

BLAZING TORCHES

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SUDHA MURHY'S EMANCIPATED WOMEN -
A STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS

M.KARTHIGA

Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "*Basic education links children whether of cities or villages, to all that is best and lasting in India*" and time has proved it to be true. Education has been the most successful tool in bringing about emancipation, empowerment, development and self-reliance to the downtrodden, especially people from rural areas.

Coming from the pens of women, gender issues prevailing in our society and other challenges faced by women, have a powerful impact on the readers as they are based on first hand experience. The modern women writers also handle some unique and not very common topics, bringing awareness and awakening society's and individual's conscience. One such women writer is Mrs. Sudhamurthy. Throughout her works she focuses on personal struggle of anglicized middle class women in contemporary India. She is one of the most eminent women writers in India is also a technocrat, teacher, activist and, above all, somebody who responds to the cry and needs of the deprived, the underprivileged and the marginalized sections of society. She firmly believes that education and the right attitude can bridge the abyss between the developed and the undeveloped and has been doing her part through her writings and philanthropy too. A prolific writer, she has authored nine novels, two collections of short stories, three travelogues, children's books and more. The Padmashree award winner with her simple style and sound wisdom has inspired countless Indian women to believe in themselves. Not stopping with mere words she has been bridging the gap between the rural and the global through her action too.

In 1960s, with the rise of feminism, there emerged the New Woman, who is completely different from her traditional

counterpart. This New Woman is now aware of her destination, that is to liberate herself from the clutches of unjust taboos and customs imposed on her by the male dominated society. As a writer of the woman-centred novelist Sudha Murthy has worked for the complete emancipation of woman. The modern women depicted by Sudha Murthy do not depend, for their survival on their fathers, husbands or sons. They fall into the category of the New woman who solve their problems themselves. (Kumar Neeraj: 2008)

In her novels, Sudha Murthy, through her unadorned and unfussy approach towards writing, makes her female characters strong and who are self reliant able to break their unreasonable restrains and stand in their own feet. She delves profoundly into the characters she comes across and leaves it to the readers to decide between the good and bad in them. Sudha Murthy's forte is simple language and beautiful narration. Her characters are realistic. As she says-

"Though you reach the sky, make sure your feet is always grounded!"

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 rivalry, the typical mother-in-law and sister-in-law v/s daughter-in-law enmity, the misconceptions about educational qualifications and the practices surrounding marriage and match making are all very familiar. Shrimathi, like the flower Bakula is unassuming and quiet in her ways, though she is intelligent and passionate about several things. and like the Bakula, it is in her later years after she "falls" and had "dried" that her "fragrance" becomes sweeter and she comes alive again.

"House of cards", as the name suggests is about the home-family ties and the balance needed to keep these ties healthy. This book is all about family and the importance of one's identity specifically a woman. It portrays how a woman sacrifices

so many things for her family however doesn't receive equal importance from her family. It depicts how strength from a mother\wife\daughter can help the family to flourish though respect\affection is not given back to her. And finally it teaches that every woman should be independent and treated equally. "Her identity should not be diluted and she should be able to pursue what she likes.....no ego no hassles....this is the key to a healthy and peaceful relation!" (Mukherjee Meenakshi : 1996)

While another novel "Dollar Bahu" by Sudha Murthy explores the hustle and tussle of staying in India or abroad very nicely. Due to poverty and lack of education that Guamma has witnessed in her childhood, she is enchanted by the dollar as iron is attracted to a magnet and thus resorts to all these comparison. The basic message that author tries to give is that, we go to any country, there will always be advantages and disadvantages. The author has done a brilliant job in praising India and America as well as pointed out the flaws in cultures of both the countries. This novel is an eye opener for greedy people, who think money can buy everything.

Sudha Murthy's another novel, "Mahasweta", brings out the journey of the young woman Anupama whose hardships are overcome after many struggles and how she escapes from the gloomy side of dependant life, but at the end she proves herself and finds her place in Bombay, the land of realizing her dreams. Her achievement after hardships is an inspiration for every young woman. The novel has an impact on the readers because the approach of the issues are Indian. "We have our past glory, golden history and cultural achievement which have not been continuing up to contemporary time. We hardly realize our present barrenness. We bask in our past achievements and do nothing. We have become stagnant in contemporary feature of India in each and every field against the backdrop of a large and glorious past". There is a lot of variation shown in Anupama's character in "Mahasweta" that is shown as a typical of all the victims of leukoderma. It exposes many superstitious beliefs of people whose prejudices govern the society even today. But in

Mumbai she again emerges into a different individual who does not consider what people talk about her. Anupama's life is not only an eye-opener to everybody but also an inspiration for all the woman especially leukoderma afflicted person. Ideas in the novel mainly focus issues like love, marriage, divorce, social taboos and inhibitions, indifference towards the victims of disease like leukoderma, extent of growth and recognition as human beings and crisis of conscience and values by the fellow human beings.

In her novels, the appearance of the new, fully awakened woman, ready to fight against the patriarchal norms in order to live a meaningