

**A Study on Feminism in *The Hero's Walk*****Mrs. P. Subathra**

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**Abstract**

Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* is a moving story about identity, grief, cultural tensions, and gender roles. It explores the struggles of a family dealing with loss, generational differences, and cultural change. Sripathi Rao's journey of self-awareness shows the challenges of balancing Indian traditions with modern Western values, while also revealing the impact of patriarchal expectations on family life. The story contrasts the old family home in Toturpuram with Vancouver's vibrant, multicultural world, showing the clash of tradition and modernity. Through Nirmala, Sripathi's patient wife, and Maya, his rebellious daughter, the book highlights the struggles of women trying to find their voice in a male-dominated society. Nandana, Sripathi's granddaughter, reflects the confusion of second-generation immigrants as she navigates personal loss and cultural differences. This paper examines how Badami uses characters, vivid settings, and symbolism to express universal themes of love, resilience, and family bonds. By focusing on the female characters, it reveals their fight for identity and equality in a patriarchal world. *The Hero's Walk* is a powerful narrative that interweaves feminist insights with themes of family, culture, and belonging.

**Keywords:** Identity, Cultural Conflict, Immigrant Experience, Familial Relationships, Generational Divide

**Introduction**

Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* is a deeply emotional novel that explores family relationships, identity, cultural struggles, and personal growth. The story is set in two very different places: the old, crumbling family home in Toturpuram, India, and the busy, multicultural city of Vancouver, Canada. Through this contrast, Badami shows the challenges faced by individuals and families as they deal with life's hardships and societal changes. The novel addresses important issues like grief, generational conflict, immigrant struggles, gender roles, and the search for identity, creating a powerful story of change and resilience.

The novel takes place in Toturpuram, a traditional town in India. It shows how patriarchal values affect the characters' lives. Nirmala, Sripathi's wife, symbolizes the silent perseverance of women in conventional households, where their sacrifices often go unnoticed. Her existence revolves around selflessness, serving her husband, fulfilling familial

duties, and suppressing her own aspirations and individuality. Despite her tireless efforts, she remains unacknowledged, reflecting the systemic devaluation of women within patriarchal structures. Maya, Sripathi's estranged daughter, is very different from Nirmala. She goes against societal expectations by living independently in Canada, marrying someone outside her culture, and creating her own life. However, her choices come with a heavy price, as her family and community reject her. Maya's story shows the unfair treatment women face when they challenge traditional roles and the bravery it takes to stand up for oneself.

## Feminism

Feminism is a movement that advocates for women's rights and equality of the sexes. It is a theory of change that aims to end sexism, oppression, and exploitation. It refers to a critical approach to literature that examines how texts represent gender and gender roles, particularly the experiences, voices, and perspectives of women. Feminist literary criticism explores themes of patriarchy, inequality, and power dynamics, analyzing how these factors influence characters, plot, and narrative structure. It often seeks to uncover and challenge biases, stereotypes, and the marginalization of women in literary works, while also highlighting texts that promote gender equity and empowerment.

It focuses on the rights, roles, and representation of women in texts. It examines how literature portrays women's struggles for equality, autonomy, and recognition in a patriarchal society. Feminist literature often advocates for social justice, challenges traditional gender norms, and highlights issues such as oppression, discrimination, and the fight for women's rights. This approach seeks to amplify women's voices and promote gender equity through the lens of storytelling and critique.

Feminism as a concept and movement does not have a single founder, as it emerged gradually through the efforts of many thinkers, writers, and activists over time. However, its origins can be traced to key moments and figures:

- **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759–1797): Often regarded as one of the earliest feminist philosophers, she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), advocating for women's education and equality.
- **Olympe de Gouges** (1748–1793): A French playwright and activist, she wrote *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* (1791), challenging the male-focused ideals of the French Revolution.
- **First-Wave Feminism** (19th and early 20th centuries): Focused on legal issues like voting rights. Leaders included Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony (U.S.), and Emmeline Pankhurst (UK).
- **Second-Wave Feminism** (1960s–1980s): Expanded to workplace equality, reproductive rights, and sexual freedom. Influential figures included Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*) and Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*).

Feminism has evolved through various waves, with diverse thinkers and activists contributing to its growth worldwide. In *The Hero's Walk*, Badami uses clear symbols and themes to reinforce feminist ideas. The old, crumbling family house in Toturpuram stands for the unchanging patriarchal traditions that block progress and growth. In contrast, Vancouver symbolizes freedom and new opportunities, though it also presents its own challenges. The

stories of Nirmala, Maya, and Nandana across generations show the ongoing fight for gender equality and the strength required to challenge systemic norms.

