

## **Relationship a mode to Self Discovery and Spiritual Realization in *Meeting Lives***

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### **Abstract**

Tulsi Badrinath's *Meeting Lives* emphasizes the growth of the Self in the protagonist, Aditi. The character's self-discovery and her understanding of life, serve as an argument for the concept of self discovery as a means to spiritual realization. The character will be analysed with reference to her relationship with others and how she is greatly influenced by the lives of great personalities and myths. The novel, *Meeting Lives* is about the life of Aditi who lives in Chennai and her desire to be a good classical dance (*Bharathanatyam*) performer. The novel revolves around Aditi and her relationship with the people around. The impact of the relationship with others exhibits her longing for her desire, the failure in following her dreams, her thought of motherhood as an obstacle in living her life and how she feels indifferent towards her duty in bringing up her son.

**Keywords:** self discovery, relationship, motherhood, spiritual realization, meeting lives

Tulsi Badrinath's *Meeting Lives* emphasizes the growth of the Self in the protagonist, Aditi. The character's self-discovery and her understanding of life, serve as an argument for the concept of self discovery as a means to spiritual realization. The character will be analysed with reference to her relationship with others and how she is greatly influenced by the lives of great personalities and myths. The novel, *Meeting Lives* is about the life of Aditi who lives in Chennai and her desire to be a good classical dance (*Bharathanatyam*) performer. But her desires are not achieved due to her marital life and her role as a mother. This makes her to travel into her inner self and a conflict starts as she is not able to accept the reality that she faces in her day to day life. Eventually this leads to an introspection of the self and she gets an answer to the struggle of the self in accepting the outer world. The novel revolves around Aditi and her relationship with the people around. The impact of the relationship with others exhibits her longing for her desire, the failure in following her dreams, her thought of motherhood as an obstacle in living her life and how she feels indifferent towards her duty in bringing up her son. The life and feelings of Aditi can be better understood through the following story outline.

Aditi is married to a person of her choice and has a son who captures the central focus as she tries to raise him single handily. She struggles through her period of motherhood in trying to raise Sanju. She gets disappointed with her relationship and regrets at giving up her career as a dancer for the sake of Sanju. At the same time, she finds it difficult to cope with her role of being a single mother. The routine life of Aditi runs parallel to the life of Thayee. Thayee is an elderly woman who is abandoned by her children. She lives a mean life on the street and makes her living by selling old bottles and newspapers. She influences the life of Aditi by living a life with acceptance. The only connection that can be placed between them is their loneliness. In the course of the novel, Aditi describes Aasha's life, a friend of her, who faces the same problem of loneliness and the urge to understand the self. But Aasha's attempts fail and she undergoes depression. The life of Aasha is set as a contrast to the life of Aditi especially in the understanding of the Self. Aditi reads and hears the lives of great people who reached a level beyond the mundane human understanding. Through the knowledge of the myths and Upanishads she is able to gradually realise herself and mould her life in a good way. This shaping of the self enables her to see the self in the other. Towards the end of the novel she surrenders to the ways of life and accepts life as it comes. Aditi starts to live in peace with the self and the locale. Thus it can be said that the self discovery of Aditi is influenced by two major factors in the novel— the relationship of the characters with Aditi and the knowledge which she gains from the lives of great people, myths and philosophies. First, on Aditi's relationship with other characters, its effects in her mind, the disappointment with the locale and the ways through which these factors lead her to self discovery and self growth. The second part deals with Aditi's reading of various philosophies and legends. Both these factors will portray how her disappointment with the outer world makes her to search for an answer which will lead her to attain self growth and self discovery.

Aditi tries hard to understand the meaning of her life and the duty she is expected to do. But the desires and the disappointment of the self interrupts her from understanding the meaning of her life. She tries to allot space and time to achieve her desires but only understands that it is next to impossible to procure her vision. In the course of the novel, Aditi's mother tells her that a child is a joy when the parent is in old age and he takes care of his parents. Indirectly she tries to say to Aditi that it is her duty to take care of her son in his

childhood and only then she can lead a meaningful life when she grows old. Aditi feels that Sanju is a tiring child and thoughts such as, "I shall abandon him" (ML: 83) keep cropping up in her mind. These words explicitly show that Aditi complains about motherhood and is in no way happy and comfortable in raising her son.

The novel in a gradual way shows how Aditi succeeds to know herself through self analyses and starts a new life filled with a peaceful mind set. While the other characters fail to assert their condition or continue to live with the persisting thought of their incapability. Aditi stands distinct in her analyses of her life. Aditi is able to travel from reality to idealism. Reality is expressed through the life of Thayee and imaginative life is experienced through the thoughts of Aditi. When she sees Thayee through the windows she sees a person who has accepted and submitted her life to the will of life itself. This very thought makes her trigger and that is why Aditi goes on recollecting her past performance and peaceful days before her marriage with Murthy. The reasons may be the reality which she sees, the experiences from her own life and from the lives of people around her.

