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**Interdisciplinary Approaches
towards
Social Transformation**

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A PRIVY PERUSAL OF MASCULINITY IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF AMULYA MALLADI

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Abstract

Literature, as it is the mirror of life, reflects the lives, happenings & behaviors of the human beings in the families and in the societies. Through their behaviors, one can know about the culture and tradition of the contemporary age. Also, their approaches and demeanors reveal their tendencies and give us a glimpse of their gender roles and gender relationships. Though the males are not the protagonist in a literary work, however, their contribution to the major female characters makes us understand their approach and tendencies towards the development of their female counterparts. Most of the novels of Amulya Malladi, revolves around the female protagonists, their lives and their challenges they face in their journey towards their achievement of success. In fact, their emergence of success and their concept of so called, 'New Woman' is vividly portrayed through the characters by the novelist. The point to be noted here is that, these female protagonists emerge successful not only on their own effort but also, to some extent, through the contribution and support of the male characters, in the proceedings of the story. In some of the novels of Malladi, these male characters, contrary to their known trait of exploitation and oppression towards women, extend support and guidance to the female protagonist on their behalf and enable them to snap out of their problems with ease. The present paper, *A Privy Perusal of Masculinity in The Select Novels of Amulya Malladi*, analyses this concept in the select novels of Malladi and tries to illustrate with the male characters taken from, *The Mango season*, *A Breath of fresh air* and *Serving crazy with curry*. It also attempts to examine the behaviours of these male characters and redefine them to appreciate how Malladi intricately balances both the gender and the male character's contribution in the process of achieving success by the female.

Keywords: masculinity, redefining, support, achievement, success of females

In her article, *Healthy Masculinity* written by Zuri White-Gibson writes: It is true that the way we have consistently seen masculinity expressed is often connected to harm sexual assault, domestic violence rates, or homophobia-but there is also room to talk about what's been missing from the conversation: healthy expressions of masculinity.

From her comments one can understand that even masculinity can be viewed under a 'positive light'. The present paper tries to shed light on these positive aspects of masculinity taking some male characters from the select novels of Amulya Malladi and attempts to redefine them.

To begin with the positive perusal of masculinity, the character Sandeep from the novel, *A breath of Fresh Air*, is taken. Revolving around the Protagonist, Anjali, her sufferings and her victimization to the Bhopal Gas tragedy which played with her life, the novel presents the catastrophe of the man-made disaster and how innocent humans like Anjali became victims. Though the entire novel deals with all the above issues faced by Anjali, the protagonist's relationships with the other characters are well defined in a naïve way. Anjali, being cheated by her philandrist-army husband, Prakash who expresses all forms of Masculinity towards her. He hurts her and she undergoes trepidation with her treatment by her husband, Prakash. However, there is another male character in the novel that redefines masculinity from a positive perspective. He is Anjali's second husband, Sandeep. After having known of all the bitter past of Anjali, including her health marriage, Sandeep deeply loves her and marries her. He feels happy as, "She would be a partner and a wife; she would be a friend and a lover. I knew I wanted to marry her, and I asked her as soon as her finals were over" (P-59).

Sandeep, not only stops with that but proceeds to love her even after marriage. He takes care of her and their son Amar. Although he is aware that Amar 's health is deteriorating day by day, he never loses his hope and provides utmost support and comfort to Anjali. Whenever Anjali gets depressed with her past life, he immediately comforts her and relieves her with his loving words and kisses. He never behaves like an ordinary male displaying masculinity traits such as domination ,suppression etc. as Prakash. In all aspects Sandeep behaves like an anti-thesis of Prakash, who shows his traits like satirical and degradable comments and cheaper treatment towards his wife. Sandeep, at times, feels that he is inferior in his deeds of satisfying Anjali's desires. He

thinks, "Compared to other wives, Anjali had never asked for one thing and that agitated me more than anything else did. Did she not ask me for anything because she knew I couldn't afford it?" (P-46).

Sandeep's dutiful approach is not only limited to Anjali, but towards all women related to his life, such as his sister, Komal, Anjali's mother, and his friend Gopi's wife Sarita. He particularly shows extra care and interests towards Anjali and always strives to make her happy at all costs. Even though Anjali's parents hate him he understands and reciprocates with his love and respect and earns their good will. Sandeep takes very good care of him," mummy said. This is probably the first time she had something nice about Sandeep. He aspires for meeting them with their daughter and grandson, Amar. He finally earns the love of Anjali's parents and even from Prakash as well at the end of the story. Though he cannot make Anjali rich with all jewels and material riches, he feels proud that he is able to give her much more than the material riches can afford. He says, "I couldn't give her material comforts, and even though I didn't really believe that the man should be the only breadwinner, I knew that was how she had been raised." (P-46) In displaying such subtle qualities, Sandeep stands apart from the accustomed characteristic traits of masculinity in the novel, *A Breath of Fresh Air*.

