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## DELINEATION OF SAROJA AS SOUR-TONGUED WOMAN IN ANITA RAU BADAMI'S *TAMARIND MEM*

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### Abstract

*This paper aims at revealing how our culture restricts and shapes one's personal life and aspirations of the characters and its core is the endless conflict between daughter and mother. Anita Rau Badami's Tamarind Mem is divided into two parts: first part is about Kamini, the daughter of Saroja, the second part is about Saroja, the mother. Two people may have conflicting recollections about the same past. The mother Saroja has the nickname Tamarind Mem because of her increasingly hostile attitude as sour fruit of the tamarind tree. Saroja feels that she has been trapped in her traditional role as an Indian wife and mother who must always be the archetype of an ideal woman like keeping the house, cooking and raising the children. After the death of her husband she takes the railroad for wide travelling throughout India like that of a sanyasi visiting many places. This journey fulfills her life. Her sour-tongue protects her from her daughters' influence.*

**Keywords:** Tamarind tree, traditional values, sour tongue, family bondage.

Anita Rau Badami's novel *Tamarind Mem* is a family saga. She portrays the relationship between mother and daughter. She has used the tool of nostalgia to depict the story. *Tamarind Mem* is her thesis, has become her first novel. This novel reveals how our culture restricts and shapes one's personal life and aspirations of the characters. Its core is the endless conflict between daughter and mother. The novel is divided into two parts: first part is about Kamini, the daughter of Saroja, the second part is about Saroja, the mother. Two people may have conflicting recollections about the same past. Though they had everything in life they felt isolated. Saroja and kamini shared their memories over the phone. The novel is set both in India and Canada. The title *Tamarind Mem* signifies Saroja's acidic tongue. Saroja is a very ambitious woman. She wants to become a doctor. But her parents forced Saroja to get married. Importance of marriage is highlighted by Badami through the mother of Saroja's words. Tradition takes a vital role in Saroja's life. Saroja begged her father and mother to allow her to study medicine. But Saroja's mother says "A woman's happiness lies in marriage" (TM 159). Saroja pleads and argues in many ways, everything became fruitless in her matter. Saroja's mother simply said "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" (TM 158). Everywoman wants to fly as a free bird but they were

chained everywhere in the name of cultures and traditions, so their dreams became mirage. The novel also unpacks the misunderstandings between two generations that result because of modernizing culture. Memories run over with a changing culture and cause uncertainty in social institutions.

Anita Rau Badami explores the conflict between modernization and traditional values. The mother Saroja has the nickname Tamarind Mem because of her increasingly hostile attitude as sour fruit of the tamarind tree. It happens in Saroja's life also. She could not escape from the bondage of culture she was married to much older than she. He was not enough to fulfil her romantic dreams. After her marriage, she is not comfortable as she expects, it is highly dissatisfaction to Saroja. This frustration makes her sour tongued mother. She is given to the stranger in the name of marriage as a wrapped woman in silk and gold paper. Her husband is a railway engineer. Because of this disappointment a silent war starts in her mind. She leads an unaffectionate and non communication life. Her husband is always busy with his work, monthly once he visits his house. Whenever he is present at home, he used to have a newspaper on his lap and cigarette in his hand. There is no sharing of feelings and dialogues with his wife. Saroja feels that she has been trapped in her traditional role as an Indian wife and mother who must always be the archetype of an ideal

woman like keeping the house, cooking and raising the children. Tradition commands that the ideal woman has to annihilate her real self by yielding to the cultural background, necessitated by her internalized choicelessness. In the article, "The Challenge of Women's History," Gerda Lerner remarks:

It is important to understand that 'woman's culture' is not and should not be seen as a subculture. It is hardly possible for the majority to live in a subculture. . . Women live their social existence within the general culture and, whenever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness (which always has subordination as its purpose); they transform this restraint into complementarity (asserting the importance of woman's function, even its superiority) and redefine it. Thus, women live a duality –as members of the general culture and as partakers of women's culture. (Lerner 52)

