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'QUEST FOR SELF' IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SUDHA MURTY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to study quest for self in the novels of Sudha Murty, taking in account the complexity of life, different histories, culture and different structure of values, the women's question, despite basic solidarity, needs to be tackled in relation to socio-cultural situation. Women under patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to much more bunts and social exclusion. They live and struggle under the oppressive mechanism of closed society, is very much reflected in her writings. They are more discriminated and biased in lieu of their sex. Murty is considered to be one of the most realistic author, for she is able to bring the true picture of psyche of the women changing with the times. Her concern for the women who are caught in the dilemma of liberty and individuality or stability and protection is understandable. The paper presents the way in which the Urban middle class women portrayed struggling to self identity in Sudha Murty's four novels – Gently Falls the Bakula, Mahashwetha, The House of Cards and Dollar Bahu . All these four novels are women centered and woman's emotions and attitudes are delineated quite meticulously. We see budding new women try to assert their own identity in this male dominated world. The study of the research concludes today's new women are ready to accomplishing their aspirations. A woman, like a man, wishes to satisfy her intellectual self.

Key words : Indian English Literature, Feminism, Sudha Murty, Marriage, Identity, A New women

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INTRODUCTION

Indian writing in English by women is a distinct phenomenon today. The creative output of the Indian women writers, especially novelists, is marked by the choice of English, the medium of expression of a woman's reaction to the varied situation in which traditional as well as modernity clash synthesize. Indian women writers are dynamics witness to the peculiar socio-cultural historic, political conflicts faced by women especially Indian. Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand tried their best to give new identity to Indian writing in English. Actually speaking it is gratifying that the "Big Three" have lost none of their authenticity and appeal in the eighties, although distinctive earlier works appeared on the Indian scenario , for example –

Kamala Markandaya ,Anita Desai, Chaman Nahal,Salman Rushdie, Arun Joshi, Dina Mehta, Shobha De Sudha Murty and Arundhati Roy.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly remarks: "When an Indian writer of fiction uses a learnt second language like English, he is actually recording a kind of half-conscious translation (from mother tongue into English) that has taken place in the mind. Most of our writers are bi - lingual, some equally proficient in English and the mother tongue, and some more in one than in the other. The background and the situations are usually Indian but the characters may often be drawn from bilingual milieus. The need for expressing the values verities and heart- beats of one culture in the language of another poses its own problems and there is doubtless the inner urge to render in English the rhythms, idiosyncrasies, images, idioms and proverbs of the local speech." Thus one of the most outstanding characteristics of Indian writing in English is that the background is Indian and the language though foreign has adopted itself to the needs of the Indians. Today Indian English as well as Indian writing in English has got its own identity.

The novel is a living and evolving literary genre and under the skill of the artist, it attains shape, idea and expression that is thoroughly Indian, though it bears the Universality. A close look at women novelists of Indian English fiction may draw one's attention towards certain interesting facts. Almost all women novelists write from their personal experiences; almost all of them end up in one or other form of feminism. Some of them give us their autobiography in fiction and all virtually identify with their female characters. Looking at contemporary Indian English fiction created by women writers, certain features catch our attention.

One phenomenon which strikes us is that in the early seventies, there was a sudden proliferation of women novelists and the novels they published were also well-accepted. This period is also a significant time for the evolution of the Indian novel. In that it ventured into an exciting and hitherto relatively less-explored thematic area. Women centered, class oriented fiction written by women novelists became a favourite with the publishers and readers alike. However, the political and social events of the sixties and the seventies and the growing opportunities of education and employment for women enabled middle class women in urban India to engage in literary activities.

Feminism has gathered momentum all over the world standing up for female emancipation, clamouring for equal rights and social justice. Feminism has gone through I wave, II wave, III wave, with the different stages of resistance, protests and confrontations, inviting unequal and opposite reaction from men going to the extent of demand for male emancipation. Ever since science reared its head, shattering the religious theories of human origin, many concepts executed by patriarchy were toppled. That includes the position of man and woman in the society also.

Indian women writers explore the women's life-struggle that ranges from childhood to womanhood. Through their novels, the women novelists spread the concept of feminism bringing hope to provide an end to all the sufferings of women. The world in which they live interfere with the mind and imagination of the creative writers. Earlier women have portrayed as patient sufferer, self – sacrificing, devoted wife or mother or daughter. They were idealized and portrayed by male novelists. They were symbols of sacrifice, love, devotion and pity etc. But, those portrayals were not realistic or factual.

