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Gypsy Upbringing: Mishmash of Cultural Boundaries in Anita Rau Badami's Tamarind Mem

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***Abstract*—One of the renowned Asian-Canadian writers, Anita Rau Badami, who created an identity in the field of Diasporic literature. Through her first striking novel, Anita Rau Badami who moved to Canada in 1991, appeals on those reminiscences for this intense, almost photographic saga about an unsatisfied woman imprisoned within the social and cultural expectancies of her period. *Tamarind Mem* is basically a story of the relationship between Saroja and Kamini as mother-daughter which represents their different perceptions towards their past. This paper is an attempt to explore about their past, including psychological reason behind acidic tongue of Saroja, and gypsy upbringing of Kamini, and mishmash of their cultural boundaries, which twisted the personal lives and aspirations of the characters emerging their new identities.**

Index Terms— Diasporic literature, gypsy upbringing, cultural boundaries, identities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tamarind Mem is one of the best works of Anita Rau Badami, as a strong voice for transcending geographical boundaries, which carved a niche in the field of modern Diasporic literature. *Tamarind Mem* is a touching portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship Kamini and Saroja. Many characteristics of the main characters are similar to author's own life, like Kamini in *Tamarind Mem* is a resident of India now living in Canada. Like Badami's own life revolved around the railway colonies of India so does this book which is set in both India and Canada. Just as the author did not have a stable childhood because of her father's transfers, who worked, as a mechanical engineer in railways so is Kamini's father who works for railroads. In her childhood, Badami was grown up by the stories her family told to her and the same she has followed the same technique of storytelling in the novel. Though the novel's narrative reflects Badami's "gypsy" upbringing and the "mishmash" of various cultures that helped shape her development and freed her from national boundaries. But Badami disavows too autobiographical connection with her characters. She simply initiated writing through memories of her past that later came out to be a fictional story. Though Badami agrees that the basic backdrop is from her own experience but the rest of the characters are entirely fictitious and she has invested a lot of emotional energy to create them. She says:

> *"All the characters are the composite of people I have known or have met briefly and been curious about. The emotional experiences and lives*

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> *of these characters are fictitious. I have invested a lot of my own emotional energy into creating these characters projecting myself into each of their heads and hearts in the process of writing them."* (Interview)

The title *Tamarind Mem* in itself arouses curiosity regarding the source that inspired the author to name her work after a sour fruit found in India. The preface explains the title: the fruit is sour and can turn a ceremony ill omened and unrewarding. The tamarind tree is also believed to be the home of spirits and it does not let anything under it survive. Reading of the novel reveals that *Tamarind Mem* is about Saroja whose tongue is as sharp as the acidic fruit. About the title Anita Rau Badami in one of her interviews said that she had been interested in exploring the lives of women separated not only by time (in terms of age, that is), but by space as well. Kamini has moved from the old world into the new. Her mother Saroja's happiness ends the day she discards her dream of becoming a doctor and marries an ambitious railway official at her parents' insistence. Fifteen years her senior, Vishwa turns out to be an uncommunicative, unaffectionate man, and there is little Saroja can do to alleviate her loneliness. As the railway transfers her husband from town to town, Saroja, who grew up in a different world, was trapped in it, found it difficult to form any lasting attachments of her own. and therefore developed an acidic tongue to deal with her frustrations. Saroja's acidic tongue was her only defense against the rule bound world in which she found herself. She uses sharp words to carve a place for herself in that world. Her increasingly hostile attitude earns her the nickname Tamarind Mem, after the sour fruit ("Mem" is short for "memsahib" or "madam"). She has a sardonic and the most scathing tongue that she uses as her strike against anger and frustration. Anita Rau Badami says in one of her interviews:

> *"Life was hard for her, so I gave her a sharp tongue to help her deal with it. Anyway characters with namak (salt) are more interesting. I didn't want to make her the stereotypical boring, submissive Indian woman because most women I know are not that way."* (Interview)

The novel is divided into two parts, and described from two viewpoints, the first half from Kamini's and second from Saroja's. The basic structure of the novel is very interesting because the two main characters namely Kamini and Saroja never come face to face. Their interaction comes to the reader through their storytelling. Both of them are entirely

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isolated from each other and they just narrate their stories in flashback.

The first part of the novel presents Saroja's life through the eyes of the grown Kamini, a graduate student living in contemporary Calgary who revisits the past for clues to her mother's bitterness. She learns to understand better her own feelings of estrangement and loss growing up as a girl in patriarchal, caste prejudiced society.

