



Grow with Literature: Gut, Grit, Glory and Grace with reference to *Phaniyamma* written by M K Indira in Kannada and translated into English by Tejaswini Niranjana as “*The Young Widow*”

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Abstract

The aesthetic expression of a writer takes the reader to the places he wanders, people he meets, the emotions he shares, and the feeling he is evoked. The readers see a slice of the world with its myriad hues through the writings. The writings have a powerful impact on the minds of the readers; to learn and live his life better. Most importantly, literature is the mirror of life. It helps us to understand those things that are not easily understood and comprehended that includes pain, hatred, love, death, war, sacrifice, human nature, and more surprisingly truth. Furthermore, it helps us to understand the power of language. Literature is the mere imitation of life. You learn about culture, Society, and language period. It is just not a rich pool of information and knowledge but a source to life's energy to absorb and grow. The stories in various forms of literary expression provide us the readers to understand that we are not the only souls who walk the path of pain, and penance. We learn that similar situations have happened in the past and we pick up the gems of wisdom in how they handled such difficult situation. We absorb joy, exhilarate mirth, love the passions, be inspired in their heroic deeds, soothed by words so found, admire nature so exquisitely painted, find synergy in the freedom movements and fight against people, forge tenacious bonds with vision and so much beyond our comprehension is what Literature offers mankind to integrate into his life to grow himself. Great literature transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote. "Literature must be an analysis of experience and a synthesis of the findings into a unity" (Rebecca West), British author, journalist, literary critic and travel writer. The victory of the human spirit in the face of challenges is a hugely popular theme in literature, film, and real life.

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Literature as Mirror and Mentor

Literature is a body of written works of writers whose creative imagination is distinguished by their intentions, expressions, and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution of thought. The word 'Literature' comes from Latin, which originally

meant "the use of letters" or "writing." But when the word entered the Romance languages that derived from Latin, it took on the additional meaning of "knowledge acquired from reading or studying books." so we might use this definition to understand "Literature with a Capital L"



The earliest examples of written literature appear to have originated in ancient Mesopotamia. The Sumerian civilization first developed writing around 3400 B.C., when they began making markings on clay tablets in a script known as cuneiform.

The first known author of literature in the world was the high-priestess of the ancient city of Ur, Enheduanna (2285-2250 BCE) who wrote hymns in praise of the Sumerian goddess Inanna. And we hail Geoffrey Chaucer as the father of English literature. The Purpose/Role/Aim is to entertain and to give aesthetic pleasure. The focus of the literary purpose is on the words themselves and on a conscious and deliberate arrangement of the words to produce a pleasing or enriching aesthetic effect. While literature largely is written in the form of words, these words come alive in one's mind through their imagination. Literary elements include plot, theme, character, and tone and assume the form of poetry, prose, dramas fiction and non-fiction with numerous techniques and theories. And in all of it we find instances of many great qualities, challenges, adversaries, success, and lessons that can be replicated in our own lives. In this article we pick out how Gut and grit have brought in growth and glory to the characters created and to their creators.

Gut feeling is the intelligence of the unconsciousness. A feeling or reaction based on instinctive emotional response is defined as gut feeling. The sixth sense, your intuition or gut feelings is based on your experiences and knowledge. gut reaction" or "gut feeling" is more profound than your conscious mind. Intuition comes from a place of truth within, the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning. "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift, and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift." Said Albert Einstein. It's true that most often we look for answers from logic and reason. Intuition is the intelligent of the heart and the knowledge of the soul.

Grit is the passion and perseverance of an individual to overcome obstacles. Angela Duckworth, an American academic, psychologist, and popular science author has done extensive research across the various sectors of life and states that Grit is the

strongest predictor for success especially in long time goals. She adds that it's like a marathon to win. Grit is more a mind related trait and individuals with growth mindset are found to be resilient and with grit to succeed their passionate goals. This reflects the persons courage and character.

When you run your life with intelligence and perseverance, glory is sure to follow. The admiration and adulations that an individual receives for doing something impressive is called glory. But, when glory hits the head and inflates the ego, people can undo themselves. So, it's necessary that the glorified individual holds his grace, to show dignity, honour and courtesy.

Voices of Grit and Grace in Global Fiction

The uniqueness of gut, grit, glory, and grace is reflected in many characters created in literature. These tall characters stand a model for the readers to understand and overcome their own obstacles in grace and to glorify their goals and life. List of them is so long that only a few have been showcased for the traits highlighted in the heading.

Brontë relinquished her vow to abandon the imagination and created Jane Eyre, a heroine who trusts in imagination, intuition, and vision. Jane fights the battle within her soul. She wins the battle because she listens to her intuitive inner voice that tells her what she wants to hear: she must return to Rochester. Jane realizes that if she does not listen to her inner voice, a life of emotional imprisonment with St. John will be the result. Jane is the symbol of a rebelliously positive woman who refuses to give up.

