

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

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Literature has increasingly been focused on issues like gender oppression, cultural conflicts and women empowerment. Women writers through their writings explore the problems faced by women in the patriarchal society. AmulyaMalladi's second novel *The Mango Season* is a portrayal of a young girl Priya who is torn between her love for her family and her love for an American named, Nick. The novel begins with a prologue in which the readers find that the protagonist Priya who is brought up in a traditional Indian family is a rebellion against some Indian customs she says:

Even though I was raised in a society where arranged marriage was the norms, I always thought it was barbaric to expect a girl of may be 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 her family. (1)

Priya escapes from arranged marriage by going to the United States to do a master's in computer science and she finds a job in Silicon Valley. She does not want to go to India and so she gives several excuses to her family for seven long years. When she realises that she cannot delay any longer, she makes up her mind to visit India and tell her parents about Nick, an American with whom she is living together for more than 3 years she says:

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'. (3)

Though she has the courage to accept a living together relationship, she has no courage to marry Nick without getting consent from her family. She has no heart to break the heart of those who love her from childhood and sent her to America by trusting that she will return as their own daughter to them once again. Priya reaches India, thinking that now she is a grown up girl who can decide her life on her own but to her shock she finds that there is no change in the heart of her family who still treats her only as their child. Priya after spending her years in America does not like India. She says:

Now, I couldn't imagine putting that piece of white and green fruit inside my mouth. It was not about taste, it was about hygiene, and suddenly everything everybody had warned me about India came true.

My Indian friends who visited India after living in the United State sad: Everything will look dirtier than it did before. (9)

Priya's mother is a typical Indian mother who allows freedom to her son Nate short for Natarajan and her daughter Priya to obey all her words. As Nate is a boy, he escapes his mother so easily by giving excuses and goes out of home with his friends. But things are different for a girl in India; even though she returns from America. There is a ritual at Priya's grandmother's house to make mango pickle which is a yearly ritual. Priya and her mom go to the grandmother's home where everyone in the family feels happy to see Priya after seven years. It is there in the house of the grandmother, the readers can find so many characters such as, Jayant, Priya's mother's elder brother and his wife Lata; her younger brother Anand and his wife Neelima and Sowmya, her sister.

It is revealed that Anand has married Neelima without the consent of his family. Neelima is a Maharashtrian and so the family thinks that she is not the right woman for Anand. Though Neelima is also a Brahmin, the family needs only a Telegu Brahmin. Priya says: "It was because of how Anand's secret marriage had broken everyone's heart that I decided to tell my family before doing the deed, though it was very tempting to take the easy way out and tell them after the fact" (33).

It is through the character of Sowmya, Malladi has clearly brought out the plight of Indian women who have no physical charms or academically qualified. Though Sowmya is portrayed as a woman having a good heart, who loves everyone, she is only treated as a burden in the family because no one is ready to marry her. Priya says: Sowmya could not get a job equivalent to her social status because she was not academically qualified, just as she couldn't get the life partner she fantasized about because she was not physically qualified" (35). This shows that the Indian Society needs either physical beauty or a source of financial outcome from a woman. Priya remarks: "sixty four matches and not one worked out, 'she told me during my current visit' (36).

The ritual of making mango pickle starts and as usual when women of India have a chance of being together, there will be always some clashes. Priya's mom accuses Neelima for marrying Anand before Anand's sister Sowmya gets married. Neelima in turn says that they had waited for 2 years and Sowmya does not get a match and it is not their fault. Neelima complains to Priya that her grandfather has asked Lata to fulfil his desire of having a son's son as their heir, though Neelima is pregnant, the family is not happy. Neelima says: "They told Anand that our son would never be the rightful heir because of me. I am not the right woman to bear their heir, she sighed sadly: That is why Lata is pregnant again" (54).

Lata who is already having two daughters is pregnant for the third time since the family needs an heir. This gives a shock to Priya, she thinks that her thatha is not such a chauvinist: After hearing this through Neelima, Priya thinks: "Burgeoning hope crushed, I realised that he would never accept Nick; he would never accept even the idea of Nick and me. What was I going to do?" (54). Meanwhile Priya contacts her American boy friend Nike through mails telling him how she feels like in the clutches of her

family. She is struggling between two loves. She says;” It was as if there were two people inside me: Indian Priya and American Priya, Ma’s Priya and Nick’s Priya. I wondered who the real Priya was” (69).