As Kamini struggles with a life of surprise and change- the arrival of her newborn sister, the making and breaking of new friendships, moving from one convent school to another she finds refuge and stability in stories. From an early age, Kamini is an avid reader of books; she's also a keen listener of her father's tales of railway adventures and deeply moved by the recounting of myths and folk stories by the family servant, Linda *Ayah*. Stories do more than allow Kamini to see the hidden worlds that seethed beneath the surface of the ordinary; they offer both a temporary reprieve from the tight lines of anger and frustration that increasingly fill her parents' faces and help her to understand better the complexity of human behaviour. As time passes, reading and listening to stories, combined with her own everyday experiences, allow Kamini to understand better, for example, the ebb and flow of her mother's affection toward her, the mother's fear of seeing her daughter's dreams quashed in a male dominant society. It also swallows her to see with clarity her father's faults: that his ironfisted patriarchal rule and emotional distance ultimately were responsible for locking her mother into rooms from which there was not even a chink of an escape, for example. As Kamini grows up, the reader also encounters an array of other members of her extended family who have their own secrets and idiosyncrasies. There's the spirited aunt Chinna, whose widowhood open windows of opportunity to indulge in movies and chocolate; there's the grandmother who deifies the men in the family, considers the women a burden, and freely expresses her biting cast prejudice.

In second part of the novel, Saroja, delights her fellow passengers with stories while traveling through India by train, after her husband is no more and her two daughters namely Kamini and Roopa have settled abroad. She has sold her home and set up on long journey through India by train. She recollects the happenings of her strange marriage, displacement from one station to another, her childhood home, her shattered desire to be a doctor, the biased behavior of her parents and relatives, the mechanic Paul de Costa who had offered her one substitute to her estranged marriage. Claim of memories on both the mother and daughter, from childhood through maturity, the love and loss, reflects the same past through different recollections. Inevitably, many of

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Kamini's and Saroja's recollections conflict with each other. Sight, sound and, especially, smells inhabit the narrative with the force of character. Kamini unwraps each memory as reverently as her mother opens "*the delicate silver tins still stained with turmeric and vermilion, akshathey and sandal paste from her wedding*." (Badami, 136) Saroja describes a pungent train ride: "*The platform first, with its odors of cigarettes, beedis, overripe fruit, and urine and frying fish. Then the drains sluggish with feces and engine oil.*" (Badami, 6)

The novel figures out the issues of caste, class and color and concerns itself most with indicating a society that favours boys over girls, who are expected only to acquire a husband. One of the novel's most disturbing moments comes as the young Saroja prepares to embark upon life with her new husband and silently laments. Ultimately, however Saroja becomes somewhat reconciled with her past. That strikes a false note. The novel is a solid accomplishment and exciting addition to the burgeoning tradition of Indo- Canada in writing that includes Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji and Shyam Selvadurai. And by telling the story of a bitter woman so eloquently, Badami offers a measure of sweet redemption.

However the story unfolds the layers, Kamini's deep connections with her mother and her childhood are reminiscently reconnoitered. This voice melds nicely into the voice of the mother, who is given center stage in the last third of the novel and paints a more complex picture of her past sorrows and joys. In representing both the poetic and incisive voice of Kamini and her mother, Anita Rau Badami powerfully probes the depths of isolation and estrangement felt by two generations of Indian women. Nevertheless, Badami does not let *Tamarind Mem* end entirely on a woeful note, infusing a tone of hopefulness that suggests that the mother's struggles have made it easier for future generations of Indian women like Kamini to forge their own memories and to determine their own destinies.

The concept of memory and isolation forms an important part of the work. About inculcating the theme of memory and isolation into her work Badami says,

> *"This book is largely about memory and its shifting nature. Most relationships float on a sea of memories, and this is particularly so in families where each member of the family uses memory to connect with parents and siblings. In 'Tamarind Mem' when Kamini, the daughter, moves away from Saroja, the mother, both spatially (to Canada) and*

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> *temporally (by growing up) she depends on memory to reconstruct the past she has left behind*." (Interview)

Kamini has attained knowledge, freedom and has explored places, unlike her mother Saroja, who was deprived of affection and love from her parents as well as her husband. Kamini, in a way, fulfills the lost dreams of her mother Saroja by pursuing higher education. Kamini, as a child, always charged her by mother for being annoyed and angry. On the other hand she empathized with her father who loved his daughters. She loved her father for his gentleness, for his willingness to listen to her and to tell her those wonderful stories when he was home, yet she hated him for making his mother annoyed all the time. But as a grown up girl far away from her mother in Calgary, Kamini realizes that probably her father was responsible for what her mother has turned into.

