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## An Insight of womanhood in Mahashweta

By Nidhi Upadhyay (Research Scholar)

Bhagwant University Ajmer,

Dr. Deepak Kumar Mudgal (Guide)

Rajasthan (305008)

### Abstract

*The purpose of the paper is to study the evolution of a new woman in Sudha Murty's novel Mahashweta. Women started regaining their lost identity and position in the last few decades of twentieth century, it was majorly due to the efforts laid by social reformers and the writers who penned down the importance of equality. The independent India progressed only with the help of social, political educational advancement and awareness in India. Indian women, as we can see the history has played a dominant role in the progress of the nation and with their development and growth the progress of the nation could be seen. She is the one who governs the world by bringing a new life to the world as it is said, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". With respect to this proverb we will discuss womanhood in Sudha Murty's famous and well read novel, Mahashweta. The woman in this piece of work is hardworking, devoted, enthusiastic, subtle to the emotions and compliant to the situation at first. But as soon she realises her true strength a new woman could be seen out of it, who is all the more resilient, high spirited and firm with her understanding of life. The very essence of their survival after the tragic situation in her life is her confidence in herself and her respect towards self which makes her do the most righteous things in life. The paper will highlight the difficulties faced by the protagonist as the replica of most of the women and the realisation of her competence, prowess and dexterity with which she is able to follow her dream and live a successful life.*

**Keywords:** womanhood, feminism, self-respect, esteem

Women of India since ages have been living under such circumstances that they consider it to be the reality. They were unaware of the real world and were always in the mode of acceptance to the injustices done towards them. For the atrocities they faced a few writers came for the betterment of women, who were called as feminists. They stood for the equality of women with men. In India, feminism is considered a practical endeavour for the problems women faced in the past, exploited by her husband, brother and other women of the same community. These feminist writers are on their way trying hard to find a meaningful and respectable position for females. Females earlier were passive, subservient, had acceptance for any odd in their lives. Gradually with the advancement of education and the development of special educational institutions for women, awareness for equality through the writings of feminist writers instilled change in the position of women. Indian feminist ideology is strongly influenced by the west. The postmodern feminist novels in India portray woman as the key figure of the family without whom any family's functioning would disturb. At the same time she is also projected as the subject of suffering, domestic slavery and suppression. There was not just the need to grow old but growing up became the necessity. This aspect of growing up was well understood by

many feminist writers. The first thing they learnt was the importance of speaking up and termed it as 'speak ability'. Women writers in India realised the power of words over actions. They are creating a new component of equality by their writings. The right power of words used not only with the essence of speaker but to whom it is being spoken too. Sudha Murty is one such voice, she is being heard and read not only through her words but also by the intent. Mrs. Murty is a dynamic personality, a technocrat, a rationalist. She has earned a distinct place for her special attention to the plight of women. She has never tolerated injustice in her life. She has made the women characters play the pivotal role in her books. Sudha murty has reached the place where she is today with a great efforts. She is an icon of simple living, compassion and empathy. She had been shouldering her husband all through his tough way. Always seated on a back seat but remained a constant support for the Infosys foundation as well.

Sudha Murty is the recipient of R.K Narayan award for literature and the Padma shri in 2006. She questions the patriarchal society by using her powerful weapon of words through her novels. The female protagonists of her novels are intelligent but bound to be submissive in the beginning due to the societal rules and pressure. They are the true portrayal of an Indian woman who readily sacrifices her career, dreams, aspirations and happiness of the family with an expectation to be acknowledged. Anupama of Mahashweta is one such example who emerged as a new example for many.

Sudha Murty's Mahashweta is a thought provoking, eye opening, motivating and inspiring story for the modern Indian woman. Anupama, the protagonist, the lead character of the story plays a significant role of a young, beautiful bold girl, whose fairytale marriage has a tragic end. She boldly and confidently stood up again without fearing what society will say and comment for now. The title Mahashweta comes from Bana Bhatta's Sanskrit novel 'Kadambari'. The hero meets with an untimely death, leaving Mahashweta all alone to fight and suffer in this unkind world. The story of Anupama is similar to certain extent to the heroine of Kadambari. She is a woman abandoned by her in laws, forsaken by her insensitive husband, compelled to return to her parent's house. Her step mother pinned sarcasm did not let her stay at peace even there. She was determined to rebuild her life against all odds. She finally decides to go to Bombay to find success, respect and a promising life.

