

THE OVERFLOW OF CONTAINED EMOTIONS IN ANITA RAU BADAMI'S *THE HERO'S WALK*: AN ANALYSIS OF AFFECTS THROUGH THE IMAGERY OF WATER

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ABSTRACT

In this article, Anita Rau Badami's second novel, *The Hero's Walk* (2000), is analysed through the perspective of the field of affects. This analysis examines how the author, through the imagery of water, presents the non-physical reality of feelings and emotions. Water is the most receptive of the elements, a source of continuous, intimate and transitory metamorphoses. In the form of storms, floods, and other types of natural phenomena related to this element, it is possible to observe how Badami makes use of a metaphorical conceptualisation of intense emotional states related to the psychological trauma that arises from the loss of a loved one. For the purpose of analysis, several important sources in the field of affect theory and water symbolism will be considered. Special emphasis will also be placed on the body (and the house as an integral extension of it) as a receptacle for contained emotions in the processing of pain.

KEYWORDS: Anita Rau Badami; grief; water symbolism; emotions and metaphor; the body as container; guilt; dirt

RESUMEN *El desbordamiento de emociones contenidas en *The Hero's Walk*, de Anita Rau Badami: análisis de los afectos a través de la imagería del agua*

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la segunda novela de Anita Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk* (2000) desde el ámbito de los afectos, estudiando cómo la autora, a través de la imagería del agua, presenta la realidad no física de los sentimientos y las emociones. El agua es el más receptivo de los elementos, fuente de continuas metamorfosis íntimas y transitorias. En forma de tormentas, inundaciones y otros tipos de fenómenos naturales relacionados con este elemento, observamos cómo Badami hace uso de una conceptualización metafórica de intensos estados emocionales relacionados con el trauma psicológico derivado de la pérdida de un ser querido. Para el análisis se tendrán en cuenta diversas fuentes de gran relevancia en el campo de la teoría de los afectos y el simbolismo del agua como forma de expresar las emociones. Asimismo, se hará también especial hincapié en el cuerpo (y la casa como extensión del mismo) como receptáculo de emociones contenidas en el encausamiento del dolor.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Anita Rau Badami; dolor; simbolismo del agua; emociones y metáforas; cuerpo como receptáculo; culpa; suciedad

Introduction

India-born writer Anita Rau Badami (1961-) is a widely acclaimed author of the South Asian Canadian diaspora, along with other notable literary voices such as M. S. Vassanji, Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Shyam Selvadurai and Rupri Kaur. Based in Canada since 1991, Badami's novels are frequently centred on Indian family life and the exploration of innermost feelings and obligations. She often deals with different emotional states such as mental turmoil, repression, guilt, anger, uprootedness, nostalgia, and moral obligations, e.g. duty and responsibility. Furthermore, in her condition as an Indo Canadian writer, she captures the existing dichotomies between the cultures of India and Canada by creating identities struggling to achieve individuality in the fragile transnational space of overlapping cultures. The protagonists of her novels are often characters who carry heavy emotional burdens related to social, family, and gender expectations, either in India or Canada.

This paper aims to analyse Badami's novel *The Hero's Walk* (2000) through an affective lens. Focus is centred on how the author, through the use of water imagery, reveals the nonphysical reality of feelings and emotions. Under the form of storms, floods, and other kinds of natural, watery phenomena, Badami creates a metaphorical conceptualization of intensely emotional states related to trauma, i.e. the presence of a boiling passivity or an overwhelming lack of control in moments when her characters undergo extreme stress. For the purpose of analysis, use will be made of the application of distinct affect sources regarding how humans convey emotions through metaphor.