Kamini, like her mother's shadow, is inquisitive by nature, but the younger sister, Roopa, is the one who acknowledges things simply the way they are. She is completely contented with her life and never wishes to poke into memory lanes. Roopa, like Kamini, is obsessed with the past. She suggests to Kamini to come out of it before she goes crazy by allowing the stories of past to invade her present life. But for Kamini it is the best pass time during her off in University, to be nostalgic and get into the recollections of her fragmented past. In fact, it seems Kamini is trying to reconstruct the past she has left behind. She being away from her mother as well as her motherland looks towards the past for some continuity with herself and her family. Kamini has got separated from her family not only by time but also by space. She has moved from the old world into the new and she looks forward to have her mother construe her calmness between her words to feel the painful isolation that she has landed into. But probably Kamini's mother Saroja's tendency to give vent to her frustrations through her sour tongue has turned a loving mother into a furious stranger who fails to sense her daughter's loneliness and finally who is very happy and contented to escape from the family shackles.

Tamarind Mem begins with two well-defined and self-regulating domestic spaces. These two domestic spaces, one Asian and one North American, are geographically, nationally, and culturally different but share an ability to suppress any disruption to her naturalized identity borders. The text take great pains to contrast immigrant narrative in which the domestic spaces that lay claim to the identities of their main characters stand in diametrical opposition to one another. Badami, introduces her narrator, Kamini, who speaks from her cold basement apartment in Calgary where she cannot shake the memories of her childhood in India. She speculates on her mother's reaction to

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her homesickness for a motherland that lies miles away from her Calgary apartment: "*Did somebody tie your hands behind your back and say 'Go-go to that Calgary North Pole place."* (Badami, 3) This switching back and forth between past and present, India and Canada, is initial emphasis on the inherent incommensurability of Asian Canadian experience. Badami depicts Asian Canadian subjectivity as an immigrant experience that pits two stable national spaces against one another in a warning in-between subject position.

The spatial difference is not able to separate the mother daughter completely. Though Kamini, as an immigrant, in the alien world stands alone, always heavily burdened by her nostalgic but glorious past, she still constantly feels enveloped by her mother's warm shadow through her warm recollections of the past. Not only through her recollections but also through her dreams, the mother Saroja seems to be protecting her child from all kinds of fears and insecurities. Kamini, vividly remembering her mother's anger and love, their conflicts and resolutions throughout her life finally realizes the social restrictions that her mother faced. She believed that her mother made her realize her dreams. She also feels, it must have not been an easy relation for her mother, and her continued displacement never let her have any 'lasting friendships.' But there are many instances that show Kamini recollecting the happy moments when she felt the strike of friendliness in her mother.

> *"Now that I had turned twelve, I noticed that Ma spoke to me differently, almost like a friend."*
> (Badami, 8)

Saroja conveys a different kind of view of her past than her daughter. Through Saroja, the author also stresses the Indian fondness to cling to the British legacy. She insisted on sending her daughters to convent schools whereas her husband wanted them to attain Central School Education. Saroja wished her daughters to learn English instead of Hindi. She wanted Kamini and Roopa to imitate the British accent of English like the British Radio newsreaders on BBC. She even subscribes to 'Women at Home' Magazine and also copies the designs for Roopa and Kamini's dresses from the magazine.

Saroja's husband, Dadda, as a railway engineer travelled constantly. Saroja utterly hated her husband's transfers because she had to move from one station to another. She hated the complete process of packing. Probably she found it profoundly disorienting to uproot everything time and again. As a result she is neither able to relate neither herself to the new place nor she is able to

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relate back to the lost one. 'Home' for her existed only in the past memories of childhood.

