

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.124261057

CONTEXTUALIZING FEMALE INDIVIDUALITY AND IDENTITY IN AMULYA MALLADI'S THE MANGO SEASON

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the female individuality and identity in Amulya Malladi's The Mango Season (2003). It looks at the female characters to demonstrate that they can overcome any adversity with grit and enthusiasm. The novel is around a woman who must choose between following tradition, her parents' love, and passion, and getting where she wants to go. It examines how Priya Rao, the protagonist, uses her strong beliefs to break free from the web of familial affection and ties as well as the patriarchal system. It centres on the themes of clashing cultures, the struggle between modernity and tradition, and the conflicted feelings that immigrants experience. Priya leaves for America to continue her further education, returning to India seven years later. She struggles to adhere to her family's customs and feels out of place in her own country. When she confesses her covert romance with the black American boy, Nick Collins, she is regarded as an outsider. Priya, who is quite emotional, hopes that her parents would embrace her love for Nick and longs for their love. She is suspended between two realities. The novel closes with her marriage to Nick, approved by her parents.

KEYWORDS: Female, Family, Individuality, Society, Identity.

Amulya Malladi is an Indo-Danish novelist. Her novels demonstrate how she has embraced two different cultures, lifestyles, and obstacles. The novels depict every aspect of a woman's life, including her uniqueness, love, grief, affection, identity, and place in society. She also depicts the chaos, the grief, and the ways in which refugees and immigrants deal with the ghosts of the past as they make their way into an unknowable future. Writing fiction while keeping in mind one's ethnic identity is like going back to one's native place. Malladi's *The Mango Season* is a tour of Indian customs. It is a well-written work that strikes a balance between traditional and modern demands, convictions, and concerns. It encourages introspection, reflection, and strength building. It is a clear winner for readers as well as for ladies. It tells the tale of Priya, a contemporary young girl who fights for her individuality. Malladi takes on the name Priya from her childhood buddy, New Jersey-based business analyst Priya Raghupathi. Despite coming from a Brahmin family, Priya tries to reject the baseless and undesirable beliefs found in the long-standing rituals, ceremonies, myths, and traditions. She is forced to choose between following her traditions and following her passions, creating the family she wants or staying in her birth family, living in an Indian community and an American one, and traditional and modern arrangements. Malladi's ability to delve deeper into everyday life allows her writing to effortlessly transport readers to both the greatest and worst aspects of India. She has a loving heart, an alert eye, and a satisfyingly broad perspective. She is a born storyteller. The mango season is so passionate that it perfectly captures the heat, the heroine's disappointments, and her family's desires. The novel is broken up into five sections, and at the start of each section comes a recipe along with instructions, indicating the novelist's interest in food. The prologue, "Happiness is a Mango," (1) introduces readers to Priya and Nick at an airport in the United States. Despite facing dual realities, Priya travels to India as a brave soldier. Malladi immerses her readers in the rich cultural traditions and spicy cuisine of modern India through her work, which serves as a clear depiction of the country's present-day landscape laced with humour. The novel reveals the facets of a long-standing conflict among women: between intellect and emotion, between passion and practicality, between tradition and modernity, and between mind and soul. It delicately addresses the issue between people. The work is remarkable because of its ambiance and Indian customs. Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana state in southern