The protagonist Anupama is possessed with certain assets in her character which develops her intrinsic worth in the minds of readers. The virtues like sincerity, humility and resilience led Anupama fight all the false values and superstitions she faced in life, which inspires the readers. The story is about Anupama who is a very beautiful girl. Her beauty attracted Anand towards her. She develops a disease after marriage which turned her life to hell. Her husband inspite of being a doctor and was very much aware that leukoderma is not a contagious disease. It is completely harmless, it develops due to the deficiency of pigmentation of skin. A moment came when out of depression she tried to commit suicide. But her virtues, her strong character stopped her from doing this malicious act and that too because of such undeserving people. She rather chose to live life with confidence and for herself. She realised her worth. She regained her confidence, faith and compassion. Sudha Murty beautifully depicts the transformation in her life. She started gaining success in the plays. She was accepted by her audience in the world of stage plays. People appreciated her work, respect her for the innate qualities she had. She gradually realised a persons' inner beauty is more important than than the physical beauty. Her husband comes back to her who once deserted her due to the superstitious beliefs of his mother only to get his refusal.

When Anupama was married with Anand, she never thought her life would take such turn. She was aware that her mother in law and sister in law doesn't like her much. But she was ready to accept them for her unconditional love for Anand. Her words from the novel, "Like Rohini to Chandra, like Lakshmi to Narayana, am I to him. Just as the creeper depends on a tree, I depend on him. I cannot live without him, and for his sake, I am ready to renounce everything. Let society say anything it wishes. I do not care..." (Maha 6). It clearly shows her intense love for the sake of her husband. She sacrificed her career, her dreams, her education for Anand and his family.

Randakka, on the other hand accepted her half heartedly. She along with her daughter used to find ways troubling her. Once Anupama caught Girija having an affair outside but she was not heard rather insulted. They considered her as their rival. When her disease was noticed, she was made to believe that it was contagious and was treated badly. Randakka also looked triumphant, "Take your daughter back with you; She need not come back until she's completely cured and my son returns and sends for her." (Maha 58)

The condition of a woman in the absence of her husband is illustrated as pitiable and when husband is not rational as in the case with Anupama the regrets are always there which cannot be coped up. Anupama suffered a lot in this period. Her stepmother's remarks, and Anand's silence made her suffer a lot. But at the same time she regained her strength, her confidence and her will power to live. According to Biblical words "So husband ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." –Ephesians 5:28.

Here Anand completely failed to be a good husband. If he had really loved his wife as his own flesh, he would have never allowed her to suffer. At one point of time she even decides to commit suicide, but soon she realised that it was a coward attempt. She realised that she shouldn't give up for the unworthy people of her life. She took up her life as a challenge with more confidence and faith in herself than ever before. She resumed her passion for plays, drama, writing, acting and training her students. She was highly admired by different people who came in contact with her, she was given due respect which she truly deserved, she was acknowledged by people because of her positive attitude towards life.

The actual worth of an individual is realised with her/his beauty. In this novel the woman's true beauty is not just her physical appearance but the inner beauty is all the more important. Inner beauty comes with the peace, solace and acceptance of people by an individual. When the expectation of giving is more than receiving. The sense of self-worth of Anupama, in the novel, 'Mahashweta' is realised by her when she was dejected by her husband and family. These were the people for whom she was ready to compromise with her career and self-esteem. The simple, yet beautiful girl of the novel, Anupama, was afflicted by a skin disease, which was neither very dangerous nor contagious. Her husband in spite of being a doctor could not take accept Anupama after the development of patches. The societal pressure, the external beauty for which he married Anupama, and his mother's wish led him to shut his eyes from the reality. By the time he realised his mistake it was too late. He went to Anupama only to get her refusal. A girl who was deserted by her husband and suffered so much at the time when she desperately needed support of her husband. Couldn't accept him anymore. Though Anand felt himself responsible for what has happened to Anupama all these years. He had the sense of guilt and shame but the time which once have flown never comes back. He says, "Whatever I have done was wrong, but the time that I have lost cannot be recovered. However, I must rectify the mistakes I have made and shape the future properly. I will beg Anupama to forgive me. She is for superior to anyone I know- in morals, intellect and conduct. With new-found determination he got up." (Maha128) "To err is Human, to forgive divine, but have I erred beyond the point of forgiveness? I will plead with Anupama to forgive me. After all, we are all human and this is part of life." (Maha134)

To his words Anupama gave a sad smile. She knew that now she would not be able to live with a man who once deserted her for the reason which wasn't her fault. She told Anand, "Was it my fault that I got this white patch? Is it my fault that I am a poor man's daughter? Now that you are here, answer me." "You knew that I did not have this before our marriage. You could have told your mother... They wanted an excuse to get rid of me and your silence provided them with the perfect cover." "A marriage is a lifelong commitment; for better or worse, till death do us part. Wasn't that what you'd said to me before you left for England?" "How can you possibly expect a burnt seed to grow into a tree? Husband, children, affection, love ...all are irrelevant to me now. It is too late for us. I am no longer the naïve Anupama whose world revolved around you. I know my goals are and where I am heading, and I don't need anyone's help to reach my destination."