In the affective domain, several points should be considered when trying to understand how emotions work and operate. First, affections and emotions belong to an ineffable world of ongoing movement and transformation that Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari place in the middle of things, that is, in an immanent becoming, resulting from complex assemblages in which bodies (human and non-human) and worlds come into existence (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Gatens 2000). However, exactly how is the indivisible relationship between bodies and emotions generated? Affects are associated with intense emotional states or forces¹ that bodies experience when they meet and interrelate. That is, affects emerge from a confrontation or, as Seigworth & Gregg put it: "in the midst of *inbetween-ness*, in the capacity to act and be acted upon" (2010: 1). That being said, the second question that arises is: through what agency are

¹ Describing emotions as forces is especially indicated when these are related to traumatic episodes (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010: 2).

affects and emotions linguistically conveyed if, as already stated, they possess such an ineffable nature? According to Lakoff and Johnson, emotions and feelings are shapeless internal forces that acquire cognitive shape and visibility through metaphor (1980: 29). When such internal forces are so traumatic as to destabilise a person, emotions can metaphorically be represented through fluids that, in extreme cases, may cause the individual to overflow (Pérez-Rull, 2001: 181). Lakoff offers an example of this in the following idiomatic expression: “I’m trying to keep my head above water” (1999: 192). In this frame of reference, the individual is then understood as a container where internal thoughts, beliefs, and emotions are generated (Pérez-Rull, 2001: 181). However, are we referring to the same thing when using the terms *affects* and *emotions*? While for some theoreticians, *affect* is a sort of umbrella term that comprises emotions, feelings and all kinds of affective narratives (Bladow and Ladino, 2018: 5), in his work *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), cultural theorist Brian Massumi maintains that *affect* and *emotion* “follow different logics and pertain to different orders” and concludes that *emotion* “is the most intense...expression” of *affect* (35). Considering that the novel under analysis concerns psychological trauma, which is defined by Esther Giller as that state in which a traumatic event or situation “overwhelms the individual’s ability to cope” with daily life (1999), this article will focus on the study of affects expressed in the form of emotions and feelings. The intensity of human emotions experienced after a traumatic incident, like the loss of a daughter or a mother, and the difficulties or impediments in channelling grief will be explored.

Patrilineal System in the Rao Family: The Weight of Familiar Expectations

The Hero’s Walk (2000), Badami’s second novel, is set in the imaginary township of Toturpuram, in India’s Bay of Bengal. In this work, the author authentically portrays the turbulent domestic life of the Rao family and examines the rigid constraints imposed by caste, family, and gender expectations. The Rao family is comprised of Sripathi (the head of the family and the protagonist), his wife Nirmala, his mother Ammayya, his unmarried sister Putti and his son Arun. The eldest daughter, Maya, who lives in Canada, dies unexpectedly in a car accident, along with her husband Alan, leaving behind their seven-year-old child, Nandana. Maya’s death marks a turning point in the novel. The floodgates are opened and the Rao family are plunged into a horrifying prison of grief and guilt. The effect these intense emotions have on the family’s day-to-day activities prevent its members from leading a normal life.

As an established institutional structure with its own rules, there is no doubt that the family sets a fixed series of expectations on others. The family has been the dominating institution in India, from both an individual and communal perspective, since ancient times. Indeed, as Sonawat states, it is a “major source of nurturance, emotional bonding and socialisation, and a link between continuity and change” (2001:177-178). Thus, going against the grain, especially when it comes to family matters, entails having to deal with emotional tensions that are difficult to bear. It is also important to note that most Hindus adhere to the patrilineal family system, as observed in this novel. And while it cannot be denied that there has been a restructuring and reorientation of male and female roles in contemporary Indian society, social and family expectations continue to play an important role, especially for women (Dhawan 2005).

The Hero's Walk, conceived of as “a tale of domestic politics” (*Vancouver Sun*, 2000:111), tells the story of a Hindu family embroiled in intense and challenging affective relationships. Ongoing conflicts arising from disappointments mark the lives of its characters. These disappointments often stem from the difference between what is expected (from a social, caste, gender and family perspective) versus what actually happens. As Professor Sara Ahmed reminds us, specifically concerning social expectations, an interesting aspect of emotions is that they are “dependent on relations of power” (2014: 4). As head of the Rao family, Sripathi is driven by and even obsessed with duty. As the novel reads: “Duty and honour, these were the twin hounds that dogged Sripathi's footsteps, and their hungry mouths gaped up at him always” (98). This obsession is a result of the strong social pressures he suffers as a member of a patrilineal system. In Sonawat's words, “in a patriarchal family set up, all male members, that is husband, elder brother and father, perform duties like decision making for the rest of the family, and their physical and moral protection” (2001: 180). Although this is precisely what transpires for this character, it is nonetheless worth analysing his role in the family in more profound terms in order to understand the affective evolution that takes place.

