



An Intricate Exploration of the Sexual abuse segment in *Mahashweta*

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Abstract

This article spotlights on the picture of resistance of Sudha Murty's super sensuous lead, Anupama, against the despotism of the socially-uplifted but mentally-lowered cruel character Hari Prasad, by dint of a sexual abuse segment in the novel. Sudha Murty, an engineering professor-turned-writer, social activist, and chairperson of Infosys Foundation, echoes feminism and courage by fitting the protagonist into a socially-challenged prejudiced world. The protagonist is an easy-on-the-eye figure of the novel who flawlessly plays all the roles that a woman can play in her family and society like the author herself does. The notion of Gender Studies depicted through this segment is analyzed here to have a better understanding of Anupama's and Hari Prasad's stereotypes.

Keywords: *Intuition Psychology, Gender studies, Sexual objectification, Commodification theory, and Psychoanalytic theory.*

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After facing a series of obnoxious encounters that Anupama's nabe and cursed leukoderma has given, she decides to face the world with a determination to stand on her own feet. She doesn't want to be a burden to her father and step-mother. She accepts the invitation of her selfless friend Sumithra and reaches Mumbai with a small suitcase, some of her favorite books, and a tender heavy heart. As days pass, she gets a job recommended by Sumithra's husband, Hari Prasad. Everything in the city is new to her, but later she

overcomes them and fits herself into the discrete lifestyle by becoming friends with her colleagues who are from different backgrounds and regions of the country. Like any other female character of Sudha Murty, Anupama also undergoes tribulations to become iron-willed.

When Anupama met Hari for the first time, his awkward reaction disturbs and reminds her of college days where most of the boys reacted in the same manner. *“With her beautiful large eyes, exquisite complexion, and face framed by long, jet-black hair, she looked like an apsara”* (Murty 8). Her level of maturity is seen in her understanding that all these exaggerations are only for her external beauty and soon they will disappear when a leukoderma patch hits her visage. She learnt this the hard way when her husband’s family abandoned her when they came to know of her condition. Hari’s reaction is deliberate and direct enough to hint Anupama that something nasty is about to happen. Here, Anupama inadvertently employs ‘*Intuition Psychology*’, which the late psychologist Nalini Ambady defines as *“the ability of judging people with their first impressions using the experiences that happened in the past regardless of the intensity”*. This scene also divulges to the readers that something odious might happen as the novel proceeds.

This segment in the novel serves as a great platform for analyzing Anupama’s and Hari’s stereotypes. On a fateful day, Anupama comes home from her office earlier to change her attire to attend her friend Dolly’s marriage. She notices that Hari is already in the house. When she enquires Hari about his untimely return, he says that he’s going on a tour, and to pack his belongings, he has come home early. Anupama enters her bedroom and when she starts changing her saree, she finds a pair of hands grasping her from behind. It is Hari Prasad. When he tries to abuse her, she strongly confronts and slaps him.

You should be ashamed of yourself. You have called me your sister...will you behave with your sister like this? I have always considered Sumi as my own sister and I will certainly tell her about your edifying qualities. Get out my way; I want to go out. (Murty 88)

Anupama is able to endure the situation, not because she was born a woman, but because she’s a woman with strong femininity. This act of femininity holds back Hari and safeguards her until a saleswoman knocks on the door for selling liquid soap. Anupama uses this as a chance and escapes from him.

By analyzing this incident, we can find that Anupama’s femininity lies in her nature of being culturally and socially orthodox and in the wisdom of knowing how to react to situations. This quality of hers could be

put into a literary theory known as *Gender Studies* which is used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of any gender. The term Gender refers only to *masculinity or femininity* and not to the state of being a man or a woman as a whole. In our case, Anupama holds all the characteristics of a typical orthodox woman which she acquired through her father's parenting and her education. This defines the construction of her femininity. Not every woman can be as educated and as well-formed as Anupama. She is the embodiment of Simone de Beauvoir's words, "*One is not born a woman, one becomes one*".

On the other hand, Hari treats Anupama as an object to fulfill his sexual desire and dehumanizes her. Even though he is married to Sumithra, he falls for Anupama's beauty and deviates from moral ethics just to have a secret relationship with her. He gives importance only to his emotions and not to Anupama's ethics. Having said that, we can deduce the application of *Sexual objectification*, which is a component of Feminist theory, that means 'treating a woman solely as an object of sex'. Hari tries to convince her by saying,

Anupama, your beauty has fascinated me from the moment I first saw you. All I see in my dreams is you. Why are you waiting for your foolish husband? Do you think he will ever come back to you? You are wasting your youth instead of enjoying it. Anu, we can be together without anyone ever coming to know about it. I will protect you, whatever the circumstances. (Murty 87)

Anupama turns furious on hearing it and blasts at him. She proves to be an audacious woman and doesn't want to lose to the male chauvinistic society.

Hari serves as an epitome for the ideology 'Men as oppressors of women', i.e. considering men as the causative agents of sexism, and claims that some men tag themselves as in charge of women. But with a broader view, I feel that Hari's hunger for sexual desire is not only because of his biological impulses but also by the effect of *Commodification theory*, which triggers his psychological impulses as well. It is a theory, which states that 'sex is a commodity stolen from a woman by the rapist'. It is an obvious truth, because every day we come across many such instances where some sellers sexualize certain products and trade them along with women's sexuality and become unnoticed rapists. As

Anupama is diseased with leukoderma and sent out from her husband's family. It does not mean that she should be marginalized in society. Sudha Murty, through this novel, limelights the present conditions of

women and the sexual assaults they face. There are so many Anupamas in society who are being harassed everywhere. Sudha Murty wants women to win over the dominant men in society and to be treated with equality and respect. This act of hers justifies the *Psychoanalytic Theory of literature*, which infers that *the author expresses his/her dreams or desires through their neuroses*. In our case, Sudha Murty dreams of equality and freedom for women. She gives Anupama the traits that a woman needs these days. Sudha Murty herself sets an example by being a courageous woman by playing vital roles in various fields like philanthropy, writing, and being the chairperson of Infosys Foundation.

Conclusion

All things considered, the clutter segment in the novel serves as a testimony to different literary and psychological theories through the portrayal of Anupama's and Hari's characters, the dialogue exchanges between them, and the author's treatment of feminism through Anupama and male dominance through Hari. Anupama's resistance against such cruelty is appreciable and the author insists that women of these days should also acquire the aforementioned qualities and be empowered.

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