

A Critical Study of Women Characters in Sudha Murty's 'the mother I never knew'

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Abstract-Literature is a reflection of the human society over centuries and has been the most powerful medium of provoking human emotions and thoughts. Feminism is the fight for women's equal rights such as the right to equal pay and treatment. It is not to be confused with making women do what is seen as Men's roles, like lifting heavy things. Women deserve to be treated as equals, because they are also capable of doing the better roles. History of Literature has observed the women's participation being evolved through centuries. The yester year women's journey has been very critical and disrespectful which they have patiently handled. Recently, Indian English fiction has been trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern predicaments. Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary writing in Indian English. Women have experienced all the criticism and persisted with their extreme journey. Today Women have come a long way emerging as a strong soul in the society. Sudha Murty, a well-known prolific author whose books in Kannada and English have been the best-sellers. She has written novels, technical books, travelogues, collections of short stories and non-fictional pieces. Her books have been translated into major Indian languages. "the mother i never knew" is the book that comprises of two novellas that explore quests by two men- each searching for a mother he never knew that he had. This paper explores the critical study of women characters and analysed in different angles in the novel.

Key words- Sudha Murty, English literature, portrayal of female characters, transformation.

I. An icon of English literature

Sudha Murty as a mother, teacher, granddaughter, daughter and wife, narrates various incidents effectively with her own experience and style. Born in 1950 in Shiggaon, North Karnataka, she became the Chairperson of Infosys Foundation. Her achievements made her to receive R.K Narayan Award for Literature and Padmashri in 2006. In spite of many accomplishments, she isn't portraying herself as a great soul, but as an ordinary person. A passionate reader would be able to see her great values and not the errors. Her down to earth acknowledgement of errors and love for the fellow beings makes her a unique and a great story teller.

Murty's novels reveal that she is an outstanding feminist championing the cause of women's liberty and rights. An intense awareness of her identity as a women and her attention to feminine problems are discovered in her fictions. She presents the real world raising serious questions about contemporary attitudes to men, women and marriage. She analyses the actual social and emotional bonds that bind women. They confront a tradition - oriented society and learn to live under the waves of heritage and modernity.

The protagonist of Sudha Murty's presented mostly as willing to accept any change in their lifestyle. She is able to read the inner mind of these women and portrays their psychological and emotional imbalances. Her books are all about the importance of one's identity with specific identity to women. It portrays how a woman sacrifices so many things for her family, however doesn't receive any respect and equal importance. At the end it teaches every woman should be independent and treated equally neither inferior nor superior.

One of the important aspects which Sudha Murthy highlights is that there was a limit which one could be obedient and submissive, but once that limit was crossed, the individual's happiness become more essential. The protagonists leave the family for not to earn more money, but she needs space and self- respect. Indian

woman are known for their extreme patience and determination. They are all in fact guided by the spirit even if the ironic equilibrium between faith and disbelief. Murty is definitely a writer with a purpose.

“Though you reach the sky- make sure your feet is always grounded” is an important message delivered by Sudha Murty. You should have experience some difficulties in life because continuous success makes a person arrogant, continuous failures makes a person diffident, occasional failures and fair amount of success makes an individual more mature. So you must undergo some difficulties, some helplessness, observe people and have sympathy makes a person very matured. She compares herself to a tree, which does not keep its fruits to itself, and at the same time, finds fulfillment in these acts of selflessness.

Sudha Murty, a disciplined writer never misrepresented the power of freedom on her protagonists like have extra marital relationship with others and lesbian experience with her mates. Murty clearly voiced by her novels that the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependent. They sense that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only limited to household works. The novels show how women always gain self-esteem in facing the hard times of their lives, assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. They are clever of being independent and leading lives on their own. To find their identity in their own way, her female characters break all restraints of customs and traditions that tie them in the quandaries and rein in their freedoms and rights. They are not against the entire social system and values but are not ready to accept them as they are. Her female characters are modern, strong and take bold decisions to survive in society. This secures her position in literature as a feminist novelist. In her novels, she has exhibited the new slant of the married woman. When they have a possibility they strive and discover their happiness. Sudha Murty says, women have to balance family and work, everywhere in the world. The women protagonists in her novels are victimized by the patriarchy. During the difficult circumstances they rise by asserting themselves as individuals and choose to live their own life, overcome the struggle and emerge as victorious women.

II. Portrayal of women character in the novel “the mother i never knew”

Sudha Murty’s novel “the mother i never knew” comprises two novellas that explore quests by two men each searching for a mother he never knew he had. Here, in the proposed paper entitled, “A critical study of Women characters in SudhaMurty’s -the mother I never knew” the first part has been analysed. Venkatesh, a bank manager, stumbles upon his lookalike one fine day. When he probes further, he discovers his father’s hidden past, includes an abandoned wife and child. Venkatesh is determined to make amends to his impoverished stepmother- and taken steps to repay his father’s debt. Sudha Murty introduced the female characters ‘ Champakka, Indiramma, Bhagirathi, Shanta and Gowri’ in the first part. These characters are critically explored in this research paper.

