

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

12th Year of Open Access

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. 12, Issue - 5 (October 2021)

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Conflict of Tradition and Modernity in Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*

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Article History: Submitted-30/09/2021, Revised-27/10/2021, Accepted-30/10/2021, Published-31/10/2021.

Abstract:

Amulya Malladi born in 1974 at Madhya Pradesh is an eminent Indian writer who settled in Denmark. All her literary works focus women, culture and tradition along with the thrust for individuality of the characters. Culture and tradition observed by Amulya in India and abroad has got laid as a background in this novel, *The Mango Season*. The dilemma faced by the protagonist, Priya Rao, in revealing about her relationship with an American to the struggle she faces in balancing her family members in the joint family system is distinctly presented. This paper highlights the trauma of the protagonist as well as the other characters in choosing between their tradition and culture to a modern and practical life. All the characters at one point stand transformed, especially the ladies who start realizing they have suppressed their identity under the banner of tradition.

Keywords: Women, Culture, Modern, Trauma, Family, Tradition.

India is a land of uniqueness. Culture and tradition are the primary identification codes to the nation. India provides shelter for people from various societies and countries and thus many cultures are observed to be practiced here. Indian family system also gains one of the important unique qualities. Many settled religions and tribals are also found along with different languages and customs. Similarly, each religion follows unique festivals and customs surprising the other nations. The dressing style also differs from each state providing a visual treat to the foreigners. Apart from this, language, food, custom, dance, festival, dressing, sport and many more also stand different.

The paper, 'Conflict of Tradition and Modernity in Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*' presents the significance of culture and tradition since the olden days till today. The Indian joint

family system, the significance of Culture and tradition, generation gap, love, customs, modernity as viewed by elders, the trauma of the youngsters and elders and the oscillation between tradition and modernity are discussed in detail.

The novel, *The Mango Season* by Amulya Malladi published in 2003 is a typical Indian novel, set in Hyderabad. Amulya has very accurately depicted her hometown, Hyderabad along with its climate, culture and ambience. This novel is purely about the typical south Indian joint family, whose daughter stays abroad for a long time and prefers to marry an American against the wish of the family. This arises many obstacles among her family members and finally the novel ends with the breakup between two families.

Priya Rao, the protagonist in *The Mango Season*, is a girl of 27 years who returns to India after seven years of her studies at the United States of America. Her main motif behind meeting her family is to reveal about her American boyfriend, Nick. Priya's family is an orthodox family headed by her Thatha, maternal grandfather, in any decision-making process. He was a strict disciplinarian and that he will not forgive even his own children who don't abide by traditional norms. He was very much against love marriage and that he neglected his own son, Anand for having married Neelima against the family. So, this was the main reason that scared Priya in revealing about her love.

Priya's bondage with her family was bit complex. She had a very good bonding with her father, Ashwin and her brother, Nate, whereas she found her mother, Radha, to be a constant nagging person.

“...You go to America and you want to look like those Christian girls. Why what is wrong in our way?...”

“Wearing shorts in Monda Market?”

“Are you trying to be an exhibitionist?” (Malladi 8)

Radha did not have a smooth relationship with her cousins too. She was always in rival with Lata, her sister-in-law due to Lata's domineering attitude. So, all these activities of Radha did not create a good impression about her among her entire family including her husband and

children. The rival between Lata and Radha was the usual sisters-in-law rivalry highlighting the attitude of women in Indian joint families.

The Pickle-making ceremony was a great event at Radha's parents' house. All the members of the family would join together and prepare mango pickle. Priya was taken to her grandmother's home for that event and there she learns about the different varieties, size and taste of mangoes. Also, she learns to chop the mangoes uniformly and make it fit in the process of fermenting. Soon she realized that the women were not only chopping mangoes but also their egos through their communication.

The members in Thatha's family include Thatha and Ammama, their sons Jayant and Lata, Anand and Neelima and their younger daughter, Sowmiya who was severely criticized for not yet getting married. Anand and Neelima were never given consideration in the family as they had love marriage. Lata is the eldest daughter- in- law who constantly mocked Neelima and Sowmiya.

