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Cultural Conflicts and the Empowerment in Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*

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Indian writers, particularly women, who stay abroad and write about Indian culture and ethos, have engraved a place in Indian English Literature. They have explored their intense felling of immigrant sensibility through their fiction with the help of portrayal of different aspects of women's life. Now, the global diasporic women authors have come up with a strong notion of breaking the age old constructs of women as the property of the male, and as the old responsible for passing the culture onto the forthcoming generations, The women are obviously not all the same in the works of the diasporic women novelists, but the most significant feature that can be noticed in almost each and every female character is a conflict, both internal and hence personal on the one hand, and, imposed externally and hence second handed, on the other. Most women retaliate and face defeat in the hands of conventionality and order but several women are released from the trap once they can step beyond the arduous rules and regulations. There are many Indian women writers based in USA, Canada, Britain and other parts of the world. The recent writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Rau Badami, Sunetra Gupta, Chitra Banerjee and Amulya Malladi are exploring the cultural conflicts, dilemmas, displacement and cultural transformation of both immigrants and natives. The experience of being caught between two cultures with cultural conflicts and dilemmas has remained a prominent theme of their writings. As women writers they view gender from a woman's point of view and thus extend the boundaries of human experience from different perspectives and dimensions. Women writers In India have captured the multiple natures of the domestic spaces in changing world, IN diaspora and Multiculturalism, Ramraj reflects: "though diasporic writing is about or by peoples who are linked with common histories of uprooting and dispersal, it develops different cultural and historical identities depending on the political and cultural particularizes of the dominant society"¹

Amulya Malladi's novels mainly focus on the themes like, family tension, the changing possibilities of memory and the elusive nature of mind, the misunderstandings between two generations, the conflict between modernity and traditional values and the changing status of women from traditional roles to conflicting women characters. The major issues reflected in her works are related to women, their self-actualization, psychological transformation, problem of identity, issues of gender and culture. The conflict between belonging and loss of belonging is the mode in which diasporic writers create different home lands. In the present paper, it is not only the conflicts between the east and west that are striking, but the conflicts within our own family and our own traditions also matters a lot. Malladi portrays the cultural conflicts that Priya experiences once she leaves her adopted culture to revisit her native place with different values and expectations. In the present paper, an attempt is also made to seek the cultural conflicts and dilemmas faced by the protagonist in her own native land. The present paper also observes how Priya's entry into the lives of her extended family brings empowerment into their lives.

Amulya Malladi was born and raised in 1974 in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, India. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in engineering from Osmania University, Hyderabad, India and received a master's degree in journalism from The University of Memphis, Tennessee, USA. After living in the United States for several years, Amulya now lives in Denmark with her husband and sons. Malladi's father was working in the Indian Army, and hence Amulya had lived all over the country. So far she has written five novels: *A Breath of Fresh Air*, *The Mango Season*, *Serving Crazy with Curry*, *The Sound of Language* and *Song of the Cuckoo Bird*.

Priya belongs to an orthodox family consisting of strict grandfather & grandma; ruling mother, kind father and lovable brother. In Priya's family duty is considered highly important than any other personal success or happiness. From such a background she moves abroad for her higher studies getting stern instructions from her family members. Every young Indian leaving the homeland to the foreign country is given the following orders by their parents. Priya is also not exception to these orders. They instruct her to avoid free mixing with American people. Her parents send her to study with a few fears and the following orders:

"Do not eat beef (the sacred cow is your mother!)

Do not get too friendly with foreign people; you cannot trust them. Remember what the English did to us.

Cook at home; there is no reason to eat out and waste money.

Save money.

Save money.

Save money.