Sripathi is a man who believes that feelings should be controlled. As the novel says, he “did not believe in ostentatious displays--of possessions or of emotions” (Badami, 2000: 3). His life is marked by fixed routines, most of which are based on his conception of responsibility and social and family conventions. He has serious problems financially supporting his relatives and in assuming his obligations as head of the family and household. Consequently, he experiences terrible guilt. As a father, he is used to being obeyed and although he defines himself as “too ordinary to have secrets” (Badami, 2000: 9), he does guard one secret: he has

hidden the fact that he regularly writes letters to newspaper and magazine editors. This occupation, as it is more than mere entertainment for him, allows him to feel freer and to express his “deepest thoughts--those blatant, embarrassing emotions that he was so reluctant to display in speech or action” (Badami, 2000: 8). Signing all his letters with the pseudonym *Pro Bono Publico*, he is very proud of his secret self. Through this mask, Sripathi feels confident in vehemently criticizing any aspect of society, basically concerning government corruption. He feels like a “crusader, but one who trie[s] to address the problems of the world with pen and ink instead of sword and gun and fist” (Badami, 2000: 9). As *Pro Bono Publico*, Sripathi is everything he dares not to be in his public life: a passionate, righteous, and courageous man, who does not mind expressing his feelings and denouncing those aspects of society with which he disagrees.

When Maya leaves India to continue her studies abroad, she is already engaged to an Indian man. Everything is in place for the arranged marriage that Sripathi has planned. However, she falls in love in Canada and instead marries there, much to her father’s dismay. He is angered that she dares to go against his expectations. According to Ahmed, in the world of emotions,” [t]o think the genealogy of expectation is to think about *promises* and how they point us somewhere, which is “the where” from which we expect so much” (emphasis added; 2010: 41). In *The Hero’s Walk*, these “promises” are cultural rather than personal. Sripathi does not accept any other possibility outside the canons of tradition. As for “the where”, it is not only related to a particular place and culture with its, sometimes, immutable customs and rituals, but also to gender. As noted above, most Hindu families adhere to a patriarchal model of society. Therefore, as a Hindu woman, Maya’s marriage to a white man is an act of disobedience and rebellion, one which is seen as a serious misdemeanour in the Rao family. In addition, the generational conflict between father and daughter is also registered as a cultural conflict between India and Canada, Bengal and Vancouver respectively. Each culture makes different demands on individuals. While Sripathi remains attached to tradition, Maya has adapted to a different world by living in Canada. The cancellation of the wedding in India causes Sripathi and Nirmala great disappointment; the relationship between Maya and her parents cools, especially with regard to Sripathi.

In order to understand the world of emotions in which the characters are involved, another aspect worth mentioning is the house where the Rao family lives. The house acts in many senses as a symbolic extension of the family: their sorrows, emotions, worries, conflicts are reflected in its deteriorated state. The Raos reside in the Big House, built more than eighty

years earlier by Sripathi's grandfather on the so-called Brahmin street "for the number of people of that caste" (Badami, 2000: 5). However, when a new government came into power, the ruling party banned the streets from having any name associated with caste and it started calling it simply "street". The dilapidated house, and its increasing decadence, is described by Badami as an expansion of the human body. As the novel registers, since Sripathi's father's death, the house had fallen into decay

into a sort of careless disrepair and looked as if it was tired of the life within its belly on the seething, restless street outside [...]. The paint had curled away from the decorative railings leaving them cratered by rust. The door had lost its gleam, and the beautiful carvings were now anonymous nubs of wood. Cracks ran across the tiled floors like varicose veins on an old woman's legs, and it was years since the walls had seen a fresh coat of whitewash or paint. Most of the windows could not be opened anymore, so much had they swollen in the moist heat of the place, and the brilliance of the glass was dimmed by layers of grease and dirt". (Badami, 2000: 6)

The same weariness and decay described in the quotation above will be reflected in the emotional development of the characters, particularly after Maya's death. A decay that is conveyed in the novel via recurrent allusions to stagnant water, excrement, impurities and bad smells. In the last section of my analysis, I shall return to the idea of the body as a container.

