

**REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL CLASHES AND DILEMMAS IN  
AMULYA MALLADI'S *THE MANGO SEASON***

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**ABSTRACT**

Cultural alienation is a world phenomenon today. The tremendous difference between two ways of life leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be called a culture shock. Amulya Malladi in her novel, *The Mango Season* demonstrates all the commonplaces of cultural clashes and dilemmas by exploring the struggle Priya faces when dealing with culture shock in her own country. Cultural dilemma is basically the result of two lived experiences, which develop conflicting ideologies in the mind of the protagonist. We have all the commonplaces of culture clashes are on display in this novel. 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. In *The Mango Season*, Malladi portrays the cultural shocks and clashes that Priya experiences once she is removed from her adopted culture to revisit her native culture with different experiences and values. In the present paper, an attempt is made to study a psyche of foreign returned Indian Priya, which is affected due to the advanced career prospects and diverse cultural practices that she receives in her adopted land America. It is also an attempt to seek the cultural clashes and dilemmas faced by the protagonist in her own native land.

The recent diasporic writers like Chitra Banerjee, Anita Rau Badami, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and Amulya Malladi explore the cultural dilemmas, displacement and cultural clashes suffered by immigrants in the various parts of the world. The experience of being caught between two cultures with cultural dilemmas and clashes has remained a prominent theme of their writings. Amulya Malladi in her novel, *The Mango Season* demonstrates all the commonplaces of cultural conflicts by exploring the struggle Priya faces when dealing with culture shock in her own country. We have all the commonplaces of culture clashes are on display in this novel. For instance, ideological conflicts, clash of an olden way of life with the western ideas, diverse caste system, patriarchal norms, arranged marriages, social & cultural transformation and generational differences between the mother and daughter as a result of a

changing culture in a modernized world etc. In the present paper, an attempt is made to study a psyche of foreign returned Indian Priya, which is affected due to the advanced career prospects and diverse cultural practices that she receives in her adopted land America. It is an attempt to explore the cultural dilemmas and clashes faced by the protagonist in her own homeland. In *The Mango Season*, Malladi masterly portrays the psychological push and pull of the cultural clashes and dilemmas faced by the foreign returned Priya. Her characters are well drawn and the clashes of cultures portrayed are not only authentic, but heartbreaking, as well. The Mango season is very realistic in its presentation of dilemmas experienced by Priya, who is studied in the west and her family stuck in the Eastern culture.

A person who is most successful at adjusting to a new culture is often not completely successful at readjusting to the old culture. A person, who adjusts readily can accept new ideas, talk intelligently with people from many countries, and be happy with the changing patterns of foreign life. The same person may find readjustment poorly upon returning home since the new ideas conflict with tradition. This relation between adaptation to the new and nonadaptation to the old is undoubtedly related to individual differences. Sojourners who develop close relationships with hosts would begin to share the same sort of activities upon their return home. They may not be able to find people who share the newly developed concerns. Therefore, it is important to study a psyche which is affected due to displacement and newly adopted culture. It is also an essential to note that serious misunderstandings can and do occur not just in cross-cultural interactions and encounters but also within one's own culture, among its own people. In *The Mango Season*, Malladi portrays the cultural shocks and clashes that Priya experiences once she is removed from her adopted culture to revisit her native culture with different experiences and values.

Amulya Malladi was born in 1974 in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. She pursued a Bachelor's Degree in Electronics Engineering from Osmania University, Hyderabad and secured a Masters Degree in Journalism from the University of Memphis, Tennessee, United States. She then moved on to working as an online editor for a high-tech publishing house in San Francisco, and then as a marketing manager for a software company in the Silicon Valley. After living in the United States for many years, Malladi shifted base to Copenhagen, Denmark with her husband Soren Rasmussen and her two 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*.

*The Mango Season* is a panorama of Indian tradition. It deals with an Indian who moves to America and lives a multi-cultural existence, which goes against the ideology of her extended family. It is about an Indian woman who hides her engagement to an American man from her traditional Brahmin family. Malladi artfully places Priya in a situation between two opposite worlds. She has to go with either dogmatic tradition of her family or her heartfelt emotion. In the novel, Priya is fighting to find the courage to tell her parents that she wants to marry a black American boy. In *The Mango Season*, Malladi captures a young woman's struggle to make her family happy, respect her past, and follow her feelings. All the commonplaces of culture clashes are on display in the novel. During the mango season, when Priya returns to India to inform her traditional family that the man she is going to marry is not an Indian, she faces the harsh reality of prejudice and cultural clashes in her homeland.

