

Representation of Cultural Patterns and Women Suffering in the Novel The Mango Season by Amulya Malladi

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ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*. Culture is considered to be important for a person. Every individual gives priority to their own culture. Culture is the identity of every individual. The novel *The Mango Season* focuses on the sufferings of women. The protagonist of the novel Priya, grows up in an orthodox Indian family. She goes to America for her educational enrichment where she falls in love with a black American. The whole story spins around Priya who is torn between her love and the cultural values of her family. This paper explores the cultural conflicts between the Modern and the Traditional mindset of people. The archaic views of the older generation contrast with that of the younger generation. The younger generation wants to live a modern way of lifestyle but the older generation wants to live a life according to its culture. They hesitate to accept the modern lifestyle and culture. The cultural conflicts are not only regarding the Eastern and Western ideologies but also about the cultural patterns of our society. This paper also analyzes the cultural displacement and struggles of women for their freedom and identity in the family system of contemporary society. The woman character in this novel strives hard for empowerment and emancipation from the cultural conflicts.

Keywords:

Modern, Traditional, cultural conflicts, women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Amulya Malladi is a good raconteur. Her novels expose the better and bitter side of human life, effortlessly. She pursued her Bachelor's degree in electronics engineering from Osmania University, Hyderabad. Amulya Malladi's father is an army officer so she has travelled and lived in various places in India. She observes many cultures and different people from various places and their characters. She also sees the lifestyle of women in every place. Her writings reflect the women in contemporary society. She has written eight novels *A Breath of Fresh Air*, *The Mango Season*, *Serving Crazy with Curry*, *The Sound of Language*, *Song of the Cuckoo Bird*, *A House for Happy Mothers*, *The Copenhagen Affair* and *The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You*. Amulya Malladi's novel mainly focuses on the issues of generation gap, conflict between modernism and tradition, and the role of women in the family, sufferings of women in the patriarchal society, women identity and cultural displacement.

The present paper focuses on the novel *The Mango Season* with the main thrust on the struggles of the protagonist Priya. It throws light on the cultural shock and dilemma faced by Priya. *The Mango Season* is a realistic piece of art about the cultural conflicts of a modern woman Priya in Indian traditional family setting. Priya belongs to a Telugu Brahmin family. The

novel mainly focuses on the conflict between modern and traditional values. The younger generation has adapted the modern outlook in its lifestyle but the older generation still holds on to its traditional values. The present paper deals with the cultural conflicts. It is not only about the east and west but also about the cultural patterns of the society.

Culture plays an important role in the life of every human being. Everyone is shaped and structured by culture and tradition. The culture and tradition are considered to be the prominent factors that play an important role in the family system. Everyone preserves the family culture and traditional values and promotes it to the next generation so that it can be considered a mark of identity for them. India has different cultures and religions that have a deep ancestral heritage and traditional values. According to C.K.Prahalad, "Modern India is a country of very diverse cultures with many languages, religions and traditions. Children begin by coping and learning to accept and assimilate in this diversity"(interview). For generations, Indian society has had a prevailing tradition of arranged marriage. Even today the majority of people have their marriages arranged by their parents. Even parents consider it as their unique privilege.

Women are oriented towards modernization, they are educated and empowered but still when it comes to the cultural patterns of the society they are torn

between the culture and their personal choices in life. Marriage is culture oriented in India. When the parents select the spouse for their daughter or son they take care to match them perfectly with regard to equal status, religion, caste, language, culture and family tradition. The words of elders are abided by the younger generation in the Indian family setting. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, the former Prime Minister of India, "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women". Even though India has scaled many heights in various fields, male domination, inequality of women does prevail in the society.

This paper deals with the cultural clash and cultural displacement faced by Priya and other women characters such as Sowmya and Neelima. It focuses on the pathetic plight of women in the orthodox Indian family. Even though the women characters namely Priya, Neelima and Sowmya are educated they suffered due to traditional lifestyle in a so called modern Indian society. Even when women are educated and empowered they are still dominated by the patriarchy and culture. It affects the life of women, their identity and freedom. Through the characters in the novels, the author deftly explores the mindset of modern and traditional people. The younger generation changes from their traditional way and prefers the modern way of life but the members of the older generation still hold on to the traditional lifestyle.

Priya Rao was born in an Indian orthodox family. She was sent to America for higher studies. Her Indian parents are scared that the western world would transform their daughter. Her family imposes a lot of restrictions on her. They forbid her from eating beef because the cow is considered sacred in India. She should not get too friendly with the foreign people, and she should not trust them. For the parents of the Indian society the race of the people is important even in making friendship with them. They remember her about what the English did to Indians. The older people think that the British are not a good people. They further advised her, "cook at home; there is no need to eat the outside food and waste money, save money, the last and most important instruction for Priya is not to find herself some foreign man to marry"(Malladi13).

Priya moves to America where she experiences a totally different culture and lifestyle. She started to adapt to the new culture slowly. She finds it difficult to live in the country which has totally alienated her. This work shows the two different worlds. In America Priya falls in love with a black American named Nick Collins. They both get engaged and start a live-in relationship. Priya was brought up in an orthodox Telugu Brahmin family so she feels guilty about breaking the trust of her family. Priya is an educated modern woman but she is not able to break the trust of her parents and her grandfather by revealing the truth that she is engaged to an American man.

