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Editor-In-Chief
Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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**Transcending Geographical Borders and Gender Boundaries: A Focus on
The Mango Season by Amulya Malladi**

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Abstract

Enunciating the way hybrid identity emerges and creates the third space, *The Mango Season* transmits this sense of in-betweenness coming out of hybridism. The protagonist Priya, as an Indian, and particularly as a woman, is caught in the crossfire of strict conservative family values and customs but concludes her story with breaking these multifarious walls built around her. The author exemplifies the emotional turmoil born from culturally defined roles versus individual desire and freedom that underline current notion of the South Asian diaspora. Through her character, the novel defines and redefines the notion of home/nation as the changing phenomenon in the globalized world and the way two cultures are clashed, negotiated and blended.

Key Words: Diaspora, Dislocation, Gender, Tradition, Priya

Introduction

Breaking free from the terrestrial, cultural as well as gender boundaries, Priya represents the way youth exists in the diaspora challenging and exceeding these frontiers. Revolving around the protagonist's visit home after seven years in the USA, the novel interweaves and poignantly deals with multiple issues like class, caste and gender roles. Overriding of tradition on the individual choice and diasporic sensibility resulted in the disinclination towards Indian culture and compels the central character to escape from these stereotypical roles and make USA her home. The story gradually unfolds with dilemma and predicament of Priya because of the family's cautiousness about their status as Brahmins and molding her into a typical Brahmin girl. But, by creating the third space, by contesting and

Converting, Priya refashions herself and writes a successful story.

Rising Above the Frontiers

The novel portrays the youth maintaining their identity of 'modern *desi*' by standing in-between two cultural spaces or being 'modern' completely by making a new land as their 'own'. Incapable of shaping herself in a conventional role in her own cultural space, she feels imprisoned and this feeling of entrapment grows when she is insisted to choose the culture of her origin and act according to the Indian tradition. Priya breaks the unwritten but the most significant law made by the society by falling in love and getting engaged with an American man: "Do not marry a foreigner" order would usually be last on the list; it was the most important on the list. Any of the other sins the parents could live with; a foreigner

daughter—or son-in-law was blasphemous.” (MS) After arriving in India, all her hope gradually crumbled when she couldn’t gather the courage to tell her family about her relationship with an American man Nick because she was “in love with a man who had the wrong skin color and nationality.” (MS) She is responding against this dislocation of ‘self’ and display diasporic sensibility and reveals the sense of disintegration which is felt and conceived by an individual in the diasporic culture and as the: “...inner life, the lived sense of ‘self’-however non-unitary, dispersed and fragmented-that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen.” (Pinner, 57)

She is unable to associate with her place of origin and feels like a stranger, an outsider in her homeland which shows her inability of reemerging with her soil after experiencing diaspora. After living seven years in U.S. Priya starts reacting against traditions which were blindly followed and never questioned by her before. Priya’s double displacement results in clashing with the culture and custom of both the spaces, Indian and Western surfacing her struggle: “I was seeing this world, my ex-world from my Americanized vision. This ex-world of mine was different to me now from what it had been before. I saw some things better, while other things had blurred beyond recognition.” (MS)

She ridicules the rituals and thinks that following them without understanding is idiocy. The heroine of this novel is paradoxical with other characters of the diasporic narratives as she doesn’t show any sense of belonging, nostalgia or craving for

homeland. She gradually comes out from this restricted Indian atmosphere by moving towards west, the wider sphere of the world. Her family intends to rub her hybrid identity which is looked as a threat to their cultural purity and draw a line around her to keep their ‘ancient promises’ in which she suffocates and finds it stifling and excruciating because of the exclusion of her desires and liberty. The text mirrors the popular image of the occidental world through her family as she states: “They had condemned the entire Western world to being immoral criminals and crooks.” (MS) Constantly warned about her status, she was told: “You only *live* in the States. It is not your country. They will never accept you. You will always be an outsider there, a dark person.” (MS)

This novel also explores the connections between caste and gender and the ways in which it operates and clashes in a hybrid space. Her resistance comes as a spontaneous reaction because of her living in the hybrid culture which ends in confronting her orthodox family who attempts to replant her in her real homeland and cut the hybrid root. Not only geographically but also emotionally she moves away from the original center-nation, community and affiliations and finds herself unable in reconnecting with it. After returning to India, she bears the burden of beliefs and myths and feels cultural and geographical dislocation reflecting diasporic sensibility, mindset and way of life. Feeling of estrangement and displacement is constantly reflected in her act, behavior and statement as she feels homelessness at her

homeland that resulted in emptiness, boredom and perpetual exile:

“I wanted to distance myself from India and my family; I wanted to feel nothing, pretend this was happening to someone else, not me; but I couldn't. I knew these people and they knew me; however dark and ugly it might get, I would still know them and they me. There was no delusional escape, this was the here and now, and whether I liked it or not, I was here now.” (MS)

Adapting the ‘other’ nation and culture creates the sense of disaffection and aloofness with her ‘own’ culture and distances herself with her ‘real’ home, discarding Indian identity to become an integral part of the adopted land. After coming back to America she expresses: “It was a relief to be back in the U.S. This was familiar territory and I didn't feel like a cross between a delinquent teenager and a bad daughter anymore”. (Epilogue) The novel explores the altered relation with the land she is born and brought up; the protagonist evokes her joyful childhood memories but now dissociate herself with her native land. The sense of belonging and rootedness is now attached with the western world and the different diasporic voice emerges with it that doesn't convey the nostalgia, longings or homesickness. This willing migration fulfills her ambitions and carves her desired space. In this way, diasporic literature and cinemas: “Offer a deconstructive practice of hegemonic culture in their potential to open up radical, polyvocal, multicultural spaces.” (Sharma, 137)

