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**Depiction of Familial & Cultural Values in Rural Life of Southern India  
in Amulya Malladi's novel *The Mango Season***

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**Article Received:** 20/06/2024

**Article Accepted:** 24/07/2024

**Published Online:** 25/07/2024

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.6.126

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**Abstract:**

India has large population residing in its rural parts. In fact, more than seventy percent of people live in villages. Indian literature has given much scope to the depiction of rural life. Many authors produced literary creations based on rustic life giving both idealized and/or realistic picture of rural India. Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* (2003) is one of the finest novels, published in recent times, which gives a very interesting picture of Indian rural life mainly from Southern part. Malladi gives her great insight into the Indian tradition while portraying traditional and familial values, generation gap, rural family structure, etc. The novel *The Mango Season* has a traditional Indian family from rural area at its background. The captivating plot relates to Indian traditions, and takes readers onto a journey into India's cultural and familial values. To be more specific, it deals with things peculiar to India: family rules, arranged marriages, women's status in family decisions, and parents' expectation from their children. Malladi, skillful in handling emotion and humour, has presented some painful scenes in quite a humorous tone. The events portrayed and the characters presented are so close to reality. The orthodox views about social status and vanity, mostly cultivated by high caste rural people, find its place in the story. Amulya, a great story teller, takes us close to the rural India with stunning details of families, their customs, values and even the food culture. In fact, almost every chapter begins with a recipe. Every aspect viz. setting, events and characters is all set to bring forth rural life, cultural and familial values minutely and in a very lucid language.

**Keywords:** Rural India, Culture, Familial Values, Traditions, Rustic Life, Customs

**Introduction:**

India has large population residing in its rural parts. In fact, more than sixty five percent of people live in villages. Indian literature has given much scope to the depiction of rural life. Many authors produced literary creations based on rustic life giving both idealized and/or realistic picture of rural India. Amulya Malladi's *The*

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*Mango Season* (2003) is one of the finest novels, published in recent times, which gives a very interesting picture of Indian rural life mainly from Southern part. Malladi's novel *The Mango Season* is a rich and colourful fabric that weaves together the complexities of familial and cultural values in rural Southern India. The story, set against the backdrop of the mango season in Andhra Pradesh, captures the spirit of Indian traditions and the inevitable clash between modernity and tradition. Malladi displays a great insight that she has about the Indian tradition while portraying traditional and familial values, generation gap, rural family structure, etc.

Family relationship dynamics is at the centre of the narrative. Priya Rao is the protagonist who was sent abroad by her parents for education and career. She went “. . . to the United States to do a master's in Computer Sciences at Texas A&M, by conveniently finding a job in Silicon Valley, . . .” (Malladi 01). She returns to her ancestral home after spending seven years in the United States. Her return is not just a physical journey but a confrontation with her past, her roots, and the values she had once left behind. The novel beautifully illustrates the strong familial bonds that define rural Indian families.

Joint families is the hallmark of the social structure of rural India. The novel *The Mango Season* has a traditional Indian family from rural area at its background. The Rao family epitomizes the traditional Indian family structure where multiple generations live under one roof, and decisions are made collectively. Priya's grandmother, Amamma, is the matriarch who holds the family together with her wisdom and authority. The relationship between the grandmother and the grand daughter is the main focus area of the plot. This relationship exhibits the essence of rural Indian household as the relationship contains deep respect and love for each other.

Malladi's tale remarkably explores the cultural traditions that are the cornerstone of rural life in Southern India. The narrative contains detailed descriptions of mango pickling to the elaborate rituals of an arranged marriage through which the novel offers readers an immersive experience of Indian customs. The mango season itself is symbolic of abundance, family gatherings, and the cyclical nature of life.

However, the most important aspect of the plot is that it does not only celebrate the rural customs and lifestyle but it also critically examines them. Priya's struggle with the concept of an arranged marriage, her hidden relationship with an American boyfriend, and her fear of disappointing her family highlight the tension between tradition and modernity. The novel portrays the emotional turmoil of a generation caught between two worlds – the one of their heritages and the one they

have come to embrace. Malladi, skillful in handling emotion and humour equally admirably, has presented some painful scenes in quite a humorous tone. The events portrayed and the characters presented are close to reality.