Mango is the main symbol employed in this novel. It holds an important place in Priya's childhood as well as her family for the Pickle making event. It bridges the family members in bringing a resolution for their ongoing disputes. The ladies were unable to remain silent while working. So, they start expressing their views by discussing some events and slowly they exchange their views through mockery, so that communication starts developing among the rival members too. Sowmiya and Lata never had a good rapport with each other but they start discussing about Sowmiya's marriage as follows: Lata asks Neelima, "When is the boy coming to see Sowmiya?" She mocks at Sowmiya, as she is an illiterate. "So, is he some lecturer at some college?" (Malladi 51). Ammama, Sowmiya's mother replies: "Just because you are pretty and married doesn't mean you have to talk like this. She will get married when it is time. God has it all planned" (Malladi 52). This proves the custom in India where people quickly degrade a girl for remaining unmarried after a certain age. People criticize the girl's behaviour, appearance, health and her parents blaming their financial situations. This is very commonly observed where relations are ready at anytime to speak ill about an unmarried girl, by hurting their parents. Also, it is one of the common factors found in joint families.

Priya had a good rapport with Neelima and Sowmiya than any other members. Neelima was pregnant and so Priya showed more care towards her. Priya felt that she was delaying in

revealing about Nick and meanwhile when she was about to confess her love to the family members, they arranged for a chuplu (bride- seeing ceremony) with Adarsh. Her love was already known to Nate and he was the only person who gave Priya courage and comfort through his words.

Soon the chuplu also took pace and Adarsh also proposed his wish to marry Priya. Still Priya didn't reveal her love to the family and she was greatly distressed as she was not able to contact Nick too, as her only comfort were Nick's e-mails since she returned from America. Nate who was aware of his sister's condition, made her gather courage to face the family.

Finally, Priya prepared her mind and first revealed her love to Adarsh. He was initially enraged and soon he too paved way for her love. That night, Priya revealed everything to her family by greatly shocking them. All the family members were against her and none wished to speak to her. It was the most traumatic period for Priya as she didn't know how to convince the entire family.

Priya's father was greatly depressed and became an alcoholic on hearing that his daughter was leading a live- in- relationship with a stranger like American for two years. Priya's father was so much concerned about her than Nate as he remained casual when he got to know about Nate's love with a Punjabi girl earlier.

“No, no, Priya Ma, you did what your generation always does, stab us in our hearts”.

“You share a home with this man?”

“And you have been living with him for two whole years?” (Malladi 211)

Radha though a nagging mother had much care about Priya and that is why she expressed her anger over Priya by beating her, unable to bear the comments that she heard about her family and Priya from her neighbours. That period was the most difficult period for Priya as she suffered a lot in deciding whether she has to stand by Nick or her family. Her parents too experienced a traumatic period, not knowing how to react to their daughter. They wondered whether they should be practical, modern parents or as traditional parents. Finally, they too turned practical by giving their consent as they realized that their daughter was holding much respect towards them. Soon Priya's parents changed their decision by considering Priya's happiness is primary than other things. The depressed father says,

Probably in a few years, may be, 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...

"I am glad though that you didn't marry him in the dark, like Anand married Neelima". I am glad you had the courage to tell us... I am proud that you are who you are. I am happy that I raised you...because I raised you well. (Malladi 213-214)

Every character in this novel is seen to be sticking to traditional norms and was suffering between tradition and modernity. Priya was a young modern bold girl from America. She was in love with a black American, Nick and was leading a live- in relationship life. Priya was very much aware that the life she was leading is much against the ethics of Indian tradition and her family. This actually created guilt in her and that is why she urged to herself to get the consent from her parents before marrying Nick. Her love for Nick was true but having no choice, with heavy heart, Priya took up the chuplu and finally confessed to Adarsh. Nick and his mother though westerners, understood Priya and Indian culture so well and that is why they too waited along with Priya to get her family's consent.

