

Postmodern Feminism in Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta and Gently falls the Bakula*

Author**J.Daisy**

Ph. D Research Scholar,
PG & Research Department of English,
A.V.V.M Sri Pushpam College, (Autonomous)
Poondi, Thanjavur-613503,
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University,
Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: daisygraham05@gmail.com**Co-author****Dr. R. Shanthi**

Head & Associate Professor of English,
PG & Research Department of English,
A.V.V.M Sri Pushpam College, (Autonomous)
Poondi, Thanjavur-613503,
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University,
Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: shanthisachi05@yahoo.co.in**Abstract:**

Postmodern Feminism is a combination of postmodernism and feminism; it is the ultimate acceptor of the diversity. It declines to develop one explanation for this grand theory. Postmodern feminists dismiss all the feminist ideas, which give single explanation for women's persecution and there is no biological differences. Sudha Murty is a renowned writer in Kannada and English, Philanthropist and distinguished masters in computer field and spouse of Nagavara Ramarao Narayan Murty an Indian IT industrialist and co-founder of Infosys. Sudha Murty is credited with Padma Shri award for social work and R.K.Narayan award for her literary works in 2006, also a receiver of life time Achievement award. Sudha Murty as defined as follows: "You have to break the chains that hold you back and become your own competitor."

Sudha Murty's novels *Mahashweta* and *Gently falls the Bakula* picturize the mental and physical agonies of the female protagonists. *Mahashweta* tells about the superstitious beliefs and sufferings of Anupama and later how she created a new happy life for herself. *Gently falls the Bakula* portrays the protagonist who was trapped into a loveless and sophisticated life finally she goes beyond her dream. It discusses the sufferings of women in society and their incarnation into a brave and strong mind to face the tribulations in individual life. Sudha Murty simply renders, in deep, the sense of being a woman in modern India. The protagonists in her novels are ordinary women who effectively handle extraordinary responsibilities, problems and emerge as new beings with the western education and culture. Thirst for knowledge and anxieties of women's life make a way for new feminine literary tradition known as Postmodern Feminism.

Key words: Philanthropist, Feminism, persecution, superstitious belief, sophisticated, Postmodern Feminism.

Indo-English fiction has been called “the twice born fiction” by Meenakshi Mukherjee, because it has two parental traditions, one is Indian and the other British. The word ‘Fiction’ is derived from the Latin word ‘Fictum’, which means “created”. Indo – English fiction prefers to take some of its subject from peripheries itself. Indian women were living under the circumstance of Indian tradition and they were unaware of the real world and they kept silence against injustices done by others. Indian women writers are creating a new dimension to the society by their writings. Among the women writers of Indian English fiction, Sudha Murty has earned a distinct, space for her particular attention towards the plight of women and social Injustice. Sudha Murty created a new form of writing through the patriarchal is replaced by matriarchal. So here the importance is given to women and play a vital role in dominating. The last few decades have witnessed huge leap in feminist writings of Indian English literature.

Sudha Murty is a trail-blazer. As a postmodern woman Sudha Murty became the first female engineer to be hired in India’s largest auto manufacturer TATA engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO). As an only female she did her B.E in Electrical Electronics Engineering from B.V.B College by breaking the restriction. Murty is best known for her social work in all aspects. Her sensitive depiction and understanding of inborn human nature makes her writings, relevant to current society. The paper concentrates the sufferings and sorrows which the protagonists have faced throughout the novel and in some extend they emerge as brave and bold characters. The women characters grow up intellectually and psychologically. Arundhati Roy states, “I think fiction for me has always been a way of trying to make sense of “the world as I know it”. By typifying Arundhati Roy’s thought Sudha Murthy writes her fiction by her individual experience.

The term “postmodern Feminism” is an amalgamation of postmodernism, post structuralism and French feminism. It first appeared in the work of Judith Butler’s 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. Postmodern feminism opposes feminist perspectives which give single explanation for grand theory; it refuses the progress of Feminism. Postmodern feminism has emerged in recent years and developed from the thought of Michel Foucault, Simon de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan and Luce Irigaray. Postmodern feminism refuses to develop one comprehensive explanation and emphasises on plurality and multiplicity. It is used to

describe reaction against contradiction and absences in feminism. The purpose of postmodern feminism is to unstable the patriarchal norms rooted in society that have led to gender inequality.