Instead of enjoying her status as a railway officer's wife, Saroja keeps complaining and regretting her frequent transitions. The kind of stability which she expected from her marriage was neither present in their relations as husband and wife nor in their profession. She says,

> *"but what is one to do with a life like mine scrawled all over the country, little trials here and there, moving, moving all the time, and never in one fixed direction? As if the seven circles I take around the marriage fire with Dadda dance out like ripple from a stone dropped in water, carrying us on wider journeys every time. That is the life of a Railway Mem Sahib."* (Badami, 10)

Saroja resides within a series of thoughts. The only house she has been able to relate to, is her childhood home. Saroja, a child in her parents' house remained as a protective girl, who after completing her high school had to argue badly with her Appa to study in Sri Ram College in their town. Saroja as a young girl observed her Amma, as a complete silence. She never liked this attitude of her mother and always failed to understand the meaning of her stillness. She always begged *"her support and received nothing but a non committal silence."* (Badami, 158) Through Saroja the author has revealed the wide gap between the present and past Indian culture, when people used to be very orthodox and narrow minded. In those times, early marriage was forced upon girls. The parents wanted their daughters to get married instead of allowing them to continue their studies. Saroja as a human has completely turned out to be a shattered and a wistful person who has taken out her frustrations through a sour tongue which she frequently uses to dribble at every one, especially her husband, who always manages with her aggressive outrages with silence.

With Saroja's sour yet strong character, the author has also tried to give a reflection of generation gap with the collision of two conflicting cultures. She also hints at the clashes between traditional and modern values through the characters of Saroja, Kamini, Roopa, Amma, Dadda. Saroja is cast in the traditional role as an Indian wife, who's expected to behave in a certain way - being at home, bringing up children, cooking proper meals, and at the same time fulfilling the role of a modern woman.

Saroja is definitely exceptional that she rebels and somehow manages to finish her high school by

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convincing her parents. Just as Saroja uses her bitter expressions for her family, she continues to do so after she gets married and become mother too. Her bitterness towards her husband becomes evident at many points in the story. Her husband is portrayed as an exhausted man who is excessively inclined towards his job and it seems almost impossible for him to form any bond with his wife and daughters. The crudest expression that Saroja uses for him is probably,

> *"I am married to a man who has no feelings to spare for a wife. A dried-out lemon peel whose energies have already been squeezed out caring for a sick mother, worrying about his sisters, inheriting his dead father's unfinished duties. It ate up his youth."* (Badami, 216)

At one point of time, Saroja's inclines towards the Anglo Paul da Costa, the car mechanic. Deep in heart somewhere she wants to reach out to him but the deeply engrained the cultural and social restrictions, somehow forbid Saroja to opt for this path of inner desire. She seems to be very much in her senses to decide what is wrong and what is right. She does not get carried away with the illusory promises that Paul keeps on making to her, when he talks of taking her to Canada, England or Australia. She concentrates on her priorities towards her daughters.

Initially, Saroja utterly hated to travel and move from one station to another because she is scared of the displacement and the process of repeated up-rootedness. But towards the end we see that Saroja herself chooses to take up travelling and roam about without any restrictions, like a gypsy, follow her own rules, own time and discuss the bitter and sweet pages of her life with the fellow passengers. She thinks that it's her turn to be the ruler of her own life.

> *"But now I have rested enough, my feet are beginning to grow wheels. Yes it is time for me to pack up and go. Once I travelled because my husband did. Now it is time for me to wander because I wish to, and this little apartment with the gulmohur flowers will be here for me to return to when I am tired of being a gypsy."* (Badami, 265)

Saroja does not want her past to affect her children's present and future. She understands that, though they are biologically intertwined but practically and physically her and her daughter's lives are separate and she does not wish her daughters to be trapped into the cultural expectations like her own self. So she prefers to

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leave her daughters with their independent choices and chooses a different path where she has the freedom to survive on her own conditions. Saroja, finally breaking all the cultural and family shackles and restrictions, departs when her husband dies and her daughters leave home with their own choices. She sets up on a journey of discovery of country and her own self, on her own conditions. *"She doesn't belong to anyone, for she too has reached that stage in her life where she can only turn the pages of a book already written."* (Badami, 11)

On the other hand, Kamini reinforces well-regulated national borders by transporting herself to an imagined setting far from the conflicts of current Canadian space. She confronts identity conflict but in settings that is safely other. The text temporally and geographically disconnects her from the present in order to create an elsewhere where binary identity assumptions still prevail. In this imagined elsewhere, immigrant characters struggle to acculturate in their new Canadian homes, while still holding onto the cultural baggage from their Asian pasts. Badami takes her narrative to an imagined elsewhere where she indirectly deals with the complexities of Kamini's current Canadian dilemmas:

> *"I called my mother every Sunday from the silence of my basement apartment; reluctant to tell her how I yearned to get away from this freezing cold city where even the traffic sounds were muffled by the snow."* (Badami, 3)

Kamini justifies her escape into the memories of her childhood in India whose people and places are remote from the freezing immediacy of her Canadian present. The text creates an imagined Asian homeland that she juxtaposes against an equally imagined Canadian national space.

