
Badami's *Tamarind Mem* reminiscence Indianness through the lens of nostalgia

Dr. Kadri Nashrin. A

Lecturer at Bhavan's Sheth R.A. College of Arts and Commerce, Ahmedabad, Gujarat. India.

Article Received: 16/10/2025**Article Accepted:** 17/11/2025**Published Online:** 18/11/2025DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.11.150

Abstract:

This research paper tries to explore Indianness through the nostalgic feelings of the character in Anita Rao Badami's novel *Tamarind Mem*. People have been displaced due to globalization and colonization. As a result, for immigrants these movements evoke nostalgia. Words like homesickness, longing, wistfulness, remorse, reminiscence, etc. are also used to describe nostalgia. Many immigrants find themselves caught in a complex space between many worlds and cultures: they cannot forget their native land from which they came, and it would be different if they returned to it now, nor can they fully integrate into the host land they have adopted. Nostalgia has been one of the significant themes in Indian diasporic writings. Nostalgia is not only about past memories but also helps immigrants rebuild and reshape their lives in the host land. In *Tamarind Mem*, Anita Rao Badami illustrates Indianness through the nostalgic feelings of Kamini in Canada and how she tries to rebuild herself through it.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Indo-Canadian, writer, Indianness, Anita, Badami, *Tamarind Mem***Introduction**

According to the United Nations, the Indian diaspora, one of the largest in the world, is estimated to have 18 million people residing outside their mother land in 2020 (Hindustan Times. 2021). Every living creature on the planet experiences migration from time to time. There are several causes of migration, including poor economic conditions, conflict, poverty, the environment, human trafficking, and more. Human needs have evolved over time as well. In quest of a better life and a more promising future, people migrate from their homelands to developed nations. It is often called one facet of the "diaspora."

In terms of Canada, Canada contains the eighth largest Indian diaspora in the world. In Canada, 'The East Indian' or 'Indo-Canadian community' is highly concentrated in Ontario and British Columbia. The majority of Indians in Canada are Sikh or Hindu. In 2001, 34% were Sikh, 27% Hindu, 17% Muslim, 9% Catholic, and 7% belonged to another

Christian group (Statistic Canada, 2015). A review of the history of Indian migration to Canada reveals that several factors, including falling economic conditions, Indian money lenders, and British government exploitation, were the primary causes of Indian migration. The dream of prosperous life attracted Indians to immigrate to Canada.

Since the origin of Indian English literature, it has now reached many miles. Indian literary critics have started to search for Indianness in Indian English poetry and literature in different genres. In Indian English literature, being Indian is more than just a concept—it's an action that elicits a response from the readers. In a literary work that began, developed, and evolved on Indian soil, to be Indian is to impose values and history. One could argue that the current state of Indian diaspora writing represents a peak in terms of 'Indianness' in diaspora literature. Nostalgia has been one of the main themes in Indian diasporic writings. Indian Diasporic writers share their memories, culture, and traditions of India through nostalgic feelings. The fictional characters in their works represent Indianness on foreign soil. In *Tamarind Mem*, Anita Rao Badami depicts Indianness through Kamini's nostalgia for India.

Nostalgia: a powerful tool to represent Indianness

Globalization and colonization have caused a significant number of people to be displaced. Among immigrants, these movements evoke nostalgia. Generally, words like-homesickness, longing, wistfulness, remorse, reminiscence, etc., are also used to describe nostalgia. Beyond its association with past lives, nostalgia also aids immigrants in reconstructing or reorganizing their lives in the nations where they have settled. Among the major themes in the writings of Indian diaspora writers has been nostalgia.