India, is home to a highly traditional Hindu Brahmin family that embodies the patriarchal culture of the entire country. Hyderabad is a bustling hub of technology firms, stores, and restaurants. According to Netto, "the story fits into specific themes and patterns relating to the family history and women's position at the level of gender narrative" (83). Her expansion of her horizons causes prejudices, superstitions, gender norms, and stereotypes to be questioned, and the old world to be reimagined. Priya's mother Radha is referred to as Ma, her father Ashwin as Nanna, her grandmother Amamma, and her brother Nate are all addressed. Other captivating characters in the storyline include Amamma's other daughter Sowmya, her sons Jayant and Anand, and their spouses Latha and Neelima. Here, Priya, a modern woman, is strong and energetic, yet she suffers because she cannot bring her two cultures and worlds together. The novel informs readers about the long-standing traditions of Indians, the effects of caste, racial discrimination, and dowries, but it also amuses them with tales of mango festivals, Indian women chit-chatting, and mouthwatering recipes in each chapter. The key themes of the novel are decision-making, introspection, and strength-building. This work is made more enjoyable by the lovely depiction of the intense heat of the Indian summer, the mouthwatering mangoes of that time of year, and the use of Sanskrit and Telugu vocabulary. Readers are given realistic depictions of Indian civilisation in *The Mango Season*. The story revolves around Priya, a twenty-seven-year-old woman who goes back to her native India. She is permitted to travel to Texas to complete her Master's program in computer science while adhering to all the norms of her typical Indian parents. The younger ones must adhere to it strictly as it is quite vital. Priya always stays away from India in favour of pursuing a respectable profession in Silicon Valley, but this time she is forced to go because of circumstances beyond her control. She wants to reveal a profound secret to her extremely traditional Brahmin family, who have forced her to follow their holy customs and traditions. She wants to come clean and admit that she has been living with American Nick Collins for the past three years because she is in love with him. Priya is courageous enough to live in a cohabitation, but she lacks the audacity to wed Nick without her family's consent. Since she has a very close link with her Nanna and Thatha, she does not want to betray the people who genuinely trust her. Malladi purposefully did not give Thatha and Amamma names. They are the quintessential representation of all Indian

grandparents. They sent her to America with the earnest belief that she would be alright, capable of handling things on her own, and would undoubtedly return to them as their own prosperous daughter. Priya has hope for bridging the gap between her family's world and the future she shares with Nick because of her love and trust for him. Despite her fear, the heroine goes back to try and convince her family of her feelings, her intentions for the future, and her desire for a family life with a foreigner. She considers herself to be an adult who is capable of thinking for herself and acting independently, therefore she is shocked to learn that her family still views her as a helpless child. *The Mango Season* tells the story of a family's love, a cross-cultural love, and a life balanced between traditional bondage and the desire for modernism. Up until she meets Nick, Priya is constrained by the affection and values of her family. Her mentality gradually changes from that of an Indian to that of a foreigner. The heroine, who has lived in America for seven years, finds everything in her native country unusual and strange, making it impossible for her to adjust to her own people and surroundings. Malladi helps her readers comprehend the challenges faced by a young woman who, after adjusting to a new system, finds it impossible to return to her previous views. The ring Priya wears on her finger represents love and serves as proof of her engagement to Nick, which gives her hope. She initially finds it odd to engage in sexual activity with a stranger before to getting married. Despite her mental resistance as an Indian, everything between them becomes extremely common when they are engaged. She does not belong to the group of women who misunderstand what liberation means. Identity connects these occasionally incongruous components into a greater pattern by encompassing identifications, abilities, roles, aspirations, psychological defences, biological requirements, emotional reactivity, and accidents of personal history. Once established, identity is the indescribable interior framework that guides objectives and moral principles into reality. Priya between her desire for the future and her recollections. She feels cut off from the past, the present, and the future because she lacks a strong sense of who she is. The psychological conflict between an arranged marriage and a love marriage, as well as between eastern and western society, are major themes in the novel. As time goes on, the tension builds, and Priya experiences strange moments every time she attempts to tell her family the truth about her love and engagement to an American. She feels conditioned by her parents' love

to be independent and to respond in an unconventional way. People tend to forget that everyone experiences love in the same way whether they are in the east or the west. Indians have a false belief that a foreigner will never form a family. Despite having been born and raised in India, she views the system of arranged marriage as a business transaction, like the process of obtaining a good employment. Both the bride's and the bridegroom's families look for a wife with traits. The most glaring fact about Nick is that, despite his qualities to be her husband and his ability to satisfy all her family's expectations, he is not an Indian by blood and is not a Telugu Brahmin.

An Indian woman cannot break free from her familial bonds and sever the umbilical cord of her love for her family through empowerment. A fence that is unseen is parental love. Her love for her family ties every cell in her body together. Despite being a strong woman, Priya experiences cultural conflict and gender tyranny in her own family. She is left feeling hopeless in an arranged marriage, which is more typical in the traditional patriarchal Indian family system. Though she is reticent to express her ideas, she has a rebellious spirit inside. She acts as though she is in tune with her family even though she does not share any of their traditional beliefs, particularly those of her grandfather. She believes that maintaining the family relationship is crucial.