Badami not only returns her narratives to the past, but also to the realm of childhood where memories are muted of the immediacy of adult experience. Badami opens her narrative with Kamini who immerses herself in memories of another, now foreign cultural landscape. She speaks of her previous motherland when she writes,

> *"the year that I turned six, I began to sense a strange movement deep inside Ma's body, a pulsing beneath the skin. Yes, certainly there was a difference. I, who was so sensitive to every nuance in my mother, could feel it every time I climbed in her lap."* (Badami, 5)

The text explores the memories of Kamini who struggle to deal with the pulsing movements that exist beneath the surface of their binary existences. Her desire for stability and the assurance of home makes her uneasy as she become aware of the

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complicated relationships that belie the clear cut divisions of her familial lives. She senses these discrepancies but continually return to the binary assumptions that promise to keep her safe within her confining domestic walls.

The text thus returns to a time when constructed boundaries still operate as naturalized dividers between Self and Other, Asia and Canada. Shirley Lim's argument, *"in a nation of immigrants, there must therefore always be already that straining against the grain, the self that is assimilated and the self remains inassimilable"* (Lim, 18-19) is a constant refrain within narratives that depicts characters who maneuvers within two oppositional affiliations. The text establishes these two competing selves, while Kamini wrestles with her memories of India that impede her attempt to make a new life in Canada, she reminisces of her mother's own attempts to reconcile the pressures of a part British, part Indian existence. Through Kamini's childhood gaze, the text details the two separate worlds that regulate the daily lives of both mother and daughter. She writes, *"for Saroja there were only two countries in the world, no matter what anyone else said. This side of the seven seas, it was India and across, it was Angrez-land."* (Badami, 23)

Kamini reenters a childhood in which her mother divides the world up into two competing cultural territories. The character conceives identity as two separate categories that resist the destabilization and blurring of their constructed boundaries.

Badami uses not only the content, but also form of their narratives to reinforce the strength of constructed borders. She structures her text in a way that solidifies well-regulated, oppositional identity spaces. The division of her text into contained narrative sections ensures that disruptive narrative incidents will remain within manageable bounds. She divides her own text with an equally mathematical precision with the first part devoted to Kamini's memories and the second to her mother Saroja's. In this second half of the narrative; Kamini's mother embarks on her own return to the past as she explains that "*I depending on where my memories carry me, will tell them about my husband the builder of tracks or Paul the Anglo-mechanic, perhaps my widowed Aunt Chinna."* (Badami, 172)

Saroja tells her stories in a railway car far from the competing voices of her now adult daughters. She writes that *"now I travel alone, not even my daughters to watch me."* (Badami, 171) Badami's meticulous separation of the two parts of her narrative extends to even using italics to differentiate between the Canadian and Indian, and the past and present portions of her text. The italics and section breaks keep competing voices and contents within prescribed textual bounds.

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Content and form consequently work together to construct two well defined and competing identity spaces that are positioned to potential border challenges. Badami cast back to a time when constructed domestic spaces are able to maintain their transparent appearances. The narratives then carefully test these spaces by creating tension in characters who find themselves in the uncertain space in-between two naturalized domestic spaces. The characters in the text live within the constructed worlds that regulate their lives because they are unable to see the fictional nature of binary divisions. The inability to see borders as artifice creates tension as the characters find themselves having to choose between two seemingly contained sites. In *Tamarind Mem* , Saroja sees little alternative outside of the constructed confines of her life. Her impulse to break out of her duties as mother and wife leaves her feeling "*guilty at not having fulfilled the role that had been scripted for her, annoyed at being coerced into playing it.*" (Badami, 163) Saroja feels guilt over the behaviour that exceeds her scripted roles because she cannot see past the traditional expectations of mother and wife that she finds so oppressive. Kamini meanwhile is troubled as she struggles to reconcile her life in Canada with her competing memories of India. The narrative is torn between two cultural spaces because of their subscription to the sanctity of each identity.