When Priya goes home, she discovers her family, her mother in particular, practicing traditional customs and superstitions. She finds no solace in her company. She says in the first chapter. "It had just been three days, but I was already tired of being in India, at home, and especially tired of my mother."<sup>i</sup> Further she describes everyday situations in India. As she says,

The road was bumpy and the auto rickshaw moved in mysterious ways. There were no rules; there never had been. You could make a U-turn anywhere. Crossing a red light was not a crime. If a policeman caught you without your driver's license and registration papers, twenty to fifty rupees would solve your problem.<sup>ii</sup>

After coming back to India seven years later, Priya finds everything unnatural which was never to be in the past. In the past, she enjoyed the mango season several times with her brother. She never paid attention on the quality of food, but as she thinks "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..."<sup>iii</sup> But after years away, everything looks dirtier to her. She further remembers her Indian friends who visited India after having stayed in the United states for a few years, said to her "Everything will look dirtier than it did before"<sup>iv</sup> So, here we see Priya starts showing her concern towards polluted, unclean, and unhygienic lifestyles of Indians. She starts sweating as if she has never been through an Indian summer before. She makes a comment on load shading and power cuts in India by saying that "The electricity was out. For six hours every day in the summer, the electricity was cut off to conserve it. The cut-off times changed randomly but usually around the times when it was most hot."<sup>v</sup>

Priya knows how her mother does bargaining whenever she goes for shopping. When Priya goes with her to buy mangoes, She gets the experience of her bargaining culture but here she finds herself fortunate due to not having the culture of bargaining in America. As she says to herself "Thanks to happy memories like that I never, ever, bargained. It was a relief that in the United States. I didn't have to do it for groceries and clothes; everything came with a fixed price tag."<sup>vi</sup>

Priya belongs to a kind of family where marriage is supposed to be arranged by the family elders, and love doesn't have the place in it. Priya's mother wants her daughter to get married soon. As she says, If they have a good U.S. boy in mind and he is in India on leave like you, we can probably arrange something. If it works out, you will be married and happy. It will be a load off my chest. An unmarried daughter...what must be neighbors think?<sup>vii</sup>

Priya's mother does not like the appearance and behavior patterns of her daughter. As she says to her

You go to America and you want to look like those Christian girls. Why, what is wrong with our way? Doesn't a girl look nice with long, oiled hair with flowers in it? Even when you were here, you didn't want the nice *mallipulu*, fresh jasmine, I would string. Always wanted to look like those...short hair and nonsense.<sup>viii</sup>

It means she firmly believe on Indian culture and does not like the way in which Priya keeps her appearance. As she knows that Priya's friends Manju and Nilesh got married happily in India but they divorced once they shifted to the United States. As she says, "same caste,

same... real good match. They went to America and now they are getting a divorce after four years of marriage, what happened? If they were in India, it would have never happened.”<sup>ix</sup>

The clash of dress is also mentioned in the concerned novel. Indian women wear saris suited to their culture. But the American women wear tight jeans and t-shirts. Once Priya wants to wear a pair of shorts to ward off the tremendous heat of Indian summer at Monda Market, but her mother objects her by saying that “wearing shorts in Monda Market? Are you trying to be an exhibitionist? We don’t do that here.”<sup>x</sup> Priya finds it strange to see women in India prefer wearing saris even in summer season. As she says, “I never understand why Indian women were saris in this day and age when alternatives like *salwar kameez* would not be frowned upon. A sari was uncomfortable...”<sup>xi</sup>

We see love-hate relationship between Priya and her mother. When Priya finds her mother, not treating her well, she says to her “Then you have to learn to treat me with respect too”<sup>xii</sup> Her mother gets angry and responds that “you are too young to gain my respect and you have done nothing so far to gain it,” “Respect! Children respect their parents...and that is all there is to it. You have to learn to behave yourself. I am not your classmate or your friend that you can speak to me like this.”<sup>xiii</sup> In Indian culture, the elders are always respected even though they are wrong. Younger’s have to be very punctual towards their elders. While the westerners call people by their names even though the person is much older than them. In the concerned novel we see Priya calls Nick’s mother by her name, Frances, even though she is much older than Priya. Elders are accorded special status within the community and their important role is very clearly recognized. Western society is a work-and-activity-centered society and in contrast, Eastern society is general and Indian societies in particular are relationship-centered.

When Priya visits her family in India, she carries with her a secret; she is planning to marry an American man. But soon after her arrival in her native land, Priya learns that her parents have chosen a husband for her in the usual traditional way of an arranged marriage. She finds that her family members are in same condition as they were seven years before. Her extended family talks of nothing but marriage, particularly the marriage of her uncle Anand with Neelima, which is not accepted by her extended family members. Anand did a love marriage with a girl from Maharashtra. In India, marriages are supposed to be arranged by the family elders, and love doesn't have much to do with it. Priya's family are deeply set in traditional values, as they think daughters are supposed to be submissive; they are supposed to marry nice (Indian) boys, and produce nice male heirs.

Priya who is facing a conflict/clash in choosing an arranged or love marriage. Arrange and love marriages have their own advantages and disadvantages. Arranged marriage shows a sense of respect and trust of the younger generations towards their elders by obeying them in deciding our future life partner. While, on the other hand, love marriage displays our courage and determination in fighting for our love. Priya, the main character in this novel is a Telugu girl who comes from the Brahmin family. So, it is a must for her to marry a Telugu Brahmin. The conflict begins when Priya is in love and is already engaged with a black American, Nick. The main difference we come across in the novel is between the two cultures, Indian and Western, dealing with marriage.