Water as a Metamorphic Recipient of Turbulent Emotions

As mentioned elsewhere, Badami uses water imagery to portray the intense flow of emotions that the Rao family undergoes following Maya's death. Water is an ever-present element in the novel, not only in the multiple references the reader encounters, but also in the titles of some of the chapters. Thus, Chapter 1 is named "By the Edge of the Sea," Chapter 3, "The Storm", Chapter 21, "The Flood", and, finally, Chapter 22, "The Heart of the Sea". In the sequencing of these titles, and more importantly, in their content, the tension increases as the members of the Rao family suffer extreme emotional distress, creating an effect similar to that of a pressure cooker on the verge of exploding. In this sense, Pérez-Rull explains that, when traumatic experiences occur, emotions act as "internal forces moving inside people exerting some pressure from the inside" (2001-2002: 181). In understanding the body as a container of emotions, it is important to remember not only the symbolic dimension of water, but also the role that this element plays in our organism. Indeed, our life and our body are conditioned by water, where sixty per cent of the adult human body being composed of it. Besides, of all the elements, water is considered the most receptive, intimate and transitory and metamorphic substance (Bachelard 2006). In *The Hero's Walk*, by alluding to aquatic natural phenomena,

Badami reflects the inner emotional conflicts of her characters, demonstrating that matter and the human do not belong to different realms. As Cohen and Duckert affirm: “there is no ‘out-’ to which things are sourced but always a wherein, with whom, wherefore” (2015: 5).

The Hero’s Walk starts with Maya’s death. As previously mentioned, the relationship between father and daughter is virtually non-existent after Maya married in America without Sripathi’s consent. Nine years pass from the moment that Maya marries and Sripathi receives the phone call announcing her passing. The call from Canada comes during the water supply, so the whole family is busy collecting this precious liquid. In Toturpuram, fresh water is only available once a week and for a couple of hours. When, after several failed attempts, Sripathi manages to answer the phone and receives the terrible news, he is completely shaken, unable to move his body. At that moment, he felt “a roaring wave of shock crashed over [him]” (Badami, 2000: 32). The moment coincides in time with Ammayya’s inability to turn off the tap, which causes the reservoir to flood:

A long distance away Sripathi could hear water running, cascading down the sides of the cement tank in Ammayya’s bathroom [...]. He heard his mother’s querulous voice calling him. “Sripathi [...] the tank is overflowing and I can’t turn the pipe off. What are you doing? Come quickly, big mess is becoming [...]. [H]e imagined water flooding the floor, snaking out from under the door, spreading silver into the bedroom. (Badami, 2000: 33)

The gushing water and Sripathi’s inability to move can be interpreted as the metamorphic articulation of the overwhelming emotion and sense of guilt Sripathi feels when he learns of his daughter’s death. Especially after a traumatic experience, “[f]eelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations and dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with” (Ahmed, 2010: 39). This idea is applicable to the protagonist of the novel. As I have already noted, Sripathi acts and behaves according to the cultural burdens of his milieu, predominantly related to duty, to which he feels bound. Consequently, all his public and family enterprises are marked by rigid behaviour, regardless of the fact they often result in failure.