Champakka

Venkatesh’s grand mother, Champakka, a loud mouthed old widowed women, lived solely for the sake of her son, faced a tough life to raised her son like how the tigress protect her cubs likewise she protected her son from all the problems and happily ruled the whole family, but sometimes dominates the family members.

Indiramma

On the other hand, Venkatesh’s mother, Indiramma, portrayed as quite, innocent and submissive. She passes her time, by knitting, embroidering painting and indulging herself in order to avoid any confrontations with others. The work of Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, is the main source of information on the condition of these housewives. She defines house wife as: The home maker, the nurturer, the creator of children’s environment is the constant recreator of culture, civilization and virtue.

Bhagirathi

Sudha Murty framed the character Bhagirathi- a teenage mother and a widow- was bound by customs and traditions thought that her husband is dead, which was not true, and shaved her head to be considered purified, thus clearing her husband’s path to heaven. In the beginning she had no desire to live, decided not to stay in

her village mainly due to the gossiping about her modesty. She is afraid that her life and that of her son's life would be worse than a dog's, if she stays in the village. Here Sudha Murthy opined that 'We cannot change the society and people. This has been going on since the ancient times. It's always a goat that is victimized and not a tiger'. Bhagirathi, struggled a lot and has overcome many difficulties to raise her son. She decided to leave the village and started working as cooking maid in many houses for meager salary for many years. Due to her hard work, she raised her son to become a primary school teacher and made him to lead a decent family life. Lorraine Toussaint a Trinidadian-American actress and producer says, "We all have a dark side. Most of us go through life avoiding direct confrontation with that aspect of ourselves, which I call the shadow self. There is a reason why it carries a great deal of energy". A woman is usually meek and humble that's the reason many of our women suffered a lot. They quietly bowed down and accepted injustices heaped upon them by men and fate. Sudha Murthy had not only written a children stories but she has also exposed the patriarchal control in our country and the tolerance of women in ignorance through her novels. To quote from Simone de Beauvoir's book titled 'The Second Sex' wherein she asserts that: "Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumble, between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator". In all her novels, she shows a survival path to the female protagonist's that women can lead a successful life with sincere and hard work, without the help of those who made them ill treatment.

Shanta

Venkatesh's wife, Shanta, ran the house very efficiently, handled the family finances better than an investment banker. She is always conscious of her appearances and proud to be a lady's club president. Active investor of the stock market because of her sound knowledge in business, she always speaks to the point.

Gauri

Gauri -Venkatesh's daughter, she was quiet and intelligent girl and also an eternal optimist. She could make anyone feel better. Venkatesh always loved her because of her intelligence, calm and ability to remain silent in any situation that brings success and peace to her life. She always spent very good time and frank discussion with her father. She always follows her conscience. In one occasion when her father undergone a tough situation to pay his father's debt, she decided to give forty five lakhs from her account, which was invested in a fixed deposit by her mother in her name to avoid income tax, or may be for her marriage and thus saved her father from a major problem. Here, Sudha Murthy tries to explain that the today's generation is much wiser than the people in the ancient time of her age. A good narration between father and daughter from the book:

Her father asked her, 'Gauri, your mother will find out about this. You know that. What will you do then? She replied, 'I have not stolen this money Anna, nor have I given it away to a cause that I don't believe in. I am not afraid of her or anyone else. No matter people say, I'll always follow my conscience.'

Venkatesh asked, 'Why did you do this Gauri?'. She replied, 'That's so easy Anna. You want to pay back a debt that your father owes somebody. I want to pay back a debt that my father owes too'

Here Sudha Murthy described the nature of a modern girl and her perception towards her vision of family life. Through the characters Shanta and Gowri, it shows the sophisticated, business background, status of family members. They live their life for earning more and more money and no intimacy between the family members, indicating the modern false life style. The novel also showcases individualities of the modern women's rights by describing an independent, skilled and gifted female protagonist's like Shanta and Gauri.

III. Conclusion

In the Post-Independence period a number of Indian writers of fiction in English try to explore and manifest Indian reality. They get more and more psychologically intended and try to assess the sociological effect on the psyche of their characters. In Hindu religion marriage is an important incident- a promise. This marriage bond is considered to be a serious vow and pledge of love and companionship during both the time of prosperity and adversity. It is essential for the transmission of humanity.

When analyzing the female characters of Sudha Murty's the mother I never knew, she portrays the sufferings of women at the medieval period and the courage of women in modern age. The patriarchal society considers a wife as a slave to her husband and so she must endure all his atrocities. But these days women ready to follow their conscience to decide their life. As described in the novel, a wife must have the determination to live without her husband if the situation really demands. She must have the willpower to bring up her children with confidence. Among all literary genres, novel reflects the contemporary social conditions in a realistic manner. The portrayal of woman in novels is also governed by the prevailing attitude towards women in society and the author's response to it. The status of women has been rapidly changing and the novelists capture this transition in their novels. Swami Vivekananda, throughout his life, strived to uplift the plight of women, in particular Indian women. He says, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved".

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