Germaine Green urged women to break down the social barriers of epoch in *The Female Eunuch*. Many women in the postmodern era chose their careers over housework, and marriages were delayed to make them economically independent. Economic independence helps many dissatisfied to lead their life courageously without any support and independently. Sudha Murty is well known for her works *How I Taught my Grandmother to Read* and other Stories, *Wise and Otherwise*, *Mahashweta*, *Gently Falls the Bakula* and the novella, *The Mother I Never Knew*.

“One isn’t born courageous, one becomes it”- Marjane Satrapi

Mahashweta is stimulating and an eye-opening novel for the modern Indian women. The title, *Mahashweta* is taken from the Sanskrit novel “Kadambhari” by the great scholar, Bana Bhatta. In the Sanskrit novel the heroine is named Mahashweta, she is the daughter of King Gandhara. The hero, Pundarika meets with an untimely death. Mahashweta could not afford him dying, so she tackles the situation herself with a severe penance by wearing a white saree in the forest. By her effort and heart rendering love, she gets her lover, Pundarika back to life and is reunited.

Mahashweta (2007) is one of the best works of Sudha Murty. The novel picturizes a young beautiful and bold girl named Anupama. She gets married as in a fairy tale and later she was affected by leukoderma and her life became very tragedy.

The novel begins with “the female child is stronger than the male child at birth, as adults it is the man who becomes the oppressor, and woman who suffers.(M-1) According to Simone de Beauvoir “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. The meaning of to be a woman in the society is created by man for his benefit. The woman is strong enough to man in the society.

You know that from the first year of college till now, I have survived on scholarship.
(M -20)

On the contrary to the earlier opinion that women are considered a burden to their families, Anupama enacts some historical dramas for her personal needs and from her savings

she sends some money to her father and supports her family. Anupama marries doctor Anand and leads her life happily.

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... (M-6). It shows her unconditional love and willingness to sacrifice everything for him. As a typical Indian woman she surrenders herself to Anand, without bothering about her education and knowledge. She merely lives for the love of her husband without caring about her career. Anand's mother Radhakka accepts their love half-heartedly for the sake of her son. Radhakka prouds of her daughter- in- law's beauty while Anand's sister Girija was jealous and think her as rival.

His face was expressionless as he said, 'you have vitiligo'.....It is also known as leukoderma'. (M-49). While performing the pooja the burnt incense fell in her leg and created a wound. The wound was in white spot it slowly develops bigger. It named leukoderma, the illness is considered inauspicious. They treated her like a contagious disease. It is the deficiency of vitamin D but they treat as a curse of her sin. Anupama compared her life to Girija's clandestine relationship, was not loyal and leading a happy life but the miserable happened to Anupama was not her fault.

Randaka 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.(M-58)

Here we see the violation of women's rights. When a woman leaves her husband's house she does not have a place to live. Here Anupama is forced to leave her husband's house. A woman without her man has to face much embarrassment in the society. Even the parents of the daughter would consider as bad omen to stay with them after her marriage. When it comes to Anupama, she suffered a lot because she was in her step-mother's house. Anand's silence affects her mentally. 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.

Anand fails to be a good husband and forgets her vows taken during their marriage. If he loves Anupama as his own flesh definitely he never allows her to suffer. In the Old Testament the woman is made from her man's rib so he has to consider as his better half and care for her throughout his life.

Please do not misunderstand us, but we are forced to call of the wedding (M-68)

Due to Anupama's leukoderma her step sister Nanda's marriage stopped by their in-law's family because they doubt it as hereditary problem. Sabakka started scolding Anupama and she could not bear to see her sister's tear in spite of her problem. Anand's silence also makes her sad.

The moment Radhakka found out, she sent the daughter-in-law packing. Now she is searching for a new bride for Anand.(M-74)

She recalls a line from which she enacted in a stage, "Why did God give strong arms and the courage of lion to man?" To take care of women from her problem and give courage to lead a life, But when it comes to Anand he fails to rescue his wife. She could not bear that agony so she thinks to end up her life. Anupama tries her best to obtain the rights when it fails she went to search for her independent individual identity. She collects all her courage and determined herself in prayer to the goddess, "Give me the courage to live no matter what happens!" (M-79)

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 all about your edifying qualities. Get out of my way; I want to go out.(M-88)

However no matter how trivial they are in their society, their daily struggles are much enough to raise great sympathy and stress for the environment that the characters are part of. Now she gains enough courage and bravery to lead an individual life in new place. She rebels against the laws followed in the society and she puts everything backward and walks through the ways forbidden by and settles herself a different person in the end of the novel. She explained with emotional and determination, "We have become good friends. Let us remain so, and not complicate our relationship by getting married (M-150). She represents the woman of postmodern world in this respect, who is torn between freedom and tradition. When Vasanth proposed her, as a matured girl and determined voice she rejects the idea and tells him that she didn't want herself to commit again into any relationship. Here, she never fails to save her culture and tradition.