Crossing the Cultural and Gender Lines

Apart from the cultural conflict, Priya battles with gender discriminations in her journey of reaching her goal. She deals with the established conventional value system which refuses the absorption of other culture and attempts to mould her in a typical Indian girl but eventually she becomes victorious in breaking boundaries of both, culture and gender. She was forced by their family to reenter in the mainstream Indian tradition but she overcomes these restrictions of rituals by earning a new identity. She bitterly states: “I was prepped up for a fight like a homicidal bull being made to do something against its will.” (MS) Her refusal to marry ‘good Indian boy’ shows her refusal of entering into the mainstream Indian society following the customaries. She states:

“Life would have been easier if I had fallen in love with a nice Indian Brahmin boy—even better if I hadn't fallen in love at all and was ready to marry some nice Indian Brahmin boy my parents could pick out like they would shoes from the catalogue.” (MS)

Her family takes their religion and rituals very seriously but Priya is objective. Her journey of emerging as a new woman and creating her own space portrays her coming out of not only of the patriarchal mould but also the cultural image and definition of an ‘ideal woman’. The focal character of this novel is trapped under the tradition, belief and conventional code of her ‘real’ culture. Criticizing and denial of accepting the original culture shows the

response of the first generation after living in the diaspora. Priya has wholeheartedly adopted and at home with American culture while her own culture of origin seems alien to her. Her people always taunt her about her cultural 'impurity' and try to convert her into a proper Telugu woman. She also exposes the claustrophobic life of women under the superficial glamorous trappings of the society. She articulates her views about arrange marriage:

“Arranged marriage is not just a crapshoot, as many believe it to be. It is a planned and business-like approach to marriage. A man’s parents want certain qualities in their daughter-in-law, and a woman’s parents want certain qualities in their son-in-law. What the children want usually does not figure in the equation. The parents try to find the perfect match and hope for the best.”
(MS)

She challenges the frontiers drawn by culture and unfetters the chain of overbearing conventions and finally her exhausting struggle ends with her triumph. She crosses the *lakshmanrekha* drawn around by the tradition and transgresses the boundaries of gender and culture and ultimately discovers her 'self' and identity by unlocking the possibilities to make her space and write her own story. To pursue her rightful share of happiness, she breaks the 'ancient promises' seeking a joy of her life in fresh promises of her fiancé Nick. Her marginalization pushes her towards a revolt and rebel against the restraints imposed on her in the name of tradition and so called *maryadas*. She rejects the

stereotyped image of a woman who is taught to accept every tyranny in the name of tolerance and sacrifice. She says: “My mother wanted to be a textbook parent while I felt that I was old enough to warrant being treated as an equal.”
(MS) She doesn't accept the clichéd binaries that have regarded men as constituting the center and women merely forming the margins and battles with the dichotomous archetypal that has worked against her and characterizes the male and the female as the self and the other.

Oppressive rituals and unjust customs play a major role in generating physical and psychological detachment and isolation with her culture. Torn between two worlds, she is unable to find solace in her land and deals with the dilemma between her old world and her newly adopted land. The novel particularly focuses on the perspective of a diasporic woman, the way she perceives her world after living in diaspora and resolves her struggles by redefining her existence. As a diaspora, she is more conscious and aware of the sufferings of marginalized Indian women and gives a voice to diasporic sensibility and feminist concerns. The central character Priya doesn't only combats with all the conventions but also gives strength to other women characters of the novel to stand up and fight for their right. She helps them to come out of the wall of established social rules and demand the equal space for them. The mango season has contradictory meaning, on the one hand, her pleasing memories are associated with it as a child; but in the present time, it becomes bitter and tormenting as a woman

that stifles her liberty. Mango is relational to the essential Indianness and pickling of the mangoes symbolizes the preserving of age old culture and tradition, sustaining it and passes it to the next generation.

The author narrates Hindu customs, ceremonies and describes the delicacies that gives an insight into the orthodox Hindu world and describes how difficult it for a modern woman to break these barriers of traditions. The revelation of her engagement with an American brings turmoil in the family as it was unimaginable and unthinkable for a family to marry their daughter with a man who doesn't belong to their culture. The family was more concerned about the disgrace and shame, their reputation in the society than Priya's sentiments. They attempts to change her decision by saying: "Marrying someone who does not understand your culture, your roots, your traditions, it will

not work out." (MS) She wants to live her life on her terms; she doesn't want to divide herself but to recognize as an individual, as a human:

"I wanted her to accept me the way I was, not the way she envisioned me to be. I wanted her to love Priya the person, not Priya the daughter who didn't live outside of her imagination." (MS)

Here, westernization and expatriation are not the cause of dislocation but looked as an opportunity of independence, freedom and fulfilling of desires. The protagonist doesn't only wholeheartedly embrace her hybrid identity but celebrates it. Her reluctance of surrendering the typical roles of a woman shows her refusal of relational position and her lower place in the "power-structured relationship" and steps across culture, gender and nation and find a new world of her 'own'.

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