Sheng-mei Ma writes,

> *"these Asian American and Asian Diaspora writers somehow are drawing from the same clichéd notion that Asian immigrants and Americans of Asian extraction have 'split personality' or 'buried self'"* (Ma, 41)

The pressure to end this split personality and give up Asianness in favor of Canadianness is overwhelming. The characters struggle against the repercussions of living in-between mutually exclusive spaces whose borders they view as constraining, static and non-negotiable. Kamini grapples with Indian memories in which she engages with the collisions between two competing cultural systems. The child Kamini has difficulties reconciling her Indian surroundings with the British stories she reads. She writes that in the stories, "*their mother, unlike mine, let them wander around without an ayah at their heel…….. I liked Nora and Tilly but wished they had different names- Gauri and Geetha, perhaps, or Mini and Bani.*" (Badami, 24) Kamini finds that her problems increase when her parents are also unable to deal with the unsettling in-between of living in British India. Saroja responds to Dadda's comment that the children "will be true Indians" with the words, "*Yes, yes, you are a fine*

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one to talk, you and your smoking jacket and pipe and British ways." (Badami, 42)

The primary conflict in this novel relies on character that finds her straddling two dichotomous identity spaces. Badami portrays characters who are convinced that they must alleviate the tension of their in-between positions by choosing a single identity affiliation. Kamini finds it difficult to embrace her new Canadian home because her memories of India continue to haunt her with their unsettling questions. She writes, "*Linda Ayah had told us long long ago that everybody had ghosts trailing behind. The problem started when you looked over your shoulder at them."* (Badami, 82) Her ghosts prevent full Canadian membership with their reminders of times in India when she and her mother felt pressured to align with the demands of a regulated domestic space. Saroja complains that

> *"after marriage there are new rules to follow, fresh boundaries. There is always someone in the house, the peon, the gardener, the maid, the dhobi, and Linda Ayah with her terrible glasses."* (Badami, 247)

The gaze of the household parallels the gaze of the nation and the community that look with disfavor on those who straddle their domestic boundaries. In Badami's novel, her characters are fearful of the mixed bodies that make explicit the permeable division between the Indian and British portions of their national identity. The adults around Kamini informs her that *"if you touch an Anglo you become an acchooth……..the Anglos were half-and-half people who hated Indians"* (Badami, 106) because of their discomfort with openly transnational bodies. Kamini is troubled by her mother's relationship with the Anglo, Paul da Costa, because she has been trained to stay away from the transnational bodies. The contact between Saroja and Paul da Costa is particularly distressing because of Kamini's adherence to the essential inseparability of Anglo and Indian bodies: "*Ma had touched Paul's hand but she was still the same, wasn't she? Wasn't she?"* (Badami, 108) This question haunts Kamini as she struggles to reconcile this contact moment with the naturalized boundaries that declare it to be impossibility.

Kamini senses as well that the ordinary is a facade that, once demonstrated, offers her the chance to create her own subjectivity beyond the naturalized "reality" set out before her. She writes, "*as we grew older, I stopped trying to show Roopa the hidden worlds that seethed beneath the surface of the ordinary."* (Badami, 236) Kamini intuits the conflicts and inconsistencies that her sister ignores because of her capacity to pierce below the surface of the ordinary. Badami raises the specter of

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cultural dialectics as she temporarily toy with both their textual and national borders.

Badami uses contact moments between characters who transgress national and "racial" boundaries in order to temporarily destabilize their narratives. Saroja who has been raised to follow the tightly scripted roles of Indian femininity is disconcerted when she encounters the Anglo Paul da Costa who fails to subscribe to the boundaries that closet her within her household roles. She is unsettled when she comes into contact with him:

> *"I don't know how to respond to this half-breed man who sits in my veranda and tells me about the latest films, about his cousins in Australia, about everything and everything. I smile timidly, afraid of what the servants will think if I join in his full-bodied laughter."* (Badami, 133)

Saroja is unable to negotiate his uncategorized body and begins to engage herself in behaviour that bridges the divide that is meant to keep them apart. They converse in ways that challenge the formal rules and regulations that label Saroja the "memsahib" and Paul the "half-breed" mechanic. Instead, Paul schools Saroja in the possibilities of the hyphen, what Fred Wah describes as "*the operable tool that both compounds difference and underlines sameness*" (Wah, 73) as they make contact in a border-space where both their sameness and difference collide. Badami provides a glimpse of the contact between characters that recognizes the possibility of negotiating seemingly asymmetrical and conflicting subject positions.