The word "nostalgia" is made of two Greek roots: 'nostos' (return home) and 'algia' (pain) (Joan 2018). The term "Nostalgia" was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934) to find out the symptoms experienced by Swiss mercenaries working for European monarchs. Hofer identified several signs and symptoms of nostalgia, including crying fits, anxiety, palpitations, anorexia, and insomnia (Wildschut et.al 2008). Nostalgia is the longing for a place of origin that is either non-existent or never existed. Nostalgia is a feeling of loss and relocation (Boym 4). Beyond its association with past periods, nostalgia also plays a role in the reconstruction of immigrants' lives in their new nations. *The Future of Nostalgia*, by Svetlana Boym said in her book,

"Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. The future of nostalgic longing and progressive thinking is at the center of this inquiry. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory" (Boym 17)

Nostalgia is frequently linked to childhood memories, the countryside, and natural surroundings; these two aspects are crucial to the development of nostalgia. A sense of loss that is both lamented and accepted, as well as the societal and personal circumstances that are emotionally charged, are at the core of nostalgia. Typically, a nostalgic remembrance yearns for something that is only preserved in memory. The most intense emotion experienced by diaspora writers, no matter where they are, is longing for their native country. They had an intense desire when their journey was risky and unusual because they were well aware that they would never be able to return home. Even if modern technology has made travel easy and distances shorter, his imagination kept him feeling inadequate when residing in a far-off place. Diaspora literature was shaped by their longing for their motherland and an odd connection to its customs, languages, and faiths.

The emergence of Indo-nostalgia in Indian novels is an experiment in writing that centers on the nostalgic experience. Indian fiction is distinct from fiction from other nations because of the growth of a unique Indian consciousness and its appropriate artistic representation. The term "Indo-Nostalgic writing" refers to works written in English in which a significant undercurrent or central theme is nostalgia regarding the Indian subcontinent, primarily India. Indian English writers discuss their experiences without losing their sense of national identity. Indo-Nostalgic writings can include memoirs, travelogues, quasifictionalized memoirs, or accounts of real-life events combined with the author's imagination. Indo-nostalgic writings deal with impressionistic recollections of people, places, foods, only-in-India scenarios. Indo-nostalgia is an emotion formed from a culture that encompasses pleasant and negative sentiments. It is a private contemplation of a worthwhile past experience. It is a dual experience that is both joyful and regretful. Nostalgia serves as a window into the thoughts, sentiments, and lifestyle choices ingrained in a people's memory.

Indo-Nostalgic literature gives a picture of India that reveals its rich cultural legacy. As reflected in the nation's art and literature, culture is a reflection of the people's way of life, attitudes about life, social structures, values, and customs, as well as their needs, ambitions, and aspirations for the country. Literature is a useful tool for measuring a country's culture and understanding its many points of view. There are a few books that mark the lives of first-wave immigrants to Canada. *Maluka* (1978) was the first Indo-Canadian novel written by S.S.Dhami, and other two books namely, *Dharma Rasa* (1999) by Kuldip Gill and an annotated photo collection titled *Zindagee*, which captures Indo-Canadian women's brief life story who born between 1900 and 1950 (Sanchez. 2020. p 89). Nostalgia has been a major theme in the works of Indian diaspora writers.

Indianness is more than just a concept or term. A literary work that began, evolved, and altered on Indian soil introduces values and history that define Indianness. It is interesting to note that Indian English literature, contains not only Indian writers who write about India but also those who write about India in foreign. Indian literature in English has unquestionably received more recent and noteworthy international attention because of the

efforts of writers from the Indian diaspora. Further evidence suggests that diasporic writers include themes from their home cultures. They create alternative worlds by exchanging one tradition with another and one home with another.

Tamarind Mem: a tale of bitter-sweet nostalgia

Anita Rao Badami is a well-known English-language writer from the contemporary Indian diaspora, currently residing in Canada. In 1964, Anita Rao Badami was born in the Indian state of Orissa. She came to Canada in 1991. In the community of Indian diaspora writers, Anita Rao Badami has distinguished herself. Her first novel is *Tamarind Mem*, and it is based on her own experiences. A mother and daughter narrate this emotional story. She investigates all the little rituals that make family life so rich and frustrating in her first novel, which is a narrative of bittersweet nostalgia. She gives her depictions of Indian household life an intensely real sense of detail.

