

An Image of Woman in The Fictional World of Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to study An image of woman in the fictional world of Sudha murty's Mahashweta . The image and the role of a woman have been observed and studied in various ways . A woman's identity and her status are always established in relation to man as dependent on subordinate to man. Sudha Murty was able to clarify gender differences through her writing . Through the motivational fiction Mahashweta, Sudha murty tries to reflect the rich formative literary and scriptural instincts of women personality. As a mirror to the society, literatures has always reflected the changes in the representation of women that history has chronicled. She presents an emerging image of woman in the society by her novel Mahashweta . She stresses on the transitory nature of physical beauty whereas emphasizes on womanish indomitable courageous spirit.

Keywords: Male Dominant Society, Myths, Mythology And Codes, Womanish, Feminism, And Recent Fiction In English, Pundarika, Hindu Shastras.

Introduction

"Woman"—the word conjures up an image which encompasses many faces within it. Sometimes a woman is a sister, sometimes a daughter, sometimes a wife and most importantly a mother, the bearer of a new life on the earth. Unfortunately, since time immemorial she has been commodified and treated as an instrument of luxury. Our male chauvinistic society has always expected her to play different roles and all of them in a perfect way. As is described in Hindu Shastras (Bhrathari-Nitishastra) :

Karyeshumantri (a minister while counselling)

Karmeshudaasi (a servant in his work)

{Rupecha Lakshmi (like a celestial beauty in looks)}

Dharmeshupatni (a companion in religious and noble deeds)

Kshamayadharitri (like the earth in forgiveness and endurance)

Bhojyeshumata (like a mother while serving and feeding food)

Shayaneshu Rambha (like a beloved in bed)

{Rang-e sakhi} (like a friend in enjoyment)

Shat Dharma yukta

Kula dharma patni (she who follows all this as her dharma is a wife)¹

These and many more are the duties which have been assigned to a woman by our male-dominant society, and with a speechless patience the woman has accepted all of them and is discharging them diligently. On the contrary, her rights as a human being have seldom found voice at the familial and social levels. Woman has always mutely suffered ineffable trials and tribulations perpetrated by man as well by her own submissive attitude, compliant nature and shattered ego.

For ages woman has been a matter of concern in the literary texts written by men. Myths, legends, epics and lyrics depict her as goddess, Mother Nature but at the same time in cunning terms condemn her as witch and seductress. Rarely has she been perceived simply as an individual with her own identity. The image and the role of woman have been observed and studied in various ways, and the acquired knowledge has been recorded in literature, works of art, religious texts, mythology and codes of social conduct.

Through the motivational fiction *Mahasweta*, SudhaMurty tries to reflect the rich formative literary and scriptural instincts of women personality. Mahashweta is the acclaimed name of Goddess 'SARASWATI' - the Goddess of learning and music, the daughter of Hindu omnipotent Lord Brahmha. Sudha Murthy has evolved multidimensional images of woman. She stresses on the transitory nature of physical beauty whereas emphasizes on womanish indomitable courageous spirit. Thus provides the message to the women to recognize the tremendous force of her inner source of fountain of the heart and soul. Literature facilitates our understanding of female psychology, actions, life,



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thoughts and patterns of behaviour in certain periods of time, though in a fictitious form yet in many ways truthful. In the pages of literature women are shown to struggle to live their lives in accordance with the likes and dislikes of men, using only silent means of escape and bearing male dominance as part of their lot. They have always been at the receiving end of men's intimate partner abuse and control and for centuries they have struggled to find their place in a world that is predominantly male oriented. Ironically the place of women in society is constantly changed and questioned. As a mirror to the society, literature has always reflected the changes in the representation of women that history has chronicled. Role of women in literature as a reflection to their roles in society, no doubt, has evolved gradually and has led women to develop from suppressed to independent roles. Modern literature has served to give voice to women's rights with the emergence of feminist pioneers.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the paper is to highlight the worth of a woman. In this male dominant society, woman is not given proper recognition and was always taken as salve of a man. She is just a beautiful toy of entertainment for them. See to it she is equally capable to do any task in any field as a man. She can climb the ladder of success if she decides to do so, even if she is left alone and doesn't get support from others. Sudha Murty through her inovational writing discloses how gender edit oppressions are inflicted upon women by men Under the guise of socio-cultural and religions traditions, grappling with themes of women's existence, survival identity women writers. Sudha Murthy tries to portray this image of woman in her novel.