The Mango Season, Malladi's second novel is the other novel that the paper takes for its analysis. The male character, Priya's father, Ashwin, who redefines masculinity and stands as an Anti-thesis to Priya's Grandfather. Twined around the character Priya, a 27-year-old girl, born and brought up from a conservative Telugu Brahmin family, arrives from America to her home in Hyderabad along with the news of her engagement with her boyfriend, Nick Collins. Though Priya's father appears in the middle of the novel, he stands unique from all his male counterparts in his behaviour towards Priya. He understands the feelings of his daughter and gives her timely advice which Priya's mother fail to do so. He never displays masculinity traits such as oppression, domination, arrogance etc at any costs, contrary to his father-in-law but gives full freedom and liberty to his family members. He hates such behaviours exhibited by his father-in-law and stays distant from him, however, he shows respect to him. Priya says, "Eventhough my father disliked *Thatha*, he was always respectful". (P-92) He gives importance to his daughter's desires and respects her opinions and feelings. He loves her and satisfies her childish desires such as buying her *ganna juice*, etc, " 'Let us hope that you don't fall sick' Naana said, squeezing my hand" (P-95).

Ashwin behaves as a good father in respecting her thoughts and feelings and in this regard, he stands apart from his father-in-law who illustrates himself with all the traits of masculinity. In contrast to his father-in-law who treats his still unmarried daughter as a burden, he loves Priya and never compels her on the issue of marriage.

When Priya confesses her engagement with Nick, he first feels hurt but later understands empathetically and gives his consent to Priya. He even persuades all the other members to accept Priya marriage with Nick. In the words of Priya, “Naana always wanted to be a good father. (.....) If I asked him for anything, his answer would always be yes, regardless of whether he could comply with my wishes or not.” If your nanna doesn’t say yes, who’ll say yes?” he would say. A father’s job according to my father was to keep his children happy. (P-183). Though, he denies her love with Nick later he understands her feelings and gives his consent. Thus, one can understand the kind nature and empathetic approach of Priya father in the novel, *The Mango Season*. Another character which unfolds a positive and pleasant trait on masculinity is picked from the novel, *Serving crazy with curry*. The character which makes us to shed positive light on the masculinity traits of suppression, oppression upon females is Avinash Veturi, father of the protagonist, Devi Veturi. Avinash Veturi, lovably addressed by Saroj as Avi, is taken as an illustration for the deconstruction of masculinity in the novel. Facing incessant failures in her life, Devi Veturi attempts to commit suicide but even fails in her mission of death. The timely rescue by her mother, Saroj, brings back her life but not her happiness and peacefulness. This ends in her in becoming psychologically mute and delineate herself from the other members of the family. The only members love her was her father Avi and her grandmother Vasu. In this context, Devi’s dad, Avi, comes under perusal of masculinity. Not like an ordinary father, Avi, loves Devi right from her childhood. He expresses his love for Devi through his letters. He writes four letters to Devi and expresses all his feelings; a father has towards his daughter. He beautifully instils confidence to Devi and writes, ‘Life is so much fun, Devi. I wish you could have some fun, so much fun that you will never, ever think about dying again. We should be afraid of death because that affirms our faith in life. When we embrace death, we give ourselves to the wasteland of hopelessness’.

I will hold your hand through this. (.....)

I love you, Devi, live for me!

Daddy (P-66)

Avi supports and renders timely guidance to her. Whenever Saroj scolds Devi, Avi was always at her rescue. Even after getting discharged from the hospital, it was Avi who arranged her room with love and care. He kindly talks to Devi, “We want you to stay with us, until you feel better,” Avi said and Devi, to her horror, caught the glint of tears in his eyes. He hugged her close, his prosthetic arm and his real arm enfolding her, holding her tight. (P-61) “Everything ‘s going to be all right, okay?” Avi said and Devi nodded, wanting to comfort him as he was comforting her. (P-61)

He trusts her daughter very much contrary to Saroj and her Sister Shobha. Despite the Doctor’s Advice of not to make her drive alone, Avi trusts her and gives her driving license and insists her to return home on time after dropping Girish.” But we

are advised to keep your credit cards and driver's license with us. This doesn't mean we don't trust you, just as a precaution." (P-61) He loves all her dishes and enjoys fully and gives convincing comments and feels that he will put on weight by eating Devi's Delicacies. He feels very happy at his daughter's psychological progress and appreciates her. Finally, unaware of the truth of Devi and her sister's husband adultery, he shouts at Girish and feels satisfied at his leaving home and happily permits Devi to join the culinary school, as she wished.

Thus, this analysis, despite many male dominant characters exhibiting the most common traits, tries to redefine masculinity and assure that there are certain male characters who stand apart and display positive traits of masculinity in a unique way to their female counterparts and help in their liberation of crisis. Amulya Malladi, though a feminist writer subtly extols the fact that the harmony between the two genders contributes for the success of the weaker sex. Though her novels deal with the life and the psyche of women, it inherently shows that there are certain masculine characters who stand apart from their natural traits and come forward to understand their predicament and extends support on their behalf for their emergence and emancipation. Thus, this paper gives scope to the readers and the researchers of Amulya Malladi to enjoy her writings and also to understand that the author is not biased on femininity alone but also focusses on masculinity, thereby making them to understand that anything in the world, either family or community, flourishes only with the harmonious relationships of both masculine and feminine.

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