After seven years Priya returns to India to tell her family that she is engaged to an American Nicholas Collins but she does not have the courage to tell this to her family especially to her grandfather. In India the reality is totally different. Priya's parents eagerly await her arrival because they want Priya to get married to Adarsh, who belongs to the same caste and culture. Priya loves an American. It is not the kind of happy news which her parents expect in India. Being a Telugu Brahmin she should only marry a Telugu Brahmin boy, anything else would create disrespect to the family. Nick's mother accepts Priya; she does not bother about her son's love for an Indian girl. She likes Priya and she always sends many gifts to Priya to show her love. Cultural displacement reflects in Priya after she came to India. Priya does not like India after returning from America. The roads are not proper. When she went to the mango market with her mother there was a lot of pollution and the market was not hygienic, after experiencing life in America for seven years Priya does not like India. She hates the summer heat, especially her mother's restrictions regarding her clothing style. Priya lived here from her childhood but a few years apart from homeland made her feel disconnected. She distances herself from her own culture and home. Priya used to enjoy the summer in her grandfather's house. Earlier summer for Priya was all about mangoes and the gatherings of family.

Priya is not able to reveal the truth of her love life because her family still holds on to the cultural values that women should marry the man from their same caste and culture. Moreover it should be arranged by the parents. Not only Priya, other women characters like Neelima and Sowmya also suffer from the same pang in the family. Priya's uncle Anand falls in love with Neelima and marries her but the marriage is not accepted by the family. Neelima is not considered a member of the family. She is not treated properly by the family members because she belongs to the Maharashtrian culture. Neelima is a Brahmin girl but she is a Maharashtrian Brahmin. So Anand's family did not accept the marriage even though both are of the same caste. She belongs to a different state, her culture and language is different. In the case of Priya, Nick is an American. This frightens Priya and prevents her from telling about her love for Nick.

In Indian family settings women are treated as subordinates. It is stipulated that they should marry only the boy whom their parents choose. They associate arranged marriage with family tradition. Even when modern women study abroad, their parents expect them to marry the boy of their choice.

The plight of Priya is similar to the one found in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*. In this novel the protagonist Feroza went to America for her higher studies. There she fell in love with an American boy named David. But in India her parents' Cyrus and

Zareen did not accept her love because David belongs to a different culture. Both the protagonists are educated and modernized women but when it comes to making major decisions in life,, they are torn between their cultural values and the love of their life. In spite of being educated, women are not in the position to make their own decisions in life.

Another character in the novel, Sowmya who is not married till thirty seven is humiliated by her own family members. She is an educated woman but her father, who is also the grandfather of Priya, does not let her work when she gets a job offer. She is always in the kitchen cooking for the family. She wears only a sari which she does not like. She feels uncomfortable. She likes to wear salwar, wants to go out and see the world and she wants to go for a job to lead an independent life but her father does not let her out. Women are restricted in the name of culture in the patriarchal society in the name of culture. Priya inspires Sowmya and she also starts to speak out. Sowmya decides to meet the man, whom her father has fixed for her to marry. She meets him and lays down conditions about going for a job and he also accepts that. From a voiceless woman Sowmya emerges into a voiced woman. She decides to stand up for her life.

Priya finally had the courage to tell her family about Nick. She tells her family that she is engaged to an American. It comes as a huge shock to Priya's family. Everyone is hurt and Priya's mother slapped her out of anger. Her grandfather says "I will not accept it, Priya. If you marry this man, then you are not my family" (Malladi125). Priya's father also does not support her and disapproves of her decision. He says, "Marrying someone who does not understand your culture, your roots, your traditions, it will not work" (Malladi120). No one in the elder generation supports Priya's decision, however the younger generation of the family accepts Priya's decision but they are not in the position to make a decision. They want Priya to marry a nice Indian boy but Priya is stubborn in her decision to marry Nick. The elders still hold on to the cultural and traditional values. They consider it more important than the happiness of their children. Priya told her father that Nick makes her happy. But he did not support Priya's decision and he says, "Probably in a few years, maybe, but right now, I am very angry with you and I am very hurt, but I don't hate you. I am your father, I will always love you" (Malladi121).

In this novel *The mango season* each chapter begins with a recipe of south India. Malladi uses food as a deeper structure for the novel. What kind of situation the chapter is dealt with is reflected in the food recipe like warmth, anger, happiness and sadness. When the situation is angry the cooking ingredients also reflect that. Chapter after chapter, the tension increases for Priya, so does the nature of the recipe. In the three chapters where Priya conveys to her parents that she is

in love with Nick the situation seems to be anger and the ingredients of the recipe also reflect that like red and green chilli, ginger, they make a spicy mango pickle. The recipes themselves convey the situation of the chapter.

Indian parents very often enforce their wishes on their children, so does the culture of arranged marriage. In India the opposition to love marriage is violent and the opposition still prevails in contemporary society on the basis of different caste, religion, language and culture. But in the western countries the parents do not restrict their children from making their life choices. In today's modern society women are not cooped up in the kitchen, they go for a job, they go abroad for their studies but still there is a hiatus, it needs to be filled in the society. When it comes to marriage the opposition for love marriage is high. They still hold back the women from making their life choice in the name of culture and cultural patterns. Women do not have the right to choose the life they like in terms of their education, marriage and job because of the cultural patterns in the society. For society, culture and family values, women should adjust their life which they do not like. They are torn between the cultural values and the choices of their life.

The mango season is a beautiful trip to the soul of women and shows the reality of contemporary Indian society. Women try to find their place and identity in society. Malladi has portrayed her women characters as stronger. The characters in the novel reflect contemporary Indian society. Priya brings empowerment to her life and also in the life of other women. Priya stays stronger until her parents accept her marriage with Nick. This novel reflects the joy and sadness of human life. The reality of the Indian society is effortlessly conveyed. People are not created by culture, culture is created by people.

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