Thatha was a traditional man and he remained determined even in Priya's case as he wanted to retain his self- dignity by breaking the familial relationship with Radha's family, his own daughter.

Lata though a rude sister- in- law to Neelima and Sowmiya earlier, understood the sufferings of modern women and started favouring them, including Priya for her love. She transformed herself by realising that she has been a submissive wife and achieved nothing except the enmity of her relations. She then started favoring Priya too, by gathering broad vision of thoughts within her. Likewise, Sowmiya though an illiterate was determined to have only an educated husband and that is why she was able to understand Priya's love with an American and supported her. Though brought up in a strict family, Sowmiya was more practical and she always wished for love marriage as she was aware that tradition is to be followed with practical ethics. At the outset, Sowmiya was a modern, practical girl brought up in a village especially in a family like Thatha's.

Priya's parents, Radha and Ashwin were heart-broken on hearing about their daughter's affair. But still Ashwin managed to save his daughter from Thatha's anger by backing her and

diverted that anger over himself and Radha. Finally, as parents, Radha and Ashwin made up their minds to respect their daughter's feelings by giving their consent as they knew that Priya was guilt-stricken. Though it was a pain, they proved that parents are always tender hearted and the anger that is expressed is always due to the love and care they possess over their children. So, Radha and Ashwin best proved the traditional role of parents by best fulfilling their children's wish in any situation of life with practical thinking. Priya's parents retained their tradition and dignity by respecting their daughter's wish; Nate too remained a caring brother by heartily accepting Nick as his brother-in-law and stood by Priya in all hard times.

On analyzing this novel, one tends to understand, how much Priya has suffered in choosing between Nick and her family. Fulfilling the duty as a daughter was a great task as Priya had so many practical difficulties right from confessing about her love till convincing them for her marriage to Nick. At the same time, she had to be loyal to her love, Nick and she has to marry him without any second thoughts despite the family pressures. On the whole Priya was able to be modern in her social life but she was not able to remain the same when it comes to her marriage. Finally, Priya and Nick happily got married by winning everybody's consent except that of her Thatha's blessings.

On the other side, woman's position in the family was greatly tested in relation to Priya's state in love. All the women characters were suppressed by the men in the family including Thatha. Lata being the elder daughter-in-law of the family was forced to conceive for the third time just to have a baby boy, an heir to the family. Such patriarchal attitude caused a transformation in her and stood by Priya's side. Similarly, Neelima was ignored for her love marriage and received ill-treatment even during her pregnancy. She survived with the hope that a baby boy would change her ill-fate. Sowmiya, though the daughter of the family was not given freedom of choice, she was restricted in every aspect of life including her dressing and education. Finally, Sowmiya threw up all those restrictions and transformed herself opting salwar kameez. Worse of all is, the girls have to sit out of the doors during her "contaminated period" where even ladies hesitate to touch the person.

Apart from this realization, the characters also entered an existential and transpositioned state. They start accepting life as it is. Priya waiting to win her parents' consent was the most traumatic period for her by merely existing. Nate proceeding his life after his breakup with the

Punjabi girl; Priya's parents who got collapsed after the confession of their daughter were trying to be casual; the women in Thatha's family who did not have freedom in life so far were cracking such stereotype and also Thatha who gave up his own daughter's family for his orthodox midset all reveal the pressure of culture over the characters for the sake of family reputation by still leaving behind unsaid pain in the hearts of all the characters.

Finally, the characters end up oscillating between tradition and modernity as both were different ends and that is where their lives become traumatic. The diasporic life of Priya is well expressed through her nostalgic expressions towards her native land. On the whole, the author, Amulya, has well depicted the significance of tradition through her characters by portraying how each character in the family were striving to be modern in some aspects of life by getting rid of certain norms in the practical world for a better life. It is clear that the characters in this novel were actually throwing their mask of tradition or norms and have started opting to be realistic and independent.

Works Cited:

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