One of the stigmatic aspects of rural India is the strict adherence to gender roles decided by patriarchy. The novel *The Mango Season* sheds light on the gender roles and expectations prevalent in rural Southern India. Women in Priya's family are shown as the keepers of tradition, responsible for upholding the family's honor through their actions. Priya's mother and aunts represent different facets of womanhood within the constraints of a patriarchal society. Their lives revolve around familial duties, and their identities are often defined by their relationships with men. The orthodox views about social status and vanity, cultivated mostly by high caste rural people, also find its place in the story. Priya's family members, especially elders, are obsessed with the concept of caste hierarchy. This thing becomes quite clear in the episode related with marriage of Anand (Priya's younger uncle). "Anand, to everyone's surprise, had a love marriage. He fell in love with a colleague, Neelima, at the company he worked for. Neelima was a Maharashtrian and they got married in secret without telling anyone about it until after the three knots of the *mangala sutra* had been tied" (Malladi 23). The family members wanted Anand to marry a Telugu girl belonging to their caste i.e. Brahmin. Anand's love marriage, "elopement" as they call it, surprised and shocked them all. The caste hierarchy is so stuck to their minds that they did not accept Neelima, Anand's wife, as their family member willingly. Interesting thing to note here is that Neelima is a Brahmin girl from Maharashtra. But Priya's family members were not ready to accept her because she is Maharashtrian, though a Brahmin. The conversation between Sowmya and grandmother *Ammamma* reveals the thing evidently:

"Neelima is a nice girl," Sowmya interjected. "And she is a Brahmin," she added for good measure.

"But not our type," *Ammamma* argued. "She is a Maharashtrian Brahmin, not Telugu. (Malladi 24)

It is obvious that they wanted a Telugu Brahmin girl as their daughter-in-law and no one else, not even a Brahmin from outside Andhra Pradesh. Priya ponders:

And being Telugu was very, very essential. Telugu was the official language of my state, Andhra Pradesh, and we were called Telugu or Telugu people. Being of the same caste was not enough to sanctify a marriage. To marry someone, that someone had to also be from the same state. It was very simple: "they" were somehow lower because "they" were not Telugu. (Malladi 24)

They cultivated a biased and prejudiced outlook for Neelima. Priya's remark is worth to cite here:

My grandparents and most of my family members did not have high hopes for Anand's marriage and they all were convinced that Neelima was not the right woman for him. They also believed that Neelima was actually a witch who had brewed a nasty potion to ensnare their poor little innocent son into her web. (Malladi 23)What would have been the consequences of Anand's marriage and condition of family members, had Neelima been a lower caste girl? We can easily envisage from the above incident.

Priya's defiance of these roles, by choosing to live independently in the United States and engaging in a relationship outside her culture, represents a silent rebellion against these expectations. She remarks "Even though I was raised in a society where arranged marriage was the norm, I always thought it was barbaric to expect a girl of maybe 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" (Malladi 01). Her character is a bridge between the old and the new, symbolizing the gradual shift in societal norms. A. Sophia Mary asserts: "There is no vacillation and there is no second thought, her stubborn will for her love drives her to attain her destiny. Though she is caught between two cultures, Priya strikes balance and overcomes the cultural hindrances by being resilient" (326). Rebellion comes from another character also from the novel and that is Lata. Jayant and Lata are the couple. They were reluctant to follow joint family lifestyle. Especially, Lata got fed up with all the rules of the house and she rebelled against the elders by leaving the 'home' and setting up an 'abode' that is hers only. The narrator narrates the incident in the following words:

Six months after the wedding, Lata didn't say anything to anyone, just packed her bags and Jayant's, found a flat, and left. The family went into total cerebral shock. *Thatha* argued, begged, and pleaded for her to come back, but Lata stood her ground. She told him she was tired of living with people to whom she was merely a cook and a maid. (Who could really blame her for that?) She also said that she wanted her own home, where she was the mistress. (Malladi 24)Probably this incidence gave some sort of courage to Priya to inform her parents about Nick and her relationship.

Another aspect from rural life in Southern India, which can't be left untouched in the present discussion, is the strong sense of community and the social hierarchy that governs it. The interactions between neighbors, the respect for elders, and the unwritten rules of social conduct are depicted with authenticity. The novel also touches upon issues of caste and class, subtly woven into the narrative through character interactions and societal norms.

In the conclusion, it can be said that *The Mango Season* is a touching exploration of the familial and cultural values that shape the lives of people in rural Southern India. Amulya Malladi masterfully captures the essence of Indian traditions while highlighting the inevitable conflicts that arise in the face of modern influences. Through Priya's journey, readers gain insight into the complexities of balancing respect for tradition with the desire for personal freedom. The novel stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of India and the enduring strength of family bonds amidst changing times. The captivating plot relates to Indian traditions, and takes readers onto a journey into India's cultural and familial values. To be more specific, it deals with things peculiar to India: family rules, arranged marriages, women's status in family's decisions, and parents' expectation from their children. Amulya Malladi, a great story teller, takes us very close to the rural India with stunning details of families, their customs, values and even the food culture. In fact, almost every chapter of this novel begins with a recipe of a South Indian dish. Every aspect – setting, events and characters – is all set to bring forth rural life, cultural and familial values minutely and in a very lucid language.

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