Another example is of Lucy Snowe in *Villette* written by Charlotte Brontë. Bronte shows Lucy as a creature of feeling who is not concerned about the facts of a situation but her own emotional reactions to the situation. Does it cause pain, joy, suffering, guilt, or fear? Lucy's answer comes from her intuitive consciousness: the inner voice.

Fa Mulan is a Disney character who first appeared in the 1998 film "Mulan." She is highly driven, intelligent, stubborn, self-reliant, and courageous. She doesn't let gender discrimination stop her from enlisting in the army in her father's place. Fa Mulan experience taught generation of girls to keep dreaming and striving to achieve.



Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple' is set in the deep American Southern land. Celie one of the fiercest and resilient women you'll find in stories, is born into poverty. She is molested, separated from her sister Nettie and her children are taken away from her. One day Celie meets Shug, a glamorous singer and probably the only strong female Celie has known. Inspired by Shug, Celie decides to take charge of her own life.

A romantic historical fiction, Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'The Scarlet Letter' introduces the readers to yet another on the list of resilient women. The story revolves around Hester Prynne, a young woman who has an illegitimate daughter and wants to repent for her sins, so that her daughter, Pearl can have a better life than hers. Since the story is set in Puritan times, between the years 1642 and 1649, it is replete with religious references and themes of legalism and sin.

Elizabeth Bennet, one of the resilient women from Jane Austen's story world from *Pride and Prejudice*, is at the centre of this tale. The story revolves around Elizabeth's life and is laced with the overpowering theme of marriage, reflecting on how mutual respect is important between partners, how marriages loop in more than just the individuals involved, and so on. Even until this day the perception of Literature has not altered. It is only a superfluous embellishment and not a critical component to life unlike science or technology. But every piece of work gives hope to human life and living. And that is why we need the literary space. Emily Dickens brings out the essence of hope in the poem below and this highlights how literary works Impress, impact, shape our thinking process and living.

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

Literature inspires you, motivates you, increases your knowledge and exposes you to new realms of thoughts and ideas. When we read literature, we come across many people and we begin to ask if they can do it, why can't I? Literature has the power of transforming one's mind. We pick up the perspectives that help alter the way we think to deal with people situation or problems in life.

Phaniyamma: A Portrait of Quiet Strength

The characteristics of gut grit glory and grace are explored through the character of a young child widow Phaniyamma, whose enforced widowhood reflected the social conditions prevailing the times of M K Indira, the writer, in her original novel in Kannada and then translated into English by Tejaswini Niranjana as *The Young Widow*. The entire flow of the article is based on the secondary data sources: the translated novel, referenced websites, and related articles/journals on the writer and her works.

A young girl of eight, Phaniyamma was forced into child marriage and made to live a life of a child widow, showed so much of gut, grit and grace as she evolved into an old lady inspiring the readers to look deeply into their privileged life and improved social conditions. To understand the qualities that made Phaniyamma stand out should be viewed against the backdrop of the social customs and traditions in the seventies especially in the rural areas of Karnataka in the early nineteenth century.

Marriage in India is a process of two families coming together and a commitment and a holy bond between two individuals. Child marriages are attributed largely to the Muslim invasion. The parents feared the safety of their daughters and child marriage was primarily used as a weapon to protect them from rapes and abduction. Child marriages prevailed in India from the monarchy days of the Delhi Sultanate. Indian culture focused so much on the girls' virginity, which kept the parents on tender hooks. To ensure their daughters physical purity, they used child marriage as an easy way out. Parents also used child marriage to make their daughter's future better, especially in areas with little economic opportunities. Girl children were married off between 7 and 11 years and stayed with their parent until puberty. Giving away the daughter early relieves the parent off the burden in the family.

The child bride does not understand the meaning of marriage, husband, and life. And when for no fault of hers she loses her husband, the society and family enforce widowhood practices which is even more alien to her understanding.

Young Widows suffer triple disadvantage of gender- due to low status of women and girls, marital



status as a widow and immaturity due to their young age. They also lack the necessary psychological maturity, life experience and knowledge to survive in an adult world.

Phaniyamma, was one of the fifteen brothers and sister born to Sannama and Tammyya of the well-known Brahmin household “Anchemane” in Hebbalige village. The tradition of ‘madi’ was strictly upheld in her family and the absolute faith in the horoscope was a normal way of life. Superstition and inane customs were practised or rather enforced all around in the village. Religious heads and their instructions however illogical were held in high esteem and followed to the last word. Such was the social fabric into which the life of Phaniyamma was painted. Phaniyamma was small made with pale complexion, small eyes, nose and mouth. She was always very gentle, walked and talked softly and worked without a fuss.

In those days, girls as young as eight would start wearing an eighteen-yard saree indicating that they are ready for marriage. When Phaniyamma turned nine, she was married off to a fifteen-year young kid Nanjunda from the neighbouring village based on their horoscope match. The extravagant wedding celebration lasted 8 days that no one in the village cooked at their homes for those 8 days. Neither did the bride nor did the groom understand the significance of marriage nor its consequences to their innocence. Forced child marriage was the norm of the days. Even before the celebrating rituals was over, in less than three months Nanjunda died by a snake bite and Phaniyamma became a child widow.

The life following the death of Nanjunda was a deprived childhood and womanhood for Phaniyamma. She was enforced to adhere to the strict and outdated inhumane practices of widowhood of the brahmin community. The young child widow had to shave her head, break her bangles, was given white saree to wear, no vermilion, no flowers and nothing that signifies a normal woman. Phaniyamma had to sleep on the ground with no pillows and ate only one meal and stayed in a room in the distant corner of the house. All this cruelty was enforced on the young child because of the social customs practised. Phaniyamma could not understand what her fault was to be treated so that she cried only when

her bangles were broken. She liked them so much and she got them in the recent temple fair. Such was her innocence.

In quick time Phaniyamma came to accept that no one did her any harm, and this is her way of her life and living. Since she stayed back in her parents’ home, she felt a little familiarity and slowly took responsibility of the household, children, farmwork and managing the huge household of Anchemane. There were so many festivities, marriages, childbirth in the family. In fact, Phaniyamma helped her mother with four deliveries. With so many children being born in Anchemane, Phaniyamma learnt to handle post-delivery care so well that she was present at every childbirth in spite of the new hospitals coming up in villages. People believed that her presence and care would help the baby and mother to be healthy and strong. She was low maintenance and less expense.

Transforming Tradition with Intuition

Phaniyamma was not educated yet with her intuitive intelligence and gut feeling, she helped solve many issues in the Anchemane subtly. She was able to softly pass off madi rituals and practices for the other younger generation of girls though she would exercise as a habit. Phaniyamma came to an understanding that the madi practices were imprisonment in the changing times in the life of young girls and women. If motor cars, hospitals, and theatres were considered growth, why should old practices still be enforced on women. Phaniyamma’s innocence and her acquired information and knowledge helped her evolve into a wise woman who was respected and sought after by everyone that she became the head of the Anchemane which was completely dominated by male administration. She became ‘Ancheyatte’.

Phaniyamma was able to comfort and help women in the family, especially those who have been discarded by their husband or abused by their husband. Sometimes it would even extend beyond the family. Through sheer grit, Phaniyamma was able to alter the decision of enforcing madi practices on young widows in her family. She stood her ground to express her views to alter the situation and perceptions of people about young widows. She ensured other young widows don’t go through the



cruel practices she suffered because of age old social superstitions and customs blindly followed. It was not an easy task to alter the mindscape of people who have been soaked in tradition and who believe that breaking them is outrageous, but she never gave up, continued her stand silently without being rebellious. In time she was successful in protecting some of the young widows from harmful subjugation.

Phaniyamma was able to highlight the changing behaviours and attitude to some of the practices and customs in the family. One such incident is about her younger brother who used to berate people who went to see plays in the town until one day he himself was given a pass to watch a play. Her life's experiences enlightened her thinking process and inspired others to alter their views. On a festive occasion, a two-year-old young kid in the family leaned on Phaniyamma as she was about to eat after a hard day of work. Phaniyamma still practiced *madi*, which means she must bathe again and then may or may not eat the only meal she took every day. The child's mother out of anger and concern for Phaniyamma hit the child strongly that he choked and puked the sweets he ate. This incident brought out Phaniyamma's graceful nature. She questioned how a young child would know of *madi* and pointed out how strongly the fear of customs has seeped into lives that we forget our normal thinking and get into rage when we see it is not upheld. Phaniyamma felt that the child would have almost died just because he leaned on her and broke her *madi*. So, she gave up even that 'one meal' and awakened the conscience of others around her.

Even at the age of eight, Phaniyamma's spirit seemed to carry a strange electrical charge. And the Supreme did not have a more precious dwelling place than her heart. When she was eighty-two, she was taken to her kinsman's house in a neighbouring village to help with childbirth. Phaniyamma's exceptional care and skill in delivery was well known to people and around in the neighbouring villages. At that place of stay, a Muslim family came seeking help of Phaniyamma to deliver their daughter's child who was having complications in delivery. Ancheyatte agreed to help the delivery. For the first time everyone in her family disapproved Ancheyatte. She failed to comprehend the rules the elders of the house had formulated because she had

hundreds of questions on them. Phaniyamma went and safely delivered the baby to everybody's joy and gratitude. The Muslim family said that Phaniyamma had a hand of gold and saved two lives. But to Phaniyamma, helping one child to be born earned so much *punya* as a pilgrimage to Kashi. Even in her glorious moments she stayed graceful and set an example of how we can be of help to each other overcoming some dead rules in the face and farce of life.

Conclusion: Why We Need Literature

Literature reflects society, people and culture. The humongous wealth of writings in various evolving forms gives us perspectives to enjoy and alter our way of thinking. Some of the characters and sometimes even the creator set examples for us to follow. It's recommended that we open our world to Literature and pick up the energies and inspiration.

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