Whenever Priya supports America her Thatha objects it. To him America is not a suitable for Indians to live. He argues that America will never accept the Indians but India accepts everyone. At this point Priya asks her Thatha: “... you don’t accept Neelima because she comes from another state. You don’t accept Indians and you expect me to believe I’m accepted in this society. How long will this society accept me if I want to live by own rules?” (81). On the other hand the family of Nick is shown as a lovable one. Nick’s mother does not see any difference in Priya’s ethnicity: “ therewere all hugs and acceptance” (70). But things are so different in Priya’s home.Priya’s parents arrange a “Pelli-chupulu” (bride viewing ceremony) for her she “ was feeling like an object instead of a person” (143). Adarsh, the bridegroom casually says to Priya that he has a relationship with a Chinese Woman, but “broke up after a three-year relationship (147). Then he realised that he should marry an Indian girl. Priya gets angry but she understands that India is still a patriarchal society. she feels guilty for heaving concealed about this ceremony to Nick. When the family arranges for marriage, Priya opens up the matter of her relationship with Nick. Priya’s father, who has so much love and trust on her feels much shocked by her truth, which makes Priya to think “I was wishing in a small corner of my mind, that he (Nick) didn’t exist in my life so that I could marry Adarsh or some other sap like him and not have this conflict with my parents” (168).But her love for Nick is very true and she cannot imagine to betray Nick. She cries to her mother: “I’m sorry that you don’t approve, that you feel I’ve betrayed you, but this is my life and I have to live my life, you can’t live it for me. I have to be happy and I can’t let you be happy for me. And for me to be happy, I need to marry Nick. It’s that simple” (169). When her family convinces her by saying that life will be tough for her if she marries a foreigner, Priya who is a girl of intelligence has countered it: “All relationship have problems. That’s a feet of life” (169).

Through Priya’s clarity in thoughts and decisions, Sowmya grows as a stable woman. Sowmya who was a naive woman changes herself as a new woman by claiming her own rights. A man named Vinay accepts to marry Sowmya. Even though she has passed her marriageable age she takes a risk of meeting Vinay personally and tells her wish. She takes Priya along with her and meets him and says: “I want to work, she revealed sincerely. My father didn’t let me and they said that your family doesn’t let me and they said that your family doesn’t approve. But I want to work” (164). Vinay gives his support for her and for the very first time in her life Sowmya feels that she has done what she always wanted. She expresses her joy: “A job, Priya. A place I can go to every day, out of the house. I am so glad I did this. I feel so relieved. And” she laughed softly “I am getting married”! (195).

According to Priya, a family means not made out of bricks, but made out of love she expresses her anguish:

We both really had nowhere to be but with each other. Relationships bound people together to the point that home was a feeling and not a brick structure. I knew where home was and it definitely was not were in Hyderabad. These people were not family. How easily they had decided to give me up... I don’t conform to their rules, I don’t exist, not important to anyone anymore. My own father walks out and doesn’t bother to tell me whether he is dead or alive as if my marrying Nick is the end of the world. (214)

Somehow Priya makes her father understand that she loves him so much and she does not want to lose him because she “was in love with another man, the man with the wrong nationality and rare” (214). Priya’s father accepts for her marriage with Nick. Lata even appreciates Priya for her courage. She has not married Nick like Anand married Neelima. Lata says, “I wise more Women would stand up for what they want” (217). When Priya thinks everything is over, there comes a storm through her Amamma who says: “And at least, said Amamma said with a broad shrug, ‘he is white, not some Kallu’”(224). Priya forgets to mention that Nick is black and she is almost frozen. But she hopes that it will also be solved somehow and leaves to America. she plans to marry Nick. The invitation is all ready now: “The envelope with the wedding invitation, a note from me, and a picture of Nick had been ready for days but I kept forgetting about it. It wasn’t deliberate” (229). The novel ends without any further complications in Priya’s life she sends the invitation and photograph of Nick and the mailroom guy informs the post will reach India in five days.

Priya overcomes all her difficulties and finally holds the hands of the man with whom she wants to continue her future. She believes that her choice is the right one and without any oscillation she moves towards it. She strongly trusts in herself and her love. She has no second thought in her decision about her marriage and that has made her to succeed. Through the character of Priya one can get the experience of being caught between two cultures. Thus, Priya brings empowerment into the lives of all the characters in the novel.

References

- [1] Malladi, Amulya. *The Mango Season*. Ballantine Books. 2003. Print.