Anupama's faith over marriage and on any relationship faded with the time. She could not entangle herself in the same knot as she had done earlier for Anand. She did not want to entangle herself in the same circle of family and husband. She was a good friend to Vasant and Satya also. But rejected the proposal of Vasant for

marriage. She continued to be their friend rather. Vasant's friend Satya told, "I respect Anupama a lot. She is such a balanced person. Even with all the odds stacked against her, she is always optimistic. Life has treated her badly and given her so many shocks, but she is never bitter."(Maha136)

With this novel womanhood in India has been smashed several times by Sudha Murty by various aspects. The marriages in India where the dominance of husband is always there and women as a wife needs to be subservient to him. Dominating mother in law, sister in law, hypocrite relatives, cursing step-mother and so on. A girl who is a loving daughter of worried parents, brought up in a completely different environment is suddenly sent to the place where she has to meet several expectations of different people including her husband. She would be loved by her husband only at the wish of his family. It is very hard to believe that a small patch led to the dissolution of marriage, which once happened out of love and for which the families of both the sides were convinced.

Indian women is striving for self-fulfilment even today. The need to be a defined womanhood is disdained by many who are united to dethrone feminity, marriage and motherhood. The emancipation of women is considered a slow process. The current need looking at the situation is to examine what modern Indian woman actually wants. What is their definition of womanhood? As the woman protagonist of the novel Mahashweta, Anupama. She could not accept Anand back whom once she loved whole heartedly. She did not want any compromises in her life, she wanted to live with her freedom and self-esteem. She chose to control her life in her own ways, she wanted to grace her body herself without any graceful mangalsutra of husband's name. She wanted the concern of the world after so much of suffering in her own ways. Just like the example of Anupama the requirements of a woman and her expectations from herself, family and society needs to be redefined.

Womanhood in India has suffered a lot not only by the males of the society but also by such female figures in the life of a woman who cannot see the other woman living a happy and contented life. It can be said they want to follow the same what they themselves have suffered at the hands of time. If a grown up woman in the form of mother, mother in law, sister, sister in law etc. stands for the welfare and better life of the new young woman who is growing up by giving them the life full of knowledge, awareness, esteem, confidence, courage to never give up at the hands of circumstances. Teach them to fight for their happy lives, their rights, leading a peaceful life for the betterment of society. Teach them to grow up rather than to grow old. Teach them to learn to respect woman as an individual and let them walk hand in hand with the society. It will lead to the growth and betterment of the society as well as of an individual, it will also lead to build up the status of self-esteem and courage in the minds and hearts of women. The need of the hour is to grow up intellectually as well as psychologically.

Anupama made it very clear by taking a stand for herself and proved that nothing is impossible for a single woman. She can live a life by keeping her head high, she denied any male authority over and proved that women are self sufficient and they can take care of themselves in a better and efficient manner. The major key to success in Anupama's case was education, Sudha Murty gave a very high importance to the education of girls and so is the main character of her novel, a well educated girl. Education helped her to raise her voice and stand against the injustice she meets in day to day life. Anupama is the face and voice of many Indian women, she breaks the taboo that men are superior to women and they need to be under the domination and control of men. She created a new woman of the millennium who have become the direct bread earner of the family and in many cases the whole family is dependent on her earnings. This assertiveness, self reliance women have earned through the education and they have learned the importance of education, which helped them to lead their own lives independently and in their own way.

Sudha Murty made a successful attempt in challenging the year old traditions of marital vows and considering husband as god. For women marriage becomes a commitment till death parts her from her husband. But Mrs. Murty through Anupama efficaciously proved that marriage is not the only goal of the girls life, when the marriage vows are broken, woman must be ready to face the challenging world and live a dignified life. The emancipation of Indian woman has been very slow and it is still in the process of development but it can be assured that this will be the best progress for any nation. The reassessment of the necessities of women needs

to looked upon at, she doesn't want anyone to control her life. She needs the remote control of her life in her hands itself. At the same time she expects the sensitivity, tenderness which is associated with femininity, The need is to positively get motivated towards a larger concept of love, joy, sympathy towards the fellow human beings irrespective of the gender, this is how an example of a perfect society could be created. The true magnificence of such a concept of equality would be measured by the women of future generations where they will not have to compete with anyone and they will have the opportunity to walk hand in hand with the fellow beings, without even giving the thought of trying, competing and struggling to get the equal status. To succeed in this, social forces must be gradually rationalized and organised, and political forces must be mobilised for the common benefit of the society. The ultimate goal was to build a new worldwide economic, political, and cultural environment that would ensure self-sufficiency in the overall development. Indian woman has reached to this state and are prepared to move ahead with confidence, dignity and to fight with all the challenges they come across. She is more confident and firm minded in the actions, her deeds and her expectations from her own life.

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