## Findings

**Family and Relationships** The novel shows the relationship between family members, especially the troubled bond between Sripathi Rao and his daughter Maya, who goes against tradition by marrying a foreigner. Their relationship highlights the difference between old customs and modern ideas. Even though they had conflicts, Sripathi's love for his daughter becomes clear after her death, showing that his pride had concealed his true feelings. His growing bond with his granddaughter Nandana shows how family can help heal pain and bring people closer. This novel proves that family ties, even when broken, can become a source of love, forgiveness, and emotional support.

**Grief and Loss** A central theme is dealing with grief after Maya's sudden death in a car accident. Sripathi and his family face the pain of losing a loved one and the regret of unresolved conflicts. Sripathi feels guilty for not fixing his bond with Maya before her death, which adds to his sorrow. The family struggles to accept the loss and adjust to their new life. Over time, they realize that healing needs time and open communication helps to ease the pain. The novel shows that love, forgiveness, and family support can help them find hope again after the tragedy.

**Gender Roles** Women characters like Maya and Nirmala struggle against male-dominated rules in society. Maya chooses to live her own life by marrying a foreigner, breaking traditional beliefs. Nirmala lives as a silent housewife with no freedom to share her views. The novel questions how society limits women's choices and their right to decide their own future. It supports the idea of women's independence and the need for equality in family and society.

**Forgiveness and Redemption** Sripathi's journey shows how forgiveness is essential for healing. He learns to overcome his bitterness and regrets from the past. His bond with Nandana helps him to let go of anger and find peace within himself. By caring for his granddaughter, he realizes the importance of love and family unity. The novel portrays that forgiving others not only brings happiness but also helps in healing broken relationships.

## Discussions

In this novel, feminism is explored through the clash between tradition and change in a male-dominated Indian society. Gayatri Spivak argues that subaltern groups, particularly women in colonial contexts, are silenced and unable to represent themselves. Her work has also contributed to feminist debates on representation, voice, and agency. Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques Western feminist discourses for homogenizing Third World women, erasing their diversity and agency, and reinforcing colonial power dynamics.

The female characters show different ways of resisting gender roles. Maya is a strong example of modern feminism. She is educated, independent, and confident. She chooses her own husband and raises her daughter in Canada. These actions show her belief in personal freedom, a key idea in liberal feminism.

In contrast, characters like Nirmala and Ammayya represent older generations who initially seem to accept traditional roles. However, even within these confines, they reveal quiet forms of resistance. Nirmala gradually begins to assert her opinions. She ultimately persuades Sripathi to sell their ancestral house to clear debts, symbolically guiding him away from his rigid pride in family legacy: "I am selling this house. I have decided. Yes, that is what I shall do" (The Hero's Walk, 322).

Similarly, Ammayya keeps Putti unmarried in the name of tradition, but ultimately for her own convenience. Putti's suppressed frustration surfaces in her bitter realization: "Why can't she be happy for me? She never wanted me to get married, I know. Why should I care how she is feeling now?" (The Hero's Walk, 339).

The novel also engages with postcolonial feminism, especially through Maya and Nandana. Nandana finds herself torn between her mother's modern values and her grandfather's conservative mindset. Sripathi, upholding family traditions, struggles with Maya's rejection of an arranged marriage: "If you persist in doing this foolish thing, never show your face in this house again. Never" (The Hero's Walk, 113).

Badami's narrative portrays gender roles as fluid and shaped by cultural context. Feminism here is not limited to overt defiance but also includes quiet, persistent resilience. Each female character challenges expectations in her own way through rebellion, negotiation, or emotional strength. The novel invites readers to understand feminism as deeply personal, diverse, and context-dependent.

## **Conclusion**

Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* offers a profound exploration of feminism through the interconnected lenses of family, culture, and identity. By portraying the trials and triumphs of its female characters, the novel critiques patriarchal norms and advocates for a more equitable society. Through the nuanced portrayal of women navigating complex relationships and societal expectations, Badami sheds light on the intricate dynamics of power and resistance. This study affirms the novel's significance in contemporary feminist discourse, providing a thoughtful examination of the many paths women take in their quest for self-expression, dignity, and equality. Furthermore, the novel's exploration of intersectionality, cultural heritage, and personal identity underscores the diversity and richness of women's experiences, challenging readers to rethink their assumptions about feminism and its relevance in today's world. By centering women's voices and stories, *The Hero's Walk* makes a powerful contribution to the ongoing conversation about feminism, identity, and social justice. The novel's impact lies in its ability to humanize and contextualize the struggles of women, rendering their experiences relatable and authentic. Ultimately, *The Hero's Walk* serves as a testament to the resilience and agency of women, inspiring readers to reflect on their own roles in shaping a more just and equitable society..

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