After the independence, many women writers have changed this attitude. They try to express and show the real experiences, feelings, longings and actual experiences of the Indian women. Sudha Murty is the most important figure in this respect. The author, Dr. Sudha Murthy is from Shiggaon in North Karnataka and has completed her M. Tech in Computer Science from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. The first woman engineer in Telco and currently, she is the chairperson of Infosys Foundation. She has to her credit twenty-four novels, three non- fiction books and four books for children.

A multi-faceted personality, she is a successful writer, social worker and a philanthropist who contributes to various charities in the capacity as the chairperson of Infosys Foundation. Dr. Sudha Murthy is the recipient of various awards for her contribution to the society. She has been bestowed with the 'Padma Shri' award by the Government of India in the year 2006 and the R. K. Narayan award in the year 2006 for her contribution in the field of literature.

As one of the leading and successful women writers of the contemporary modern era, her works are a realistic portrayal of the socio-psychological issues faced by the contemporary Indian women. In a simple style, she has analyzed the significant current-day issues in her novels. She has explored in-depth the workings of the inner mind of the women characters in her works. She has projected In a simple style, she has analyzed the significant current-day issues in her novels. She has explored in-depth the workings of the inner mind of the women characters in her works.

Her writing is clear and simple, communicates her ideas clearly. She is a prolific writer in English and Kannada and her novels focuses on Karnataka villages and the people. She advocates feminism and gives power to her females to strike the adverse situations of their lives. She demands the women to give credit to them and liberate the stupendous power of them to accomplish their discernments. She is full of humility and modesty and uses her wealth for the less fortunate people. She acknowledges to the cry and requirement of the impoverished, the destitute and the marginalized portion of the society. She writes in the backdrop of Indian English Literature. The main protagonists are portrayed as well educated women with the inherent inner power who were ready to face the challenges under any circumstances and emerge successfully by carving a place for them in the society within the parameter of the Indian tradition.

Quest for self in "Gently Falls The Bakula"

Sudha Murthy's first novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* is the story of a marriage that loses its way as ambition and self-interest take their toll. The novel is a beautiful tale about the ideologies, the family conflicts, the stereotypical mother-in law and sister in law v/s hatred daughter-in law, the illusion about educational qualification, marriage and match making all are familiar. Shrimati, the protagonist, by becoming a dutiful, dedicated, sincere and affectionate wife, she enabled him to reach the peak of glory in his IT profession.

Shrimati sacrificed her professional desire and dedicated life to her husband wholeheartedly. But Shrikant's inability to spend time with her or at least to recognize her service to him shattered all her dreams of a happy family life to pieces. Her single mind devotion didn't notice by her husband, so she took a hard decision to get away from him, not ready to live with the immaterial things. Shrimati tells to shrikant, 'Shri, I am getting a scholarship. I have thought over this matter for the last few weeks before taking this decision. I did not bring anything with me when I got married to you. Now also, I am not taking anything from this house. My flight is scheduled for tonight...now I can leave peacefully.'(GFB, p.160)

No one in this male dominated society would appreciated her step but Shrimati had left him without even bothering about what people would think. She had acted on what she felt was right. Murty has portrayed a strong women finding her own identity.

Quest for self in "Mahashweta"

In *Mahashweta* (2007) the heroine Anupama shows her intense and unconditional love to her lover Dr. Anand who does not honour her love simply because of the fact she suffers from an incurable disease called Leukoderma after marriage. Leucoderma is a cosmetic disease but this has changed the lives of many in the in the society that has caused a lot of hardships and injury in the minds of people who suffer from it.

No artist can recreate the vibrant colours of nature on canvas. We think we know all about beauty, but we understand is that external beauty is short lived.(MS,p.132)

Dr. Anand finally traced her address to ask sorry to his behavior. But Anupama was not in that state to forgive him. She says 'You knew that I did not have this disease before our marriage. You could have told your mother...but you didn't. You were scared that I would be disfigured because of this disease...I ended up a victim because you chose to dishonor the vows you took.'(MS, p.147)

'We met accidentally, but we were not made for each other. Let us part with a good grace.'(MS, p.149)

Murty portrayed in the first half of the novel her protagonists is meek, submissive, enduring and condemning her fate and expecting help from her husband. But in the second half of the novel she emerges as a confident, self-sufficient, guiding and a respectable person. Murty has depicted confident women finding her own identity.

