people of mixed racial background and treated as impure. In the course of time it had got positive meaning as soon as the term is used in postcolonial studies. The term here connotes mixing of the east and the western culture. In Clifford Geertz's words, we now live in a globalised world in which there is "a gradual spectrum of mixed-up differences" (Geertz 148).

The term hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K Bhabha. He says that all cultural statements and system are constructed in a space he calls as the Third Space of Enunciation. The mimicry of the native often consists of both a superficial obedience and a deeper disobedience and mockery. The native seems to express servility but in fact articulates resistance. This dual state of mimicry by the native is what Bhabha termed as hybridity. This hybridized native who refuses to acknowledge the colonizer's authority is placed in a position of in-betweenness between 'adopted' Englishmen and the 'original' native condition or identity between obedience and resistance. This hybridity creates a 'third space which Bhabha states in his book *The Location of Culture* as "all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (55). He also adds it is that Third Space, "which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure the meaning and the

symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (55). Accordingly a new identity will appear.

Bill Ashcroft in his article "Caliban's Voice: Writing in the Third Space" mentions that "this space is also a transcultural space, a 'contact zone' . . . that space in which cultural identity develops. . . . the space of postcolonial transformation" (Ikas 108). The third space is the appropriate space for the interaction of the main characters who are in need of a mutual colonial relationship to get along with the colonizers. The colonizer and the colonized in the Third Space try to interact. The concept of interactions between the colonizers and the colonized is denoted by Haj Yazdih as, "hybridity arose out of the culturally internalized interactions between 'colonizers' and 'the colonized' and the dichotomous formation of these identities" (31).

Cultural hybridization is a universal process which is speeded up through interactions among societies. It can be seen in the life of all migrants in various ways through their language, food, religion, wearing cloths, festivals, marriages and through customs and traditions. Hybridity can be observed in Anita Rau Badami's novels too. Among the Indo-Canadian writers Badami has earned unique pace in the vibrant field with her focus on diaspora, multiculturalism, post-colonialism and cross-cultural encounters. Badami, the Indo-Canadian writer, was born in Orissa and grew up traveling across the country because of her father's job. She got married and followed her husband to Canada as an immigrant. Obviously her novels deal with the conflicts of cross culturalism, globalization, hybridization and mimicry. Badami in her second novel *The Hero's Walk*, which won her the 2000 Common wealth Prize for fiction, analyses the concept of cultural hybridization through the immigrants who take up their traditional practices in their alien land.

The novel scrutinizes cultural hybridity through the family of Maya Baker. Cultural hybridity can be seen through the way they follow the traditional practices of their homeland in the form of dress, religious practices, food, language etc. Maya Baker was an Indian immigrant in Canada, whom migrated to America for her higher studies and married a Canadian man, named Alan Baker and was living with him in Vancouver. They had a child named Nandana. She was studying in a school in Vancouver where they celebrated International Day and each student was supposed to bring their parents in their special dress. Dress plays a vital role in cultural hybridization, that remarkable differences can be seen in the dress of east and west.

Maya, the immigrant from India, decides to wear the traditional dress of India as a special dress. She refashions her old saris, into a long skirt with pleats and a blouse and made Nandana wear it. When Nandana enquires about the outfit, Maya explains it as a kind of outfit, that she wore it when she was a small girl in India. Maya also had braided Nandana's hair and wore some flowers in the braid and put a small round sticker on her forehead. Maya also wore a sari for the International Day which was held in the school of Nandana. "Nandana felt silly in the dress" until her friends and Mrs. Lipsky admires by saying "She looks cool" (HW 71). After seeing Nandana in her special dress, her friends were attracted towards it and they wanted to wear the sticker on their foreheads. Maya bought the multi-coloured felt dots when she went to the Indian store and her friends wore it.

After migrating to India, Nandana continues to wear her usual western dress. When she goes to temple with her grandparents Nirmala dresses her up in a "long green cotton skirt and matching blouse" which looks "unfamiliar" (HW 256) to her. She obediently wears the dress, which her grand-mother had brought to her. As she accepts hybridity in dressing she demands her grandmothers wedding saree which she promises her to give when she grows.