This obstinacy is especially evident in the chapter entitled “The Storm” (31- 48) which recounts Sripathi and Nirmala’s reaction to Maya’s death. The chapter narrates a storm of reproaches, accusations, repressed hatreds and terrible, unbearable grief that erupts into anger and violence. The first to explode is Nirmala, who, without warning, loses control and starts beating Sripathi in the chest, shouting: “Your fault, your fault, your fault! You killed my daughter. You drove her away from me! You! You! You! (Badami, 2000: 35). Emotions

undoubtedly arise from exposure to certain situations (Pérez-Rull, 2001-2002: 179). This exposure is usually involuntary and unexpected, such as receiving the news that one's daughter has died in a traffic accident. In explaining the essence of affect and how it acts and transforms over time and through unexpected events, Seigworth and Gregg point out that "[a]t once intimate and impersonal, affect *accumulates* across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between 'bodies'" (2010: 2). Thus, when a close and intimate relationship, such as that between a parent and a daughter, breaks down and one of them dies suddenly, the pain of loss may be even greater than in a less abrupt situation, because of the impossibility of repairing such interruption in the relationship. Indeed, the mourning period would probably last longer because of having to deal with the feeling of guilt. Therefore, Maya's death and that of her husband trigger a "deluge" of changes that affect the Rao family in India because, "by dying [Maya] had stolen from [Sripathi] the opportunity to forgive and be forgiven" (Badami, 2000: 137). Though he "struggled to control his inchoate feelings --rage and despair, sorrow" [...] slowly, guilt grew in him like a balloon" (Badami, 2000: 39, 41), permeating every single second of his daily life.

Guilt also dwells in Nirmala's mind after her daughter's death. A woman guided by tradition and superstition, Nirmala never understood why her 22-year-old daughter was going to study in America instead of getting married: "This scholarship and all is fine, but more important is marriage" (Badami, 2000: 98). As the prototypically dutiful Indian wife, whenever Maya tries to visit her family in India, Nirmala gives her the run-around in an attempt not to disobey her husband, something she deeply regrets following the accident. Thus, in the case of both Sripathi and Nirmala, a feeling of guilt has settled in their minds and resonates incessantly like a mantra. And often, the way they find to free themselves of such an emotional burden is through reproach, that is, they release themselves by blaming the other for what they have done. In this regard, Elaine Scarry observes that individual pain is often elusive and remote in the perception of the other. It acts as "some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an *invisible geography* that, however portentous, has no reality" (emphasis added; 1985: 3). This ungraspability of affect that seems to belong to "an invisible geography" is verbalised by the main protagonists on different occasions. Pain invades the body and manifests itself as an awkward, intangible presence, as in the example cited above: "slowly, guilt grew in him like a balloon" (Badami, 2000: 41). Its presence hurts to the point of making breathing difficult. Yet it cannot be controlled, nor can it be replaced by something else or made to disappear:

“[Sripathi] thought vaguely that he needed to eat something, that if he filled his body with food, there would be no room left for grief” (Badami, 2000: 42). And even though the pain of loss prevents him from living and his wife comes to think that Sripathi has become a man of stone, he still thinks that if he externalises the agony he feels, he will not be able to survive: “I have not turned to stone, he wanted to say. I am full of tears, but if I let go I will not be able to carry on walking this hard path to the end of my life. Control is everything now” (Badami, 2000: 173).

As the novel progresses, and despite the continued presence of the body as a container of repressed emotions, references to the element of water now re-emerge with a more positive meaning: as a transformative axis. Maya and Alan’s daughter, Nandana, who is left in the care of her grandparents and goes to live in India, has much to do with this. Nandana is a seven-year-old Canadian girl whom her maternal grandparents have never met. As a new member in the Rao family, she is going to provoke a different set of emotional reactions in them. In Sripathi, for example, the girl will become the constant painful reminder of the deficient or virtually absent relationship he had with his deceased daughter. With regard to Nirmala, due to the difficulties she has placing Nandana’s needs above her own in order to help her granddaughter adapt to her new life, she will start questioning her role as a traditional, obedient housewife. Nonetheless, before these important changes begin to take place, extreme situations emerge in the novel, predominantly related to the intense affective state in which Nandana finds herself after losing her parents.