Quest for self in "House of Cards"

In *House of Cards* (2013) the protagonist Mridula was attracted to the young man Dr. Sanjay in a marriage ceremony in Hubli. Both the parents agreed with the marriage proposal of Mridula and Sanjay. After the marriage, Sanjay got a job at Victoria Govt. hospital, Bangalore. After a few months Sanjay got admission to the post-graduation in Gynecology and they shifted to Vijaynagar (West area of Bangalore). Eventually, Sanjay had finished his studies and started working as a doctor and lecturer in Govt. hospital in Bangalore. Her husband had manipulated her completely due to her ignorance and foolishness. Sanjay's cunning nature had encouraged all these activities. After knowing his husband's dubiousness, She had lost all her confidence, aggrieved, and shocked and also became annoyed. She didn't believe that her faithful husband Sanjay had cheated her. He had inculcated restlessness in her. She had lived with complete belief and trusted him from the first day of the marriage.

Mridula tells her friend Anita, 'Anita, it is not about money. Money can be earned and lost. It's about faith that a wife has in her husband. That's more valuable than money and gold. Faith sustains a marriage and brings joy to the family. Without it we have nothing. How can Sanjay destroy the faith and trust I had on him?' (HOC, p.186)

According to Mridula, Sanjay was a dishonest, untrustworthy and dubious person he had stabbed in the back of his own wife. He was something that appeared one way but was truly another. Leigh K. Cunningham a lawyer and author of *Australia* illustrate: — "Trust is something that is difficult to establish. It is very fragile that needs to be taken care of. Once trust breaks or shatters into pieces, it is very difficult to rebuild it." Marriage was not the final destination for her. She wanted equal partnership in neither marriage nor the subordination of the wife. He thought of her mother and actualized that she was an ideal woman. Mridula suffered and sacrificed her life and remains as a nonentity. She was sensible to the denunciation made by her husband.

She goes away to release herself from the emotional obligation. She felt that it is better to be alone and happy than to be with someone who makes you feel inferior, undesirable and inadequate.

Mridula came out in a white cotton sari with a glow of peace on her face. She said, "No, I have spent twenty five of my most important years with you, and yet, I never felt like I belonged to you or your family. I'm still an outsider...Now, I want to live for myself. I have my job, my school and my village. You don't have to worry about me any longer. You and Sishir can visit me whenever you want" (HOC, p.218). Mridula was honest, caring and bold. She had enormous enthusiasm for life and unlimited energy. She wanted to spend every minute of the day fruitfully.

Quest for self in "Dollar Bahu"

In *Dollar Bahu* the story of, how money corrupts the way people look at one another and how it can almost split a family apart. Vinuta marries Girish, a bank clerk, and starts living with his family in Bangalore. She adjusts to her new family well, looking after her husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law Gouramma, not taking to heart her mother-in-law's constant picking. But when Girish's elder brother Chandru, who is in the US, decides to get married, Vinuta has to listen to the constant comparisons made between her and Chandru's wife, the 'Dollar Bahu', whose husband earns the valuable dollars that has brought the family its recent affluence. Vinuta slowly loses her peace of mind and health because her selfless sacrifice, silent suffering was not recognized by her mother-in law.

When she had a conversation with Chandru, she told him, 'To be honest with you, I am not at all that happy either. All the time, there is comparison between Jamuna and me. I don't want and can't compete with anybody. But its evident that the family does not need me anymore...finding him more a friend than a brother-in-law (DB, p.72) At last she decided to move away from that place.

The women writers of the earlier period were given importance to free women from the clutches of patriarchy and domestic drudgery. Having come out of the quadrangle of the house, women being educated have chosen different careers including acting, modelling and business which were once considered unsuitable for women. Hence the later women writers reflect the predicament of modern women who are ready to break

free from the constraints that have been thrust on them, so as to assert themselves sexually and economically on par with men.

In Indian culture, the identity of a woman is attributed to her husband. A woman is never regarded as an autonomous, being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position:

“Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man”. And she is very simply what man decrees...she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (The Second Sex by Simone De Beauvoir, (76))

She is a decorative appendage who is expected to accompany her husband everywhere he goes and meet the people he approves. She can never expect to have her associations and definitely not of the opposite sex or else she is branded as immoral.

Conclusion

Thus the Indian woman passive or aggressive, traditional or modern is in a state of bewilderment and emotional vulnerability, and there is a sense of fear and isolation in her. Even though, she is swayed by the words of equality and liberation, she finds it difficult to adjust with the reality of life, as she has to pass through the traditional values. Dorothy Parker has written: ‘I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman ... My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings’ (Sociology, p. 143). What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own sole? If one can understand this and act with total awareness, he can significantly reduce the hardships in life.

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