Main Text of the Study

Though the difference between the medieval past and the present day cannot be ignored, yet the fact remains that right from the classical Greek theatre to the twentieth century, women are perceived to be, more as, sexual objects rather than normal human beings. Throughout the Ages of Literature the image of woman has remained one of subjugated, subordinate being, always to maintain silence in the public sphere and give unstinted respect to father and husband. They have been continually instructed that their spiritual and social worth reside above everything else in their practice of and reputation for chastity. As Sushila Singh puts it in *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* :

"Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with masculine experience with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one-sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely has an entity that concerns man either in his real life or in his fantasy life." ²

Since creation, women have been treated and believed as inferior to men on the grounds that the women's biology justifies the societal pressures that make them sub-ordinate to men. All that is passive, servile, docile, conventional, and emotional

and all that pertains to a subordinate and secondary position is identified with what is called feminine.

Anupama, the protagonist of Sudha Murty's *Mahasweta* is befooled everywhere, whether it is her in-laws or maternal uncle or her spheres work. But she faces them with her untiring courage and arrives to a new platform of life, always relying on her hidden wealth of patience and courage.

A woman's identity and her status are always established in relation to man and as dependent on and subordinate to man. A sense of her inferiority and male-superiority is inculcated in her mind, heart, and her very self right from her childhood and discrimination begins as she is treated differently by her family and the society. Simone De Beauvoir's classic exposition of making of woman goes like this:

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."³

Because of their sex, often referred to as "weaker sex", women are forced to face many unfortunate situations like subjugation, violence--physical, mental and emotional, imprisonment in marriage, objectification, dehumanisation, child marriage, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, rape, ostracism, denial of and struggle for identity and many more. In fact, women's subjugation, objectification, dehumanization, victimization and secondary position is one of those deep-seated evils confronting women all over the world which are as intense today as they were at the time of their origin. Politically unstable societies and events further continue to aggravate this evil and threaten the harmonious co-existence of women as independent entities together with the male egoist society. Women, being extremely vulnerable, are easy targets of any form of atrocity, oppression, humiliation, deprivation and discrimination in our patriarchal social set-up and the irony is that all this is shadowed by patriarchy under the mask of normalcy.

The term patriarchy implies a social structure in which relationships are power based and male members of the society have all the powers which they exercise over their female counterparts. Such a set up of society hands over the reign of power to men who use it to maintain the relationship of the dominating and the dominated between the two sexes thus the suffering of women is perpetuated. Kate Millett, a renowned feminist, observes that "the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance—in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands." ⁴Explaining patriarchal societies, Adrienne Rich expresses a similar view:

"Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and, in which the

female is everywhere subsumed under the male.” (Rich 57)⁵

A consciousness of victimization and awareness of women's oppression and exploitation gradually paved way for the feminist movement which according to David Bouchier “includes any form of opposition of social, personal or economic discrimination which women suffer because of their sex.”⁶

The novel begins on a note that resounds so gorgeously with the swing feminist sentiments. On the very first page, the readers are introduced to the male leading character Anand, a doctor by profession. As usual he was busy handling his patients. He is with his boss, Dr. Desai and nurse, who is grown old working in the maternity ward, Prabhavathi. On the event of a case of delivery that results in a baby girl, then Prabhavathi outbursts with these seeds of reality. “Even though the female child is stronger than male child at birth as in the process of becoming adults, it is the man who becomes oppressor and woman who suffers.”⁷

The readers find the prospective of a female in the above line even the male counterpart Dr. Anand admits the power of women in definite parts of life. He finds from his thoughts that a woman gives birth to a child after enduring intense pain while suffering inside her life.

“Indeed both parents play equal yet significant roles in process of creating a new life. But at the moment of birth of a baby- the moment of truth- the only reality is the mother.”⁸

Feminism, as an innovative approach, emerged in 1960's in the Western world. The term signifies the emergence of female power in order to secure equality of women with men on familial, social, political, economic, educational, moral, religious, cultural, spiritual, intellectual, artistic, sexual and legal fronts. Chaman Nahal in his article “Feminism in English Fiction” defines feminism as a “mode of existence in which woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group or ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materialises.”⁹