Tamarind Mem, starts with a conversation between the daughter Kamini, in Canada and the mother, Saroja, in India. Kamini is pursuing her higher education in Calgary, Canada. She feels lonely in the cold, snow-covered basement apartment and holds to memories, hoping to find the warmth of love from the people who surrounded her in the past. Integration into the host country is initially challenging for diasporans due to cultural, linguistic, and traditional differences. In her leisure time, she used to reflect on her childhood memories of native land. Additionally, she remembers her mother arguing with her family about the significance of her daughters' names. They started a comparison of Kamini and Roopa with the Sun and its shadow. Her mother disagrees, saying that her daughters' names are symbols of prosperity and beauty.

Kamini does not like being alone in a host land. She constantly wants to be with her mother. When Kamini comes to know that her mother, Saroja, is sending some sweets and dresses via friend's son, who works in Toronto, she becomes so happy and nostalgic all at once. She recalls, how her mother ordered Ganesh to prepare several dishes for everyone, she (Saroja) ordered, Ganesh peon, “. . . today we will have onion dal and rice. Tomato Salad for Kamini baby, cucumber for Roopa and fried cauliflower for Sahib” (Badami 61). Kamini also describes how her mother ordered Ganesha to cook various food items when they went for a picnic, “Make puri, make aloo-dum! All in ten minutes if you please!” (Badami 48). She also recalls how her mother scolded her father for eating unhealthy food items in restaurants. She asked him, “. . . what is wrong with home food, I ask you? Simple, no cutlet – mutlet and fried gobi every day” (Badami 72). In Calgary, Canada, Kamini misses the Indian food she used to eat. She also miss to wear Indian attire in Canada, because she is afraid of being judged by her peers. Kamini remembers when her mother gave her a sari for the Diwali festival when she was twelve years old, her mother gave her compliments while her father did not like the idea of her wearing it. She could remember how her father had reacted:

“Dadda looked at me as if he didn’t recognize me. I waited for him to say something. He smiled such a sad a smile and I thought guiltily of the last time I had sat with him and listened

to his stories. Was it a month ago? Six months? A year? Had he noticed that one of his daughters had moved away from childhood?"

(Badami 128)

For Kamini, it is not easy to live in silence and solitude in Canada. In India, she disliked Ratanpur due to excessive traffic on the roads. Now, in Canada, She doesn't even hear the traffic on the road when she is inside the house. She does not have any friends with whom she can share her feelings and loneliness. When Kamini is faced discrimination by her racist friends in Calgary because of her skin colour, she recalls how her mother discriminated against Devaki because of her poor economic background and social status,

"How many times have I told you not to go near those dirty children?" Ma had said, towering over me, her hand tight around my wrist as if she was going to snap it in two. "You will catch some dirty filthy disease and then who has to run for doctors and medicines and all? Me, Who else?"

Kamini sees small plants through the window of her Calgary home, which makes her remind of the besharam plants in her Ratnapur home, "The snow outside my window seemed to shift and tiny green shoots pushed through. Almost all of them would be dandelions, which were considered weeds here in this country. But I liked their tenacious brightness. They reminded me of the besharam plants in our Ratnapur house" (Badami 137). She feels like an insect, in Calgary, Canada. She is restless because of the cold weather, and she could only see snow from her window. Whenever she feels depressed or upset, she keeps the postcards sent by her mother close to her. Saroja scolds Kamini because she spends her spare time looking at family photos, and advises her not to waste time dwelling on the past. Roopa is not so concerned about her departure from her native land, and lives happily in America with her husband and children; whereas Kamini lives alone in Canada. Roopa, too, is a diasporan, but she does not suffer as much as Kamini. It is most likely due to her happy marriage and rapid acculturation to American culture. However, Kamini suffers from diasporic nostalgia because she straddles in both India and Canada.

