

The Hero's Walk

by Anita Rau Badami



About the Book

In a small town in India, Sripathi Rao struggles to support his unappreciative family. His wife, though subservient, blames him for refusing to communicate with their daughter Maya, who defied tradition by breaking her engagement to a well-to-do Brahmin and marrying a Caucasian she met in Canada. Then a phone call brings tragedy: Maya and her husband have been killed in an accident leaving Sripathi to be their daughter's guardian. Sripathi travels to Vancouver to bring the child back to India. Nandana has not spoken since she heard about her parents' death. Terrified, she resists her distant grandfather. Filled with guilt about his daughter, Sripathi finds everything in his life falling apart. But circumstances soon change as Nandana unexpectedly begins to bring hope into all their lives.

Discussion Guide

1. Which of the seven main characters--Maya; Sripathi; Nirmala, his wife; Ammayya, the grandmother; Putti, the sister; Nandana, the orphaned girl; and Arun, the son--was your favorite, and why?
2. Sripathi keeps his passion for writing letters to the editor a secret from his wife. Why do you think he does this? What does this secrecy reveal about his character?
3. What was your opinion of Ammayya, the widowed mother of Sripathi? Did you feel that her unkind husband--and his public rejection of her for his mistress--justified her bitterness? Why do you think Ammayya stole things from her own family?
4. After her daughter Maya dies, Nirmala has a terrible argument with her husband, during which she exclaims: "I am tired of behaving myself!" By the end of the book, has Nirmala stopped behaving herself? If so, how?
5. At Sripathi's youthful initiation ceremony, he escorts his mistress out of the hall, and leaves Ammayya and Sripathi in

the celebration hall. Afterward, Sripathi says to himself: "Never would he fail in his duty to his family or subject them to such shame." Has he succeeded? To what does Sripathi feel a sense of duty?

6. Maya is engaged to Prakash, a young Indian man, when she leaves for Canada. But in Canada, she meets and falls in love with Alan, and she breaks the engagement--"I cannot help the way I feel about Alan," she writes by way of explanation. How does her family react to this? Did you feel her argument that she was truly in love with Alan, not Prakash, meant much much to Sripathi and Nirmala? Did "love" justify Maya's change of heart?

7. From Sripathi's balky scooter, to the garbage on the streets, to the showy policemen directing traffic, the reader is given a precisely textured vision of life in the imaginary town of Toturpuram. Why do you think Badami took so much time and care over the details of everyday life? What does this add to your sense of the characters, and to the way they move through life?

8. Women take many different roles in *The Hero's Walk*--from traditional wife to homebound spinster to political leader to career girl on the rise. Did this diversity surprise you? What were your conceptions of women's roles in India before you read this book? What are they now?

9. Throughout most of the book, Sripathi shows disdain for his son, Arun. But in the end, it is Arun who shows Sripathi the sea turtles returning to lay their eggs on the Toturpuram beach, an event that awes Sripathi. How does Arun's knowledge about the sea turtles help to shift Sripathi's opinion of him? What has Sripathi been overlooking about Arun?

10. "The whole business of living, I think, is an act of heroism," says Anita Rau Badami, the book's author. By this definition, there are many acts of heroism in *The Hero's Walk*. Which acts, for you, stand out? Nirmala's helping Putti to marry Gopala, the milkman's son? Arun's social activism? Maya's marriage to a non-Indian? Putti's dutiful behavior to her mother?

Author Bio

Anita Rau Badami was born 1964 in the town of Rourkela in the eastern state of Orissa. Her father, who worked as a mechanical engineer and designed trains, was transferred every two or three years, so that she had a mobile childhood. She grew up in a household where English was the primary language spoken, and where her extended family was fond of telling stories about its own members. She has always loved writing, and sold her first short story for Rs. 75 when she was 18. She earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Madras, and studied journalism in Sophia College, Bombay. She worked as a copywriter for advertising agencies in Bombay, Bangalore and Madras, and wrote stories for children's magazines. She married in 1984, had a son in 1987, and moved to Calgary in 1991.

Her first book, **Tamarind Mem**, is a novel about the relationship between a mother, Saroja, and her daughter, Kamini, who have very different perceptions of a past they both shared. The title of the book, which is set in the railway colonies of India, refers to Saroja, who has been nicknamed after the sour fruit for her acid tongue. Her second book is **The Hero's Walk**.

Anita Rau Badami lives in Vancouver with her family.

Critical Praise

"A WONDERFULLY TEXTURED TALE whose poignant events are imbued with truthfulness . . . Badami joins the ranks of such internationally celebrated authors as Michael Ondaaje."

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Publication Date: February 26, 2002

Paperback: 359 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books

ISBN-10: 0345450922

ISBN-13: 9780345450920