Aiming at identifying the discrimination, inequality and injustice with which half of the humanity is treated in our phallogocentric society, feminism as a concept, as a movement and not less importantly, as a humanistic concern strives to recognise and emphasize the dignity of women as human beings, their contribution to society and their value as equal counterpart and complimentary to men. In fact Feminism in its manifestations is “something more than the effort to express women's experiences: it is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorises and condones male power over women.”¹⁰

Gerda Lerner emphasizes this ‘something more’ thing in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* saying that feminism “is not always a movement, for it

can be a level of consciousness, a stance, an attitude, as well as the basis for organised effort.”¹¹

As for the feminist literature, it is largely based on the principles of feminism, is not always militantly aggressive. It includes all literary works dealing specifically with female experience and woman's struggle for equality and acceptance as a human being and thereby turning the spotlight on woman, endowing her with a sense of selfhood and dignity. It touches upon various aspects of woman's life and seeks to assert the value of woman as woman and express the struggle to establish her identity. Feminist writers endeavour to break off the shackles which are instrumental in women's subjugation and victimization. Being aware of their degradation and second rate status imposed on women, these writers, through their works, emphasize the urgent need of emancipation of women by portraying their quest for identity and self-fulfilment and struggle against oppressive male dominance in order to establish new social standards where they can be their true selves. According to Helene Cixous, a postmodern feminist, feminist writing is not just a new style of writing but it also signifies “the very possibility of change, space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural standards.”¹²

Feminism has influenced literary criticism also which aims at making women's experience as important as men's by exposing the misrepresentation and marginalization of women in literature. Social, historical, psychological, political and gender-related issues have always engaged creative writers and feminist criticism, with its new explorations, provide us with an opportunity to re-assess, re-interpret such issues and broaden our range of responses to them. Feminist critics, thinkers and authors like Alice Walker, Naomi Littlebear, Judith Feltebey, Michele Wallace, Lillian Smith, Elaine Showalter, Simone De Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Mary Ellmann, Adriene Rich, Toril Moi, Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar and others have postulated, popularised and precipitated the ideas of feminism and have given their valuable contribution in offering refreshingly new readings of the major writers established within the mainstream of literary canon.

A significant number of contemporary writers have strived to portray woman who has always been robbed off her own identity, in a voice of her own. Though not all the feminist writers follow a direct and similar approach towards the goal of equality yet with a subjective, rather than an objective approach in their works they all seem to explain the difference between sex, which is natural and predetermined and gender which is created by the society during the process of socialisation along with a particular perception about gender roles. In a way, feminist writers “instil a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self-actualizing, whose identities are not independent on them.”¹³

Sudha Murty was able to clarify gender differences through her writing. Mahashweta is an evidence of her comprehension of the middle class Indian society. As for the story's location, she has chosen Karnataka to provide it a realistic touch since

she grew up there so such social lacuna survives in her psyche so well.

While doctor Anand wonders in his thoughts, nurse Prabhavati comes there and says that his boss had forgotten his watch and he had to give it to his boss on his way back home. Dr. Anand had to do so since he knew that watch was very special to his boss because it was a gift from his mentor. Dr. Desai, a renowned doctor, and a teacher lives in a comfortable bungalow in the college campus and is totally devoted to his work. He would often joke "I know the entire city because half of them are my patient and the remaining halves are my students"

Although Dr. Anand was relative of Dr. Desai, but he was rarely been to his house due to his shy and reserved nature. Vasumati, Dr. Desai's wife was surprised to see Anand and offered him lunch and asked him to take rest. While he was resting, he heard a sweet voice- 'Like Rohini to Chandra, like Lakshmi to Narayana, I am 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 don't care...'

Anupama is a great scholar of Sanskrit. She directs and acts Sanskrit plays in her college. She is a beautiful and dedicated college student, belongs to a poor family who organizes plays to collect money for charity purposes.

One day Anupama visit Dr. Desai, her father's friend with the hope at selling tickets of a play as she was hosting for some foundering program. Where she meets Dr. Anand, an intelligent and handsome doctor who is a distant relative of Dr. Desai's wife. When Dr. Anand sees Anupama, he is fascinated by her beauty.

He had met countless girls over the years, but had never seen anyone so startlingly lovely. With her beautiful large eyes, exquisite complexion, and face framed by long, jet- black hair, she looked like an apasara. Then there comes Dr. Desai, he introduced two Anupama and Dr. Anand to each other. Dr. Anand buys the ticket of play of fund- raising program. He is amazed by Anupama's mesmerizing beauty as well as her acting as Mahashweta in Banabhatt's classic works. At the first sight Dr. Anand lost his heart. He thought that she is not only beautiful but also a brilliant actress.