Such nostalgic moments make Kamini happy, "If I found a pin lying on the floor, let loose from the sliding brilliance of my mother's hair, I kept it under my pillow, for it was almost like having Ma next to me, patting me to sleep as she used to when I was much much younger" (Badami 49). She put her mother's hairpin under her pillow which gave her a sense of emotional attachment that her mother was beside her while she slept. For diasporans, nostalgia serves as a support and a substitute that engenders feelings of love and warmth. Kamini is never at ease in Canada, she sits alone in her living room. Through her stories and memories she tries to convey her sense of belonging in Canada. She tells her stories about her family to her neighbour's child, Claire. She uses her father's narrative technique while describing stories, in this way, she remembers her father through storytelling. She tells Claire how Linda Ayah threatened her with her ghost and goblin stories. She started to scream at night after having a dream about Linda Ayah's ghosts. Her mother comforted and patted her to sleep while chastising Vishwamoorthy and Linda for filling the child's mind with fantasies

and unreal stories. Kamini also says Claire how eagerly she listened to Vijaya aunt's story about her ancestors. Saroja claimed that Vijaya mixed her imagination because she was not able to recall everything precisely. After Kamini's migration to the host land she believes "Memories were like ghosts, shivery, uncertain, nothing guaranteed, not-for-sure" (Badami 73). After so many years, Kamini realises that the stories she heard as a child were not entirely true. Her father, Linda Ayah, and aunt Vijaya tell the stories from their own imaginations.

She recalls how her mother felt when she first told her about going to abroad. In initial stage, her mother did not give her permission to go foreign. Her mother scolds her that she has gone mad because of her hasty decision to go to Canada. She was concerned that her daughter, Kamini would become ill as a result of the cold weather. "Canada, Canada, and where is that place?.....Here itself when it rains you wear three – four sweaters, shawls and blankets and go hurru - hurru with cold!" (Badami 149). But Kamini was unconcerned by her mother's words. She was adamant in her decision. She later felt bad for hurting her mother. She feels that her mother gave her and Roopa the freedom to make their own decisions in life. In Canada, Kamini recalls her mother, her native land-India, Indian culture extremely and she does not wish to remain in Canada and refuses to communicate with anyone. Kamini suffers from depression as a result of her alienation. Memories of her homeland help her cope with the loneliness of living alone. Kamini contrasts and compares her lives in India and Canada. Diasporans try to maintain their homeland traditions while living in a host land. Their yearning for the lost 'home' is reflected through festival celebrations, marriage ceremonies, and religious rituals performed at home. They are connected to their homeland through memories; tradition, custom, food, and language are the links that connect diasporans' past and present lives.

Conclusion

People migrate to several parts of the world for several reasons, because of migration they face many problems, obstacles and challenges. Migrants carry with them their nation's language, tradition, culture, attire, and so on. In the initial stage, it is not easy for the migrants to assimilate with new culture and tradition. They feel Loneliness, rootlessness, alienation, cultural conflict, racial discrimination in a host land, whether they are victim migrants, or volunteer migrants. In the novel, *Tamarind Mem*, Anita Rao Badami depicts volunteer migration of Kamini, she goes to Canada for further study and in Canada how much she misses her home land, her mother and relatives. Anita Rao Badami's novel *Tamarind Mem* is so much relatable to present time, nowadays many students go to Canada for study and there they face many challenges, problems, etc. Kamini was so excited to go to Canada but, when she arrived there she felt so lonely and alone. She had nothing except her memories of childhood, mother, and memories of India which gave her comfort and warmth in her time of depression. Kamini contrasts and compares lives of India and Canada. She wears Indian attire in Canada whenever she gets chance. She recalls every little thing of India, such as, her parents' fights and arguments, her traditional bath with shikakai, amla, imaginative ghost stories, her Indian friends, etc. Nostalgia does not bring only sad memories but it also has

sweet and happy memories. Nostalgia also gives you comfort, warmth and strength to rebuild and reshape your life and create your identity onto a foreign soil

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