The contrast in cultures and subsequent cultural shock that Nandana experiences is overwhelming. India is utterly alien to her. The city, the language, the food, the customs, the people are so different that the girl, together with the trauma resulting from her loss, cannot help but feel like a fish out of water and ends up losing her ability to speak. To make matters worse, she is also harassed by the neighbouring girls, and is kidnapped by an old lady who has lost her mental equilibrium as a result of having lost her own daughter years before. At the most desperate moment, when the old woman’s husband finally frees her, Nandana finally realizes that her parents are dead and regains her ability to speak. It is at this point in the novel that Badami once again uses a metaphor related to water. Nandana starts chattering “as if a dam had broken inside her” (Bandami, 2000: 317). It is possible to observe in this and earlier examples from the novel that, as pointed out by Lone Bertelsen & Andrew Murphie (2010: 140), “[e]motion involves physical states” which is conveyed through the utilization of figurative language. In his work *Metaphor and Emotion* (2000), Kövecses observes that this is

especially the case when it comes to universal or master emotions, which he relates to force (17). Thus, it is possible to notice how Badami adopts the use of figurative language in *The Hero's Walk*, primarily related to fluids, that realistically illustrates the emotional outbursts suffered by the characters and how they try to adapt to the affective changes imposed by the circumstances of their lives.

A frequent device used by writers and artists in works where emotions are implied is to allude to different atmospheric phenomena, normally those related to the elements of water and fire. Through metaphor, these are used to express those repressed and intense emotions that are so difficult to articulate linguistically. Thus, Pérez-Rull explains that, “[w]e come to know our thoughts and feelings by analogy to the physical world” (2001-2002: 179). In the final chapters, specifically from chapter 18, “The Way Home”, through to closing chapter 22, “The Heart of the Sea” (297-359), Badami utilises the literary device of pathetic fallacy to symbolically illustrate the mood and affective state in which the characters find themselves. Torrential rain and cyclonic activity intensify unceasingly, which leads to torrential downpours. In a way, the rains outside embody all that has not been mourned, that is, all the emotions that have not been externalised: “The house smelled of damp clothes that had been strung up in almost every room. Nothing dried, not even the thinnest of cotton blouses. It was as if the rain had percolated into every pore of the house” (Badami, 2000: 325). The arrival of December thereby coincides with the moment in which the characters undergo a catharsis. The body becomes a receptacle of emotions in which “the loss of emotional control is the explosion of the container. As a result of the explosion, what is inside comes out” (Pérez-Rull, 2001-2002: 184). In this way, in *The Hero's Walk's* outcome, the rain seems to activate all the emotional pain, tensions, and conflicts that had previously plagued the lives of the characters.

In the final part of the novel, references to dirt, excrement and foul-smelling water are manifold. While such descriptions may, of course, be frequent in describing the consequences of natural disasters, in a psychological context, they may also figuratively allude to part of the painful process that individuals undergo in dealing with the channelling of negative emotions. In the penultimate chapter, “The Flood” (335-351), rainwater combined with excrement that has been released from a ruptured septic tank is washed into The Big House while the Raos sleep. Chaos ensues as they all struggle to get out of the house, as best they can, to avoid drowning in their own excrement. Again, this moment of despair also echoes painful memories of the past, as is evident from the following dialogue between Putti, Sripathi's unmarried sister and her tyrannical mother: “Ammayya, there's kakka in the water and all kinds of other dirty

things,” said Putti brutally, hating her mother for clinging to her, for having sucked her life away [...]” (Badami, 2000: 342). The detailed references to dirt serve as metaphorical reflections of what lies within, that is, repressed feelings, disappointments, lack of forgiveness and pain that has been stuck in time. In this vein, Cohen & Duckert note that the elements, in general, and water in particular, “are the outside that is already within, the very stuff of the cosmos, home, body, and story” (Cohen & Duckert, 2015: 13). In addition, through the description of this unpleasant experience, Badami offers a thoughtful reflection on the caste system or the disparity of social status between different people when they are hit by a catastrophe of this magnitude. Therefore, what is a cathartic if an horrific act of revenge for Putti against her mother, becomes an indelible punishment for Ammayya. Her contact with the dirty water makes her realise that, as a Brahmin, she will be damned for eternity, as she has been unable to remain pure in life:

“I thought you said it was the sea,” wailed Ammayya. “Now you are telling me that I am walking in shit water?” Her skin crawled at the sly touch of the liquid. “Ayyo deva! Ayyo swami! Ayyo-ayyo-ayyo!” she howled. She was polluted for eternity. She was soiled for ever. Nothing could wash away this stink, this putrefaction, this muck that only the toilet cleaner ought to touch [...]. “What treachery is this? What have I done to deserve this? Putti, are you sure? she begged. “Can’t you smell it? [Putti says] [...] “Whose is that?” Ammayya asked faintly. “What do you mean *whose*, Ammayya?” demanded Putti. Now her anger had been replaced by contempt for her mother [...]. “All the drains on this road are connected”. (Badami, 2000: 342)

As the popular ecocritic Timothy Morton sustains: “When you flush the toilet, it is now painfully evident that *away* is just an idea in your head. Whatever you flushed does not go *away*--it goes into the wastewater treatment plant to be recycled or it might go into the local ocean” (2015: 278). This humorous certainty makes us reflect upon the artificial nature of establishing differences between races, social classes or castes. After all, the existing connectedness between all things and people, even the dirt and waste we produce, make us equal.

Furthermore, in these final chapters of the novel, a different symbolic dimension of water becomes apparent: water as a symbol of the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one, that is, water as a sign of purification and transformation. According to Cirlot, a flood or deluge, like a catastrophe, can never be represented as final because “it takes place under ...the

regenerating properties of water [...]. [It leaves] the way open for the re-emergence of life [...]; every fall of rain is tantamount to purification and regeneration, which in turn imply the basic idea of punishment and completion” (2002: 79). As a result, at this point in the novel all members of the Rao family undergo major changes. Starting with Sripathi, it is possible to observe how the selfish and sexist attitude that he once held towards his family gradually gives way to a more sensitive and mature attitude and consequently he is a changed man. Nirmala, who typified the traditional and obedient Indian woman, one who was submissive and incapable of making her own decisions and always at the service of her husband and children, undergoes a refreshing change. She leaves behind the burdens of duty and obedience and becomes independent and decisive. Sripathi's sister, Putti, marries a lower-caste neighbour, rebelling, in doing so, not only against her mother but, being a Brahmin, also against the obligations of the caste system. In the case of Ammayya, we see a figure who embodies the tyrannical mother prototype, a woman utterly obsessed with caste, who makes life miserable for everyone, finally dying. Nandana, on the other hand, becomes fully integrated into the Rao family, and Sripathi's youngest son, Arun, a social activist, who, in a sense, represents the public self that Sripathi would want and has not achieved, establishes a fluid and cordial relationship with his father that did not exist before. So, all indications are that the Rao family's life will become more peaceful.

Conclusion

The Hero's Walk depicts water as an ambivalent symbol. On the one hand, water provokes the unleashing of chaos in Brahmin street, cutting off the electricity supply and plunging the town into a “stinking, liquid darkness” (Badami, 2000: 2). On the other hand, water acts as a purifying agent, remover of sorrows and emotional burdens, destroyer of old selves and creator of new ones. It is through this latter meaning of water that all the social categories of duty, obedience, patriarchal behaviour and caste traditions, together with the rigid system of family expectations that the Raos followed collapse, becoming nothing more than hollow entities when life and survival come into play. In *The Hero's Walk*, all the references to pollution, bad smells and stagnant water not only allude to literal descriptions of the consequences that storms and floods can cause in India and elsewhere, but also serve as metaphorical examples of how inhibited emotions become imprisoned over time when they are not addressed. As Morton claims, “there is no *away*, [because] waste goes somewhere” (2015: 283), emotions can

stagnate and be transformed into something else. The novel addresses how we humans develop social masks and self-defence systems when feeling threatened by our own emotions and how “we control and lose control over emotions in the same way we control and lose control over certain physical forces” (Pérez-Rull, 2001-2002: 191). Water as a metaphor acts in this novel as the triggering mechanism for the release of blocked emotions, but it also functions as an agent of transformation. In *The Hero's Walk*, repressed thoughts and feelings work, then, as destabilised pressures that Badami represents as forces of nature.

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