

EMANCIPATION OF A NEW WOMAN IN THE NOVEL *MAHASHWETA* BY SUDHA MURTY

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ABSTRACT

The depiction of women from the ancient to the contemporary era can be traced in Indian fiction in different forms written by several authors. The portrayal of women has changed drastically from women struggling, suffering, and showing no signs of relief to women who overcomes the obstacles of dominance. In the contemporary literature, women have been portrayed as strong and liberated. The present paper focuses on the emancipation of a new woman in Sudha Murty's novel *Mahashweta*. Furthermore, the paper throws light on the protagonist whose liberation from the social stigma and prejudice is shown through her hope, resilience and courage. This research also aims to showcase the capability of women to fight against all odds of her life.

Keywords: emancipation, social stigma, prejudice, hope, resilience, new woman.

Literature is a mixture of fiction and facts that acts as a mirror of life. Literature, especially fiction, has played its role in depicting the real time events through fictional characters. Indian fiction has also contributed enormously the – social, political and cultural events of our country. Likewise, the image of women from the ancient to the contemporary era can be traced in Indian fiction in different forms written by several authors. The progression of women from being subjugated under the clutches of men, to the liberated women, could be seen towards the struggle of independence. The novels of the contemporary era portray women as powerful images- independent, self-reliant and bold. Sudha Murty's novel *Mahashweta* too, depicts the new age woman in the light of the protagonist. The novel furnishes hope and resilience against social stigma and prejudice.

A prolific writer in English and Kannada, Sudha Murty has written novels, technical books, travelogues, collection of short stories and non-fiction pieces, and six books for children. She was the recipient of the R.K. Narayan Award for Literature and the Padma Shri in 2006. Her books have been translated into all the major Indian languages.

Sudha Murty's novel *Mahashweta*, offers the readers a tale of a new age woman, named Anupama. She is an extremely beautiful girl who hails from a humble family. Her beauty and acting skills fascinate Dr. Anand, who belongs to a rich family. Eventually, Anand's mother Radhakka, reluctantly gets them married despite the family status. The author shines the spotlight on Anupama's resilience and determination throughout the novel. She frees herself away from the clutches of being a traditional daughter-in-law and unlike any other traditional Indian women, she does not subdue her self-respect and dignity for the sake of the prejudices their in-laws hold on to.

After their marriage Anand goes abroad to pursue his masters. In the course of time, she finds out that her beauty is blemished by small white patches on her foot and learns that she has leukoderma. Her mother-in-law considers her skin condition as a disgrace to the family and eventually she is not allowed to do any work in the house and she is humiliated by Radhakka for concealing her skin condition before marriage. Anupama very well knew that she did not have the white patches before her marriage, but Radhakka was not ready to accept. Anupama does not feel grateful for getting married to a rich family because the riches have only positioned her life worse than before, by giving her a position lower than that

of a servant in the house. Moreover, she is ostracized by her mother-in-law and sent to her father's house for deceiving Anand and his family. She is not able to share her agony even with Anand.

Unlike any other traditional Indian women, Anupama does not succumb to the familial status. The first glimpse of a new age woman could be witnessed when, she refrains her father from pleading to her mother-in-law and without even looking back, she steps out of the house at once. Here, Anu does not suppress her self-respect, rather she tries to come out of the dominance that has been imposed on her through social stigma and prejudice. For Anupama, her dignity was more important than preserving her marriage which only put her into misery.

Anupama went to her room, collected the few things that belonged to her, picked up one of Anand's photographs and returned where Shamanna waited for her. She took his hand in hers, and silently clutching her bag, walked out of the house. She knew in her heart that this was the last time she would be seeing the house or its people...but she did not look back even once. (59)

At her father's house Anupama is constantly accused by her step-mother Sabakka, because her step-sisters are denied of marriage proposals due to her skin condition- leukoderma. Anupama does not have the strength to cope with such stinging remarks. Despite knowing the circumstances of Anupama, Anand too, does not write back to her letters. She realizes that she does not have support from her maternal side and Anand as well. Her step-mother's continual accusations and her skin condition force her to contemplate suicide.