DO NOT FIND YOURSELF SOME FOREIGN MAN/WOMAN
TO MARRY.ⁱⁱ

Even though the order "do not marry foreigner"ⁱⁱⁱ is given at the last on the list, it is the most important one on the list. But, Priya has other plans. She is already in love, engaged and living with an American, Nick; they even share a joint mortgage. And her views on matrimony are already formed, even before she comes to America. As she thinks,

Even though I was raised in a society where arranged marriage was the norm, I always thought it was barbaric to expect a girl of maybe twenty-one years to marry a man she knew even less than the milkman who, for the past decade, had been mixing water with the milk he sold the family.^{iv}

Seven years later, she gets back to India to reveal herself. As she finds herself in dilemma, she declares,

I didn't want to go because as soon as I got there, my family would descend on me like vultures on a fresh carcass, demanding explanations, reasons, and trying to force me into marital harmony with some "nice Indian boy."

I had to go because I had to tell them that I was marrying a "nice American man."^v

After reaching India, Priya finds her family members in the same condition as they were seven years before. Her extended family often talks about marriage, particularly the marriage of her uncle Anand with Neelima, which is not accepted by them. There is continuing battle over Anand due to his marriage with a woman out of his cast. Priya soon learns that the family's new bride, Neelima, is being given harsh treatment because she is a Maharashtrian Brahmin. Priya's Telugu Brahmin family is convinced that Neelima has trapped their son Anand into a "love" marriage.

In India, caste is still a fairly important point for marriage, especially among the first-generation immigrants and short term visitors. Priya's family has fixed opinions on the other

casts. They are not in favor of any other caste except Tamil Brahmin, even not the Brahmin from any other region. Amamma is orthodox type of woman. Who hates inter caste marriages. As she says to Priya “In our family we don’t let our daughters chase and marry men from other casts”^{vi} In America, class inequality is based on economic criteria and culturally it is open to an individual to achieve their own class position. Individual class mobility is possible in class systems. Class systems are based on religious and ritual criteria, while Casts cannot be understood in secular terms of inferiority and superiority of the principles that ranks parts in the whole is religious.

Most Indians grow up and live in extended family networks. In a family-oriented society any problem that affects an individual-financial, medical, psychiatric, or whatever that affects the entire family. A community in India has several common features. The members within a community generally operate on a ranking or a hierarchical system. Elders are accorded special status within the community. Eastern society is general and Indian societies in particular are relationship-centered society. Marriages are cultural as well as religious obligation in India. The majority of marriages are arranged by the respective families of both bride and groom. While choosing the spouse for their son or daughter both the parents prefer the equality of the family in respect of status, financial position, religion, caste and language. India has a big society of different cultures and communities. In contrast, western society is a work-and-activity-centered society. Nick’s mother Frances doesn’t care about Priya’s ethnicity but she is undoubtedly fascinated by her Indianness. When they met for the first time, she tells her, “I’ve never spoken to an Indian before, but I love curry”^{vii} Frances is a lovable woman who always respects Priya by sending her gifts on her birthday but such affection and friendliness is missing in the relationship between Priya and her mother.

Amulya Malladi demonstrates all the commonplaces of cultural conflicts in *The Mango Season*. The novel is about an Indian woman who hides her engagement with an American man from her orthodox Brahmin family. After having left for the US seven years earlier, she dishonored one of the primary orders every Indian parent imposes on a child: "Do not find yourself some foreign man/woman to marry". In the present novel, Priya is struggling to find the courage to tell her parents that she wants to marry a black American boy. Here, Malladi explores cultural shock that Priya faces in her own country and the conflicts that arise between Priya and her near and dear ones of her native country.

In the context of Priya we can find so many changes in her lifestyle and how she perceives things in her everyday life when she is back in India after having stayed in America for the period of seven years. At the same time, we can see that she has a different mindset now as she is much liberalized and modernized. She thinks going through pelli-chupulu (bride-seeing ceremony) is just a waste of time. Priya says “In several arranged marriages, couples don’t fall in love with each other, they merely tolerate each other”.^{viii} When she declares that she is willing to marry Nick. Her grandfather says, “I will not accept it, Priya. If you marry this man, then you are not my family”.^{ix} He shows reluctance to allow Priya to marry someone from other caste or ethnic group. Now she is forced to choose between the love of her family and Nick, the love of her life. Her father Nana also objects her decision by convincing her that “Marrying someone who does not understand your culture, your roots, your traditions, it will not work out.”^x Priya boils with anger and frustration at watching the orthodox culture of her extended family. She gets angry when Neelima says “we are not like all those white women who have sex with hundreds of men, we marry the man we have sex with”^{xi} Priya’s mother also seems anxious due to her dark colour. But Priya’s boyfriend Nick couldn’t see the subtle differences between the various shades