The novelist introduces the submission of the Self to the Divine by displaying varied shades and levels of motherhood and the importance of a mother to a child and vice versa. After observing the life lived by Thayee she could have been disturbed. A source of energy is arrived when she gets to know the lives of Aryaamba and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. She is able to understand the greatness of Aryaamba and partially understands that acceptance and agreement with the ways of life will result in a composed life. Only after understanding the true power in the submission of the self she submits to the feet of Shiva. Aditi gets awareness from the life of Punitavati and this helps her to get rid of the worrying thoughts. In the course of the novel she is able to understand that the Divine is present in all beings and the difference is created only by the human mind. When Aditi realises that she is not able to live a life in her own way she goes to the level of searching the meaning of her existence. At this tremendously dejected condition she completely surrenders herself and Sanju at the feet of Lord Shiva. This makes her to obtain a spiritual perceptive in leading a life.

Unlike other women in the novel, Aditi does not slip out of life after her introspection. The best instance would be the character Aasha, Aditi's friend. She lives in America and the friends communicate through letters. In the middle of the novel, we find Aasha's visit to Madras. The description of Aasha by Aditi states that she is in a sullen state of mind. Aasha has to bring up her two children by herself and has no helping hand. Her husband, Rajesh would leave for work and is away for lengthy hours. She has not got a minute to spend for her alone. Dislocation and the feeling of loneliness make her to learn more about the Self in her— "Loneliness proclaims itself loudly but is absorbed into the silence" (ML: 194). Aasha slips into depression, and conceals this from Rajesh. This is because Aasha is not able to locate the reason for her despair and so covers it from her husband. She is not like Aditi who at times expresses her distress in bringing up her child. She is not able to discover the reason and the solution to her troubled mind and thus slips into a form of depression. She loses hope in caring for her. She is not able to come out and goes to the level which Aditi experiences and asks to her inner self, "Where am I in my life?" (ML: 199). Aasha says to Aditi that she wants to leave everything and go away— "A day off. Be by myself, away from the kids," but the thought shamed her into silence. "I want to leave everything and run away" (ML: 199). Aasha fails and falls from life and Aditi by surrendering to the will of the creator or to the ways of life lives life with serenity.

The way the characters meet their lives— *Meeting Lives*, gives a thorough reflection of how self analyses can turn into both a spiritual level and a fatal level. On one hand Aditi is able to penetrate into the depths of life and its meaning and articulates her understanding to a positive reverberation. She also develops the aptitude of understanding the Other.

The use of myths and legends in the novel gives explicit evidences to the central character and guides her to understand the 'self' in her. Moreover the readers are given a clarified image of Aditi's evolution. The novelist tries to expose the boisterous side of a woman in contrast to the calm character Thayee. Thayee hardly remembers her name called but Aditi strives to see her name in the papers and journals. The relationship she tries to acquire with her goals, husband and child stands incomplete until she really understands the innate self in others and the real essence of her being. Self-discovery in this novel helps in the process of discovering the human mind. Aditi is made to think of her past and the past experiences in connection with the myths seek out to her discovery of the Self. The reminiscence of her past is not coherent it occurs in reference to the present and thus forms an order. The essence of her life is not instantaneously seized by her, the past occurrences are put to find a meaning and this ends in her search of meaning. As a lover of dance she was ready to depart the worldly concerns and after a great search she believes that to be selfless as a mother it doesn't mean to lose the self.

Tulsi Badrinath discovers the most intact cores of motherhood. There is the explosion of the self of a mother. The traditional set up of a wife, mother and a married woman is put under devastation. But as the novel progress, it exposes the recovery of the mother, a wife and a person in the mind of Aditi. The normal way of expression which is mandatory from a mother is shown through the character of Amma. The Self's expression towards the duty bound life in expressed in the ways of Aditi.

*Meeting Lives* conveys the gradual realization of self-discovery through the character of Aditi. In general the novel throws light over the conception of motherhood in the lives of Aditi, her mother, friends and Thayee. It intensely brings to light the hidden thoughts of a mother, who goes through extensive changes without any sort of understanding. What is indirectly stated in the novel is the self analyses and fall from life by the characters except Aditi. They go through self analyses and the result brings an end to their mundane life and yields to the birth of melancholy as in the life of Aasha. It is only in the character of Aditi that the self discovery leads into a higher level of understanding of life. This higher level is the spiritual level of living. That is, the soul is able to connect beyond the material world and obtains the facility to penetrate into the depths of heart where the Divine exists; the Self is able to live alongside the Other with pure understanding. This level of relationship that is established with the self and the other is the meaning and the means of reaching a spiritual perceptive of life.

Tulsi Badrinath gives a variety of establishments with the self and the locale through the character of Aditi, the novelist tries to place a clear peculiarity between Aditi and other characters in the process of understanding the self and its life. Aditi is able to combat with her struggle and she is capable to render to her routine life with absolute acceptance and faith. She takes up life as it comes to her only after her introspection which leads to the submission of the self. The other characters go through the feeling of meaninglessness in their lives and continue to live with discontent. Aasha is the suitable example of this category— she is not able to travel through her mind and is down with major depression. She continues to live with discontent while Aditi cope with life through the means of pure dedication to the will of the

creator or destiny. This is a novel where its characters try to meet the meaning of life and only Aditi is able to meet her life with a thorough perspective and derives meaning from her life.

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