In Priya's words, Malladi expresses the sentiment of the Indian women's community regarding the practice of arranged marriage. She believes it was inhumane to expect a twenty-one-year-old girl to marry a man she did not even know, the milkman who had been putting water in the milk he sold her family for decades. In India, where arranged marriages are common, the dominating languages are those of the state, caste, and language. Malladi makes a lot of amusing observations and comments, one of which is that a man or woman should marry inside their own caste and language; otherwise, the family and society will view them and their marriage as impure. It is evident how the Eastern and Western world differ, particularly in regards to women's status.

Women enjoy complete independence in western nations, yet they remain under the control of men in eastern nations like India. The sad reality is that they are unable to vocalise their ideas, opinions, sentiments, or emotions. Priya makes a comparison between her own father and her partner Nick. While Nick arrived at the airport to bid Priya farewell in a tender, loving manner, her father did not even drop her mother off at her grandparents' house.

Ammamma's remark that "White people are never good...Look what the British did to us" (101) further irritates her. Priya describes her travel to India as an overwhelming event, and she manages her inner conflicts very carefully to win her family's love and fulfil her desire.

Priya's mother exposes the biased views towards women by giving her son Natarajan, sometimes known as Nate, complete independence yet demanding that her daughter follow her orders. Mothers oversee their daughters' moral development processes. Her brother, a boy, manages to get away from her mother with ease, but Priya is made into a scapegoat. The situation of the ladies in the Indian families is always a different story, although her brother usually justifies his visits to his friends' houses. The gender gap still exists, even though she works overseas, and she still needs to observe all her grandmother's customs. Whether one likes it or not, following the family's necessary instructions to prepare mango pickle is considered a yearly ritual.

In India, divorce is seen as a sign of failure. Indian women are expected to evaluate their uniqueness based on traditional ideals. Since it was still uncommon, some believe it is preferable to deal with the oppressive marriage than the social pressure they would experience following a divorce. Malladi eloquently illustrates the expectations of the Indian system of arranged marriages, emphasising the importance of physical attractiveness, charm, justice, intellectual attainment, and family history. Priya's aunt Sowmya suffers greatly because of her lack of education and attractiveness. Despite having a bachelor's degree in Telugu literature, she is unemployed. She can only work as a secretary or a clerk in an office with her educational background, but her grandfather believes that these positions are inappropriate for ladies of wealthy Brahmin ancestry. Malladi reveals the circumstances faced by women who do not meet the prescribed ideal of beauty and demonstrates how the concept of ugliness is a metaphor for what is false, unreal, pointless, and unneeded. Instead of attractiveness, a woman should be appreciated for her abilities, bravery, and intelligence. Despite having a kind, compassionate heart, Sowmya is only seen as a burden by her family. The reason Sowmya's situation is so pitiful is that her entire family takes advantage of her single status and severely hurts her.

Malladi is making a concerted effort to highlight the ways in which marriage serves as a trap for Indian women. The family does not appear to view Neelima as a human person, but rather as someone who adheres to their traditional standards. While Priya's

own freedom is in doubt, she is more concerned about Neelima's liberation. Her family forces her to participate in the "Pelli-chupulu," (143) or bride watching ceremony, against her preferences. Adarsh, the bridegroom, tells her in a very casual manner that he had dated a Chinese girl. The patriarchal structure of her family prevents her from expressing her feelings, even though it drives her to become violent. She is aware that "India was still a man's world, and it was taboo for me to mention my current or ex-partner while Adarsh was still allowed to talk about his." "I didn't have the courage, anyway" (147). This comment from Adarsh demonstrates how Indian males view Indian women. It appears Indian ladies were made only to get married. In addition to race, class, religion, and ethnicity, gender is a significant factor in social stratification. She is expected to take on stereotyped gender roles and inherit her mother's household duties even within her own home.