Badami keeps the sexual contact between two different communities; they can confront border transgression while still leaving the overall national boundaries intact. Saroja has an affair with one of the *"pretend English people they were the Anglo-Indians of Ratnapura, half Indian and half English."* (Badami, 20) What is absent is an exploration of the sexual relationships between her characters and larger White society. By representing transgression between two groups whom the nation has already marginalized, Badami leaves national borders unquestioned while they still leverage the shock value of a taboo relationship between two groups who are supposed to stand categorically apart. This shock value leaves unsaid the larger crime of contesting the domestic space that overarches the relationships within and among these minority communities. In other words, Badami upholds a national space in which, as Smaro Kamboureli argues,

> *"diversity is respected and supported only insofar as it is presumed to articulate subjects rehearsing collective*

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> *rectifications that are determined categorically and not relationally precisely the point of the federal policy's sedative politics."* (Kamboureli, 112)

In a domestic space that is clearly uneasy with the presence of difference, belonging becomes contingent on ensuring that difference remains categorical in order to prevent it from destabilizing the domestic's parameters.

The text further tempers the destabilizing effects of these incidents by using their child narrators to provide limited, second-hand details of border transgression. The narrative keeps the transnational at bay by keeping their recognition of transgression to a minimum. They imply without fully delving into the potential repercussions of forbidden sexual relations. Badami contains these fears even further with Kamini who vaguely suspects the secret relationship her mother is having with Paul da Costa. Even when the second half of the narrative switches to Saroja's perspective, Badami provides minimal details of the affair with Paul da Costa, dwelling more on the fact that *"I am, after all, a memsahib, and there is a distance to be maintained between us"* (Badami, 233) than on the actual moments of sexual contact. Saroja's border transgression remains an understood tension within the household and the two parts of the narrative. The few moments when they are together take place on the household property where the watchful eyes of the staff keep their interactions within strictly regulated bounds. Moreover, the possibilities of transnational interconnection quickly Badami turn their attention to the impending violence that awaits these transgressive characters. She depicts characters who rail against the naturalized boundaries that constrain them but, in the end, Badami underlines the power of the nation and the community to discipline its unruly subjects. Badami dooms the relationship between Paul and Saroja when Linda Ayah for bodingly reminds her mistress of the fatal consequences of ignoring the hierarchical and divisive society in which she lives: *'"Memsahib, tell me, if you sit in a mortar can you avoid being hit by the pestle?' she asks suddenly, her hands full of tamarind"* (Badami, 234) Saroja is forced to acknowledge her fate with her eventual response, *"Yes baba yes! My head will be pasted and my hand will be smashed by the wheel. Happy?"* (Badami, 235) Saroja resists at first but eventually admits that she has deluded herself into believing that she can overcome the violence of their identity spaces.

The character realizes that the impending end to their transgressive relationship is a sad but necessary part of the maintenance of domestic order. The disorder that their taboo sexual a relationship creates is pleasurable precisely

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because of the expectation that it will be short lived. While the regulations that constrain these characters lives are intolerable, the characters still prefer known borders to the destabilization of the unknown. Saroja sends the controlled household environment into turmoil that must be restored through the removal of Paul da Costa's disruptive presence. Saroja suffocates within her marriage but knows that she must sacrifice her lover if she wishes for domestic stability to prevail. Kamini contrasts Paul da Costa's violation of the rules of membership with her mother's eventual acceptance of the demands of the club and the household:

> *"Ma had learned the unspoken rules of the Railway colony very quickly, for she had Linda Ayah and Ganesh Peon guiding her from the day she came to this life as Dadda's bride. Ma knew, for instance, that although the Inspector of Works was much lower than an officer, he wielded greater power, for he was in charge of maintenance."* (Badami, 121)

Tamarind Mem portrays characters that struggle under domestic identity reproduction and yearn for a solution to reconcile ambiguity but in the end, accept a place within the nation in lieu of the disruptive possibilities of transnational exploration. Badami suppresses transnational possibility until it exists in the shadowy cracks and fissures of their narratives. Like Saroja, who declares *"I shall ship a way, leaving them with memories of an old story-teller a weaver of myths."* (Badami, 29) the transnational eludes the author who keeps Asian Canadian representations innocuous as they reproduce contained ethnic textual commodities.

To conclude it we can say that the text breaks out of constructed borders into the possibilities of the transnational border space for Asian Canadian subjectivity to move to new, more agency-producing possibilities.

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