There is continuing battle over Anand and the fact that he marries a woman out of his state. Inter-caste marriage means girl and boy are from different castes where one member belongs to lower caste. In this novel, inter-caste marriage can be seen in the marriage of Anand and Neelima. Anand is a Telugu Brahmin while Neelima is a Maharashtrian Brahmin. Even

though we can see that both are Brahmins but they are from different state. Being Telugu is very essential for Priya's extended family since it is the official language of Andhra Pradesh. Being of the same caste is not enough to approve a marriage. Typical marriage expects both partners are to be from the same state. In *The mango Season*, Maharashtrian Brahmins are considered the lower caste because they are not Telugu. 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.

In the western culture, 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, and indeed this is the ethos of most industrial class systems in the contemporary world. While caste system is based on religious and ritual criteria, it is still a fairly important reference point for marriage, especially among the first-generation immigrants and short term visitors. In India, sometimes Brahmin parents would say that Brahmin of any region is acceptable, but, in practice, demanding efforts are made to find matches' in one's own linguistic and regional groups.

Traditions play a vital role in India and many take it to a higher level, especially in the case of marriage. These traditions are held so dearly because they are tied to patterns, beliefs, and practices by many of India's ancestors. We see a constant conflict between tradition and modernity through changing times and generations. Marriages are cultural as well as religious obligation in India. It is an important institution. In India, the majority of marriages are arranged by the respective families of 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. The Indian marriage institution considers the marriage as relation not only in spouses but within the respective families of them.

The cultural clash is also seen in the living styles in America and that of India. Living together before marriage is totally prohibited in India but not in the western culture. Here, we can see that Priya's lifestyle changes when she goes to The States. She has been living together with Nick in the same roof even though they are not married so far. But in India this living together business is simply not allowed before couple gets married according to Hindu marriage institutional norms.

Getting consent from her Grandfather is again a major step for Priya. If she reveals about Nick then she thinks that the whole family will reject her. Love will be curbed. Priya's happiness, future lies in the hands of her grandfather; when he accepts, everyone will follow him and Priya's path will be clear. Priya's dilemma becomes a personal pain when she cannot tell her family that she is engaged to an American boyfriend. Priya is forced to choose between the love of her family and Nick, the love of her life. Happiness and love are not the point of her grandparents' or her parents' union. Again this frightens her and she hides her secret, and this makes her even to agree to a bride-seeing ceremony. Even, she finds hesitation to tell her family members that Nick is black. Priya comes to India seven years later and she has to say something that no one is going to like to hear. Her parents want her to get married and they prefer to do it without her permission.

Priya is from a Telegu Brahmin family. So, it is a must for her to marry a Telegu Brahmin. The conflict begins when Priya is in love and is already engaged with a black American, Nick. When she tells her parents and her grandparents about it, they totally disagree and would never want an American guy to be Priya's husband. Here, she has a conflict with the

family where none of them are to support her except Nate and Sowmya. Ammamma, Priya's grandmother is orthodox type of woman. Who hates inter caste marriages, once she says to Priya "In our family we don't let our daughters chase and marry men from other casts"<sup>xiv</sup> Priya remains firm on her decision of marrying Nick, So Thatha replies her "I will not accept it, Priya. If you marry this man, then you are not my family."<sup>xv</sup> This shows how strict older generations are in forbidding a love marriage. But Priya has a different ways of looking at love and marriage. As she says, "In several arranged marriages, couples don't fall in love with each other, they merely tolerate each other"<sup>xvi</sup> For Thatha, a marriage is actually based on commitment, not on love. As it progresses, the feelings automatically get developed. He shows reluctance to allow Priya to marry someone from other caste or nationality. The words like happiness and love are missing in the rule book of his grandfather. It is the duty that is at the top of the list. Now she is forced to choose between the love of her family and Nick, the love of her life. Thata tries to change the mind of Priya by saying that, "you cannot make mango pickle with tomatoes"<sup>xvii</sup> He further warns her that, "You cannot mesh two cultures with-out making a mess of it. I say this because I love you. Forget about this American. They are not our people. They will never understand us. Marry Adarsh. He is good boy and it will make your family happy."<sup>xviii</sup>

Priya tries to convince her family that the quality of a person does not lie in his caste, wealth and University degree but lies deeply in his character and treatment towards his partner. The novel invokes the culture gap between the East and the West where cultural differences are seen in every form of the life. In the context of Priya we can clearly see lots of changes in her in terms of lifestyle and how she perceives things in her everyday life when she is back in India after 7 years living in The United States. 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 chupulu (bride-seeing ceremony) is just a waste of time. Change is permanent, and one cannot say no to it. America and India are way apart. America is a developed country while India is still a developing country. Therefore, it's very hard to compare a country which is so different in every single thing.

## REFERENCES

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