of Indian dark. As he says “All Indians are dark”^{xii} Finally, Priya’s experiences as a “semi-foreigner” in her own country makes her uncomfortable. As she thinks “This was not home anymore. Home was in San Francisco with Nick. Home was Whole Foods grocery and fast food at KFC. Home was Pier and Wal-Mart. Home was 7-Eleven and Star-bucks. Home was familiar, Hyderabad was a stronger, India was as alien, exasperating, and sometimes exotic to me as it would be to a foreigner”^{xiii} As she believes that change is permanent, and one cannot say no to it. She also succeeds in bringing the changes in the lives of her family members. At the end of the novel Priya empowers every female in the house by rebelling against the controlled, oppressive, chauvinistic culture of male dominated society.

In the end, Priya empowers everyone from her extended family. Her diasporic identity makes the huge impact on the women of her family. Eventually, all the women stand up for themselves and learn to demand their place in society. Sowmya starts becoming liberal and independent. As she says “I am going to change my life, Priya. I am going to change it. I am not just going to sit down and let them do what they want...I am going to decide what I want to do”^{xiv} She further adds “And I want to stop wearing saris. I want to only wear salwar kameez. This sari is so uncomfortable. And I want to go to America to see your house and see that country.”^{xv} In India, woman is considered to be an: ‘embodiment of sacrifice silent sufferings, humility, faith and knowledge’^{xvi} But in the concerned novel, we see how At Priya’s grandparents house there is a lot of tension to know about the sex of Lata’s baby because Lata, the mother of two daughters, is pregnant again. So, Priya’s grandfather Thatha wants a “pure blooded” boy to carry on the family name. But Lata protests saying that “I don’t want to know the sex of this baby”^{xvii} she decides that “There will be no ultrasound and no amino test”^{xviii} Her husband Jayant remains unable to change her decision and when Thatha gets angry to listen it, Sowmya interferes and manages to corner the old man himself with a few words. Sowmya surprises everyone by saying that ‘If she doesn’t want to know, we should not force her. We are not that kind of a family.’^{xix} After listening Priya’s decision to marry her American boyfriend, Thatha says to Priya’s father, “I want you to know that you will be the person with the most blame. You can stop her. Do it now”.^{xx} But Nana shows his maturity by accepting his daughter. As he says “She is my daughter and this is my choice to make, just like you are making yours. I trust her. I believe her to be a smart and intelligent woman. I think that if she says she is happy with Nicholas, she is telling the truth. Priya is no fool”.^{xxi}

Priya’s brother Nate has a North Indian girlfriend, Tara, a girl who doesn’t shy of meeting her boyfriend Nate in the night on a Kinetic Honda. Tara comes across as a caricature for the new “liberated” generation. Tara doesn’t fall in Priya’s mother category in her tight yellow blouse and small black skirt she isn’t different from a typical girl her age in the US. It is a shock to her to see now much things changed in India. Tara is an independent woman of the 21st century. Priya admits that she doesn’t know much about the pop music of the United States but Nate and Tara are aware of it. Their feet are tapped to the music and Tara is hummed to the lyrics. She accepts that it is entirely new Indian generation in which “girls could meet boys at a place like this after nine in the night”.^{xxii} At the end of the novel, the characters begin to realize the importance of tolerance, liberalism, permissiveness and compromises along with empowerment that must be made in order to sustain and improve their relationships with their near and dear people.

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