Anand apologizes after knowing his sister's secret affair and Anupama's purity. The depressed have asserted the identity and fight for their rights having rejected and the injustice

imposed on them. They have remade their lot having reconstructed the traditional culture, changing the discriminatory and patriarchal concept of the past and created the new concept of present which is completely free from all prejudices of the past.

After a lot of humiliation and experience Anupama proved her talent and lead her life better than her past is denoted here as a postmodern feminism. In the final stage she shows her steady immersion in modern culture without leaving her cultural identity and teaches Anand a lesson. Women are both bread makers and bread winners. Anupama emerges as a new being with the western education and culture.

In Sudha Murty's nonfiction *Wise and Otherwise* the vignette "A Wedding to Remember" makes the person repent for his mistake by reading the novel *Mahashweta*. It becomes a thought provoking fiction and it helps Malati to retain her life from misery.

'Madam, later we came to know that he read your novel, *Mahashweta*,' he said. 'The situation of my son was similar. It seems he read this novel at least ten times and understood the plight of the girl. He took a month and decided he did not want to be like the man in your novel, who shed his responsible only to regret it later. Your novel changed his thinking.' (Wise and Otherwise -108)

Gently falls the Bakula portrays the drudgery life of the female protagonist, Shrimati, who seems to experience the pain from her marriage but her husband Shrikant fails to realize the sacrifice of her life. The Bakula flower is considered a souvenir of their love, even though it would dry up, its fragrance will be same like their love.

Gently falls the Bakula is the story about Shrikant Deshpande and Shrimati Shrikant Deshpande, the protagonist is a hyper intelligent girl. She was very much fond of History subject. It helped her to have a good knowledge on Indian history and its architecture. Shrimati stands first in essay competition. Shrikant friends could not tolerate his defeat, so he tried to console his friend Ravi by saying "history is not great subject..... real intelligence is scoring in science" (GFTB-5). Hence to prove Shrikant is not correct, Shrimati attains state first rank in SSLC board examination. While hearing his rival's rank Shrikant could not tolerate, as a man he is not ready to bear his rival, a female.

Shrikant's mind went numb. Mr Kulkarni's chatter continued, but Shrikant did not hear a word. Had a thunderbolt struck him or had he touched a live wire? (GFTB -21)

To repay Shrikant's educational loan, Shrimati plans to work for money to repay as soon as possible. "The day we send the last instalment, I will stop working and pursue my studies. It doesn't matter if I am late by a year. Can you please find a job for me? (GFTB -77)

As a typical Indian woman she sacrifices her intellectual longings and supports her husband as a submissive wife. Shrimati gives up her passion and ends up as a dutiful wife to her husband, after marriage. By doing this she approves and accepts him with his good and bad. Here the litterateur resembles Shrimati with the character of Bhamati; who sacrificed her whole life to support her sage husband without expecting anything from him. When everyone praises the sage's achievement and failed to notice Bhamati's sacrifice, the sage says as follows:

No, Shri, I am perfectly all right, but don't you think we should have children now? We are well settled financially. Both of us are over thirty, and thirty is late for a woman.(GFTB -96)

Shrikant gives all the happiness to his beloved but fails to give real happiness. A woman's life is fulfilled when she bears a child. The society expects a married woman to care for her home and she has to give heir to his family. A childless woman is considered a social stigma. Love and marriage between them sustains when there is mutual trust and respect. Shrikant's dedication towards his work made Shrimati feel lonely and also puts barriers to her desire of becoming a mother. Shrikant does not spend his time with his beloved rather he concentrates on his work even in house. Being lonely, gives her unnecessary thoughts.

Shrimati look at the sea with sorrow and bewilderment. The grief that was in her heart was as deep as the ocean. Despite her arguments and her tears he had not listened to her.(GFTB -150)

Even though she was fascinated by nature her mind becomes depressed. Shrikant's love for work makes her feel lonely. Their marriage are based on loveless life and rather based on mechanical process. There exists a terrible communication gap between them though they live under the same roof. The thirst for money and fame slowly subside his love and family attachment. As an Indian woman she is afraid of her mother-in-law about "being barren".