Saroja wants to fulfill her frustrated life by shopping and make up herself and she uses the major tool of sour tongue to scold others. That shows her revenge upon her disappointed life and protects her daughters from the traditional rules and cultural bondages that have imprisoned her and ruined her romantic dreams. She allows her daughters to make their own lives. Saroja finds solution for her trapped life through a whiplash of words. Saroja as a mother wants her daughters as a free bird and to be better than others "you have to be one step ahead of the rest of the world", she declares, "better than the best. Don't let anybody be ahead of you" (TM 119). No one can escape from the biting slice of her tongue. But most of the time, she is very moderate and contented as a railway engineer wife and responsible mother, she does her household duties interestingly and she does not want to share her kitchen work with other family members. Badami has carved a niche with her little literary writings in the literary world. As Dr. G. Chennareddy remarks:

Badami's novels mainly focus on themes like—firstly it explores family tension, the changing possibilities of memory and the elusive nature of mind. Secondly, it explores the misunderstandings between two generations, by exploring the conflict between modernity and traditional values and thirdly, it explores the changing status of women from traditional roles to conflicting women characters (Chennareddy 50).

As a wife, Saroja cannot have a lasting relationship with anyone because Vishwa gets transferred frequently

and the family moves from one place to another place. Moreover, her husband does not allow her to enter into his private world of journeys. Like that of her parents, Saroja's husband strictly follows the conventional cultural norms where his wife is restricted to the home, when he works in the public field. Her struggles to keep her faith in these beliefs which at one level, she knows these are unavoidable part in the sea of life. Saroja's life is between her wished and unwished desires and it is a real fact in every woman's married life. Saroja leads two different kinds of life, one for her daughters and other for her own wishes. Saroja learns traditional values from her mother and grandmother. From her mother, she learns the wifely duty, and from her grandmother she inherits her sour-tongued habit of talking and a desire of making a room for her own. As a woman, Saroja thinks that she will have a romantic life living with a dark complexioned young Anglo-Indian motor mechanic, Paul da Costa, and taking care of his daughters. But in reality she used to ignore him. Saroja as a female protagonist does not want to accept Paul's offer and also she maintains her unhappy married life only for her daughter's future. Anita Rau Badami represents her own life in this novel and it is apt to quote the words of Rustonji-Kerns here:

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 this book ("South"). The father in the book is also a mechanical engineer for the railroads, and as a result, the family moves frequently. Just as Badami grew up surrounded by the stories her family told, the book is constructed around numerous tales (Rustonji-Kerns 117).

Saroja has proved that the common character of Indian women must lead their life as a candle to give light to their next generations. Saroja inherits her mother's submissive life but never wants to miss her husband she wants to be a shadow for her husband. Although she likes her grandmother's individual life who has bequeathed her the sour-tongue, teaches her to act as an individual and creates her own image but not caring about others. Even though Saroja has a sour tongue, she never wants to break the traditional family bondage because she loves her daughter. She never wants to destroy the life of her members of the family. She recalls her mother's words "I didn't want your children to grow up with shame" (TM 215).

Saroja's sour-tongue protects her from her romantic dreams. Anita Rau Badami reveals the modesty of women in using the power because of the Indian culture and

motherhood qualities which are considered important for every Indian woman. She grants her daughters whatever she has missed in her life. Roopa's love marriage has never made her angry or disappointed, but at the same time she protects her daughter from her relatives' scorns. Saroja uses her sour-tongue only to protect her daughter. "My girls know how to pick their fruit" (TM 148). Anita Rau Badami presents Saroja as a woman escaping from the traditional prison to the modern independent world. She forces her out from her orthodox parents and then from her disappointed married life and now she unconsciously but slowly escapes from the motherly duties.

Saroja sends everyone away from her life like a tamarind tree which does not allow smaller plants to grow. After the death of her husband she takes the railroad for wide travelling throughout India like that of a sanyasi visiting many places where her husband had refused her to take her on his frequent business trips when he was alive. Now this journey fulfilled her life. Her sour-tongue protects her from her daughters' influence. She completes her duties as a woman, as a daughter, as a wife and a mother. Now she is ready to lead her life for her own happiness without others impose in her life. "The real test

is life itself, whether you are strong enough to stay and fight" (TM 208). Saroja as a "Tamarind Mem" never allows anyone to live under her shelter. Her love for her family members is only a distant love. Anita Rau Badami portrays Saroja as a frustrated woman trapped in the cultural expectations of the time period. Only after her husband's death and her daughter's maturity Saroja tries to leave her traditional role and travel to many places as her wishes.

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