Hybridity can be seen through religious practices as the immigrants continue to celebrate the Indian festival as well as western. Maya, the daughter of Sripati Rao is Hindu in religion. She went to America for her higher studies. Maya used to write letter for her family quiet often. Her father Sripati Rao also writes letter in an elaborate manner. On one of the letter written by Sripati, Nirmala asks him to

remember Maya about the Yugadhi festival. Through the letter Sripati instructs his daughter to wash her hair, pray to their god and eat something bitter mixed with sweet as “*You are to wash your hair, say a small prayer to the assortment of gods we believe in and eat a small helping of something bitter mixed with something sweet*”(HW 105). In this incident Nirmala reminds Maya about the festival and asks her to celebrate it in America. In America Maya followed the culture of India and west thus establishes her hybrid nature.

After marrying a Canadian Christian Alan Baker, Maya settles down in Vancouver. Maya through some religious story books and reward, edify Indian Hindu religion to her child Nandana. Alan had bought a dresser drawer for his daughter from garage sale and spends three weeks to beautify it. But Maya on her part brought some nice-smelling paper to line the drawer and gave a small picture of Goddess Lakshmi to her. Maya carefully placed that “small picture of an Indian lady called Lakshmi with four arms and a smiling white face, sitting on a lotus flower with two white elephants on either side of her” (HW 92) under the drawer paper where Nandana's books were kept. She introduced it as a goddess to Nandana and assures, “she will always look after you and make sure you are okay” (HW 92). Thus she introduced Nandana to Indian religion in Canada. Maya also had practiced the custom of telling stories to Nandana at bed-time. For that she had bought some religious story books from the Indian store and narrated stories of Lord Rama, Seetha and his brother Lakshmana and the monkey God Hanuman

Aunt Kiran the neighbor of Nandana, who lives in Canada, is also an immigrant from India. After the death of her parents, Nandana lived with them in their home. Aunt Kiran is also a baby sitter to Nandana, who once told about the brave Monkey God Hanuman, who helped people in trouble and make everyone happy. She remembers about the Hanuman God after her parent's death and thought that she must pray to him so that the God may bring back her parents to her and prayed every night to “send her parents back to her” (HW 250).

Halloween is the most practiced carnival celebrated on the night of October thirty first all over United States and Canada. Children wear different costumes and visit neighbour's houses asking for candies. Nandana celebrated Halloween in Canada with her parents and after coming to India she thinks about their celebration and yarns for it. She searches for pumpkins in India whereas she couldn't find any. Maya, though an Indian immigrant celebrated Halloween with her family. Preparation for Halloween celebrating starts several weeks before the festival. Nandana thinks about their customs and bags of candies and waits patiently for her mama lady to celebrate. But for her dismay she finds none of her friends talking about their festival and there is no candy bars in her mama lady's home to be distributed to the children.

For her astonishment she hears kids talking about a festival called Deepavali that she had never known. They describe about fire crackers, new dress and sweets which she wanted to see. She wondered whether her mama-lady would get her new dress. Her grandfather had bought “a box of sparkles, some fountains and ground crackers”. Nirmala also bought a new dress and some multi-coloured plastic bangles for Nandana. She celebrated Deepavali instead of Halloween for the first time after coming to India. She realizes that in India “they didn't have Halloween. Instead there where something called Deepavali, when people got presents and burst fireworks” (HW 278).

The immigrants easily adopt the culture of their alien land but still follow the culture of their homeland too. These immigrants show a reciprocal, mutual, beneficial and constructive relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. According to Bhabha, in the third space of enunciation, the relation between the whites and the blacks becomes reciprocal. He shows that both the colonizer and the colonized depend on each other and none of them can be considered a separate and independent entity. Accordingly, the mutual relation between the colonizer and the colonized, which Bhabha emphasizes, is totally apparent. It has been proven to both parties that to avoid conflicts and collisions, it would be better for both of them to live under the regulations of the third space.

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