Shrimati remembered telling Shrikant a few times that his mother always bought the cheapest of gifts for her, but for Rama she would buy things worth thousands! (GFTB -151)

Shrikant's mother shows discrimination between her daughter and daughter-in-law. When Shrimati tells Shrikant he comforts her and is not able to understand that a gift has a measure of love in it. It shows the value of recognition towards the person.

“...a woman should stay with her husband, irrespective of what he was. Shrimati did not agree with that belief. She felt that there was a limit to which one could be obedient and subservient, but once that limit was crossed, the individual's happiness became more important. (GFTB -157)

Earlier women identified themselves in the sub-name of wife, mother and daughter. They accept this identification willingly because they are not financially independent to lead their life individually. But now time has changed and women reject this relational identity. Now she is able to understand the dishonesty of this identity that is thrust upon her by society, so that she may control herself as a being. The postmodern women are the women of sensibility and consciousness of her low position in the family and society. They are educated and mentally strong to lead their life in prosperity and now woman wants to stand on her feet as full human being, equal to man in society.

But by the love for her husband she acclimatizes her life. Shrikant becomes more acquisitive and he invites some of his friends to the house and Shrimati is bored by the hospitality and make herself alone. The guests insult her favourite subject which makes her burst out in emotion. Shrikant feels sorry for the inconvenience because of his wife's behaviour and insults Shrimati before the guests. It stimulates a sense of anger and bursts out her inner feelings. Shrimati shares a deep affectionate relationship with her husband and it becomes very hard for her to take a decision. She decides that she would not tolerate any more humiliation being of Shrikant's wife. She realizes that her life is her own which she has to shape as well as face the events of her life.

“Your silence will not protect you”- Audre Lorde

Shri, I am leaving and I don't have any plans to return, I am handling all the responsibilities of the house to you. (GFTB -160)

Shrimati gains the courage to leave the house where respect is no longer being served. She does not want to be in her husband's shadow with a luxurious life without self-respect. It is better to create a place in a society, instead of living a discriminated, suppressed and sophisticated life. She finally finds a way out of the dilemma to seek her own life. To turn out

this boredom and meaningless life she decides to have a peaceful life by concentrating on her studies. “Money is one thing which rarely unites and mostly divides people”-Sudha Murty.

Shri, you told me the other day that I am more intelligent than you and I can decide what I want. This is what I decided. (GFTB-162)

It expresses the ferocious change in the mind of Shrimati. Shrikant's attitude makes her decide what she was and later she has advised him; very few can only attain this peak in a short time like him. Nothing is free of cost in this world; in achieving the position, he has lost his lovable wife Shrimati. She understands that she is going to get her identification. So she decides to go the U.S for doing Ph.D. By doing this she tries to defeat men and breaks all the chains and norms propounded by patriarchal society on women.

Now Shrikant realizes the sheer love of Shrimati and has felt, before seventeen years he had lost his meaningless first rank and now the most precious Shrimati. However he tries to divert his mind to work, but he cannot stop thinking of Shrimati. Their love metaphorically symbolizes the flower 'bakula'. It blooms, withers and falls down to the ground, so does the romance and love of this couple eventually.

The novels *Mahashweta* and *Gently falls the bakula* is not only about the nostalgic love for the past but also a reformation and reconstruction of new life. Postmodern women have broken the walls of restrictions and traditional prejudices. They unravel the fact that behind the blanket where very few are ready to wipe out the tears of suffering women in the name of socio-cultural tradition which is made by the interest and profit of men regardless to equal status of women. Anupama and Shrimati typified the life of postmodern world, eventhough they faces the tribulation and humiliation like the female in feminist world they are not kept silent. As a postmodern female they come out of their worries and built a new life which gives the real happiness as well as an individual identification. Postmodern feminism acknowledges herself as an asset, and proves women are not helpless and dependent. To represent postmodernism the protagonist's life does not end rather starts from her decision. Education helps them to take a decision. Woman is more capable than man; it clearly expresses that in the present age women have to realize their capacity. The suppressed protagonists get frustrated and try to prove themselves; in this process a woman has to undergo a series of humiliation, betrayals to make her life cheerful. Postmodern women perceived education as an asset and to make world positive.

Work cited:

Germaine, Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 1970; rpt.st. Albama, Paladin, 1976. Print.

Iyengar, Shrinivasa. *Indian writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1983.

Mukhopadhyay, Arpita. *Feminism*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Private Limited,
2018

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Twice Born Fiction*. Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974.

Murty, Sudha. *Mahashweta*. New Delhi: Pensssguin Books, 2007.

Murty, Sudha. *Gently falls the Bakula*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008.

Murty, Sudha. *Wise and Otherwise*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006.