Indian parents often wind themselves in a full mess, despite their desire to have control over the lives of their adult children. Priya expresses her disdain for traditional relationships and arranged marriages. In front of her father, she comes clean and says, "I came to India to tell you all that I'm in love with an American and I plan to marry him. We have a fiancé" (165). She is enthralled with Nick from the moment they meet. She feels confident and trusting with Nick. The most important thing for her is to gain the freedom to be herself with her family, and she thinks that marriage to Nick will grant her the necessary sense of belonging, wanted, required, and love. Nanna is left speechless, leading Priya to believe that it would be best if Nick were completely absent from her life.

Priya breaks from the stereotypical roles that women played within the four walls of Indian society's patriarchal framework, which limited them to being moms, wives, daughters, and sisters. Sowmya and Lata notice a significant difference in Priya because of how bravely she handles the circumstance given her intelligence. When her family tries to convince her to reconsider, she just says, "Relationships are difficult in general. It is a reality of existence" (169). Although her family makes it obvious that she will have a harder time in life if she marries a white man, she is full of hope instead of caring about it.

Malladi transforms the ancient narrative with the help of the character Priya. It is normal for women to be impacted by strong, independent women. Sowmya develops from a gullible woman to a confident adult. Priya inspires Sowmya to pursue her dreams and gives her the self-assurance to overcome obstacles. She is aware of the potential she possesses and is unwilling to accept advice from others.

Sowmya makes a risky move when Vinay, a man, proposes to marry her once she reaches marriageable age. When she and Priya finally get to meet, she tells him how upset she is that her father did not let her pursue her dream of being a professional woman. She also gains the intelligence to convince her fiancé that he will persuade his parents in support of her desire for job. Thus, Sowmya's life has become much more purposeful because of Priya's assurance and mentoring, which had a profound effect on her.

Women have advanced significantly in recent times, and Karkun notes that "the new woman's emergence has been a result of her strong urge to be identified as an individual with a free mind and spirit" (191). Readers are made aware of the predicament faced by women who are constrained by societal constraints by Sowmya's enthusiasm. Priya breaks free from a traditional family's cage by spreading her wings, creating a path for herself and other women who have trapped themselves, such as Sowmya. Although Malladi does not offer a suggested conclusion, viewers can still have optimism that Nick will be accepted by Priya's family.

Consequently, the novel looks to be the story of one strong woman fighting against all patriarchal ideas while still showing compassion and love. Priya hates her parents for trying to overprotect her even though she still loves them. Her route of individuation and separation from her parents is characterised, like that of the other path-makers, by ambivalence towards them. In contrast to the Guardians' families, they are not presented as entirely satisfying. Internally leaving home hurts but also offers promise. The protagonist, who has a disposition for striking a balance between custom and fervour, culture, and her own desires, eventually succeeds in getting her

family to change their minds and holding hands with the guy she loves. She can fulfil her dream life because of her deep love for Nick and her family.

Priya conquers all obstacles and hurdles to pursue her personal ambition. Despite the unsupportive circumstances, she has the bravery to win the love of her life and responds with bravery. After relocating to America, she must contend with the mystery of the modern woman. She changes from a lovely daughter to a sophisticated American woman. She braves the new world to find her unique personality, much like the New Woman, despite suffocating between tradition and modernity. She serves as a fantastic example and ideal role model for women in the modern era. She can do things because she has such a deep sense of trust in herself and her love. Her unwavering will to live her life to the fullest propels her to fulfil her destiny without hesitation or second thought.

Despite being torn between two cultures, Priya is an independent woman who knows how to balance herself and overcome all obstacles with poise. Malladi teaches her readers that anything is achievable with courage and unwavering determination through the character Priya. The heroine is self-aware and has a strong sense of purpose. Priya's contemplation over her battle for self-reliance and her aspiration to design her own life is understandable. She forges her own path while also preserving the ties that bind her to her family. By the novel's end, Priya was a model pathfinder. She overcomes the obstacles and builds a bridge across racial, ethnic, and cultural divides with tenacity and perseverance. Indian women are required to blend in with the society's social hierarchy. Women are viewed as unfeminine if they reject the social norms.

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