Sumithra Anupama's friend, room- mates for the last six years, they were like sisters. She noticed dr. Anand started teasing her "you have lost your heart for Dr. Anand, he is your pundarika. Princess mahashweta, this is not your palace but girls hostel and fortunately, your pundarika is not in the forest. He resides just a stone's throw away. Please go to sleep, good night!"

Although Anupama did not accept this, but somewhere Sumitra was right. Anupama knew that Dr. Anand is from a wealthy family. His family is blessed by goddess Lakshmi. The family situation of both of them is different. Notone maybe because Anupama belongs to a very poor family. Although she is blessed by Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of learning, her father is a school teacher in the village

and she entrusted her life in the midst of struggles. Anupama shares her entire secret with Sumitra, but she did not utter a single word about this matter, she knew her father could not bear the expenses, she was completing her studies because of her scholarship.

Anupama's mother has passed away when anupama was just a toddler. Her father, Shamanna got remarried. His second wife Sabakka bore him two daughters. Relations between Anupama and her step mother were not harmonious. Shamanna clearly told anupama's father in plain words "let us not educate her further. It might become difficult to find a husband for her. Besides, she will not support us. She has to marry and go to somebody else's house one day."

Anupama's life was spoiled in some way but she escaped from the clutches of her step mother as she had won a scholarship for her further study. The main reason why her step mother did not like her was that Anupama was more beautiful than to her two daughters. The beauty and qualities of Anupama were in sharp contrast to the plain features and rawness of her step sisters. Her step mother's anger kept no bonds when Anupama desired to study further and instead of getting married. "---this apsara won't get married herself and insists on destroying my girls lives"¹⁴ said Sabakka.

But Anupama was not far from Anand's thoughts. His heart is entangled in Anupama's dazzling beauty. He is attracted by Anupama's efforts and her role of Mahashweta. He makes up his mind to marry her. Anand talked to Srinath, the brother-in-law of Dr. Desai. Srinath doesn't agree with Anand's proposal as he said that there was a big gap in their economic and social status.

Feminist writing includes both fictional and non-fictional works, but particularly novel, for being capable of allowing more comprehensive handling of the issues pertaining to women than any other mode of expression, echoes the victimization and subjugation of women more effectively. It is noteworthy that not all the authors of feminist novels are women, there are men also who champion the cause of feminism and through their works try to put forward a body of thought and practice that recognises, criticises and seeks to change inequalities based on gender. But this is also true that women novelists, themselves representing society's marginalised and silenced half and having a deep insight into the female psyche, more authentically present woman's side of life. With a voice of their own they offer a diverse range of feminine experience. In the last few decades a significant number of women novelists has contributed to the enrichment of literature especially feminist novels. Doris Lessing, Anita Desai, Mahasweta Devi, Buchi Emecheta, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison are but a few to name. Through sexual awakening, sexual victimization, sexual discrimination, suffering, pain, struggle, agony, helplessness and exploitation, their female characters learn of the gendered oppressions that work through their bodies.

Gifted with great creative genius, these women novelists take up cudgels against women's suppression and exploitation by patriarchal social

system and eloquently voice the question of self-definition by exploring the violent and subtle ways in which patriarchy silences female sexuality to overpower and curb women's voice. By exploring and sharing a range of victimisation of female figures in their works, these novelists have not only exposed how female sexuality and bodies are defined but also controlled and exploited by men. They have invigorated the realistic novel by using it as a tool to expose how gendered oppressions are inflicted upon women by men under the guise of socio-cultural and religious traditions. Grappling with themes of women's existence, survival and identity, women writers in their novels often feature women as ones ready to make their own decisions, to express their personal choices and also prepared to deal with the consequences of their choices, decisions and actions.

Conclusion

Sudha Murty tries to reflect the rich formative literary and spritual instincts of woman personality by the novel Mahashweta. She also stresses on the transitory nature of physical beauty whereas emphasizes on womanish indomitable courageous spirit. She tries to spread the message of the women to recognize the tremendous force of her inner source of fountain of the heart and soul. Role of women in literature as a reflection to their roles in the society, As a mirror to the society, literature has always reflected the change in the representation of women that history has chronicled. Modern literature has served to give voice to women's rights with the emergence of feminist pioneers.

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