Better sense prevails on Anupama and she returns home to go to Bombay in search of a job. Anu realizes that when her sister-in-law, Girija could get married into a respectable and rich family despite her affair before marriage, why cannot she preserve her respect and individuality by finding her own path? As a new age woman, Anu leaves behind all the barbs and taunts of her family and society and moves forward with the faith she has on herself. Anupama gracefully embraces her skin condition and pours out all her courage to venture into a new beginning in her life. She outcasts all the taunts that has been inflicted upon her and goes to Bombay to find a new job and lead her life independently.

Anupama climbed down the steps. Whatever the circumstances she found herself in, she would meet the challenge head-on, and win. She was now ready to face the world, determined to stand on her own feet and build a new life for herself. (79)

In Bombay Anupama stays with her college friend Sumithra and her husband Hari Prasad. With the help of the couple, Anupama finds herself a respectable job as a clerk. She becomes a financially independent woman, thereby sending money to her poor father in the village. Her confidence starts blossoming with the financial independence. While all odds stood on her way, Anupama did not resort to being a traditional house-wife or a daughter-in-law who acquiesce to the patriarchal dominance. Instead, she showcases her resilience by breaking the stigma and prejudice, that has shattered her life. Anupama even shows her courage when she finds out that Hari has negative intentions on her. Later she moves into Dolly's house and at her suggestion she takes up the role of a lecturer in a college. Here, she is not held captive under Hari. Her education has given her the strength to surpass the abuse that Hari has inflicted upon her. She even takes up the responsibility of looking after Dolly's house. Anupama emerges out to be a woman of immense potentials.

Though Sabakka had ill-treated Anupama, she does not hold on to personal grudges. Even after Shamanna's death, Anu monetarily supports her step-mother and also gets her step-sisters married. Meanwhile, Anand's constant search and efforts for bringing Anupama back home goes in vain. She clearly makes up her decision that she has no relationship with him. Furthermore, she refuses to be held captive in the name of marriage and familial status. Dr. Vasanth's proposal too goes in vain. She refuses the proposal saying that she does not want to get into family circle and prejudice anymore.

how can you possibly expect a burnt seed to grow into a tree? Husband, children, affection, love... they are all irrelevant to me now. It is too late for us. I am no longer the naïve Anupama whose world revolved around you. I know what my goals are and where I am heading, and I don't need anyone's help to reach my destination. (148)

Anupama reveals the evolution of a new woman in her, as she refrains herself from the institution of marriage. She clearly showcases the readers that woman require no support of a man to lead her own life. The author here, portrays how, with the help of education and self- confidence, women can deal with millions of obstacles and lead a successful and happy life. In the end, Anupama emerges out to be a brave new age woman through her courage and resilience.

Sudha Murty's female protagonist Anupama, portrays the image of a new age woman. She has not only broken the stigma and prejudice, but has also in the process, made her own identity. Apart from being a lecturer and an erudite in Sanskrit and plays, her sheer resilience and will power to face betrayal and disappointment gives her an identity. Her quest for self has moulded her personally and professionally into a new age woman.

Indian women have always been seen in the light of struggle and oppression by the patriarchal society. Women were seen as a commodity, a sexual tool and a weaker sex and were pushed into believing the notion that, they were only capable of rearing children and managing household chores. Women were succumbed to the social stigma and prejudice, thus ruining their own lives. The position of women in the contemporary era has seen only acute changes. It is very rare to find women like Sudha Murty's Anupama, who picturizes the woman of the contemporary era; the liberated woman, who outpours her resilience and courage to overcome her adversities caused by the social and familial status. The modern Indian society still is not ready to equate women with that of men. The shadows of patriarchy and familial status still follows the educated women of our country. Its high time that our society changed its way of treating women as caged birds. Women are independent and determined to rebuild her shattered life just like Anupama in the novel. Thus, the novel shows the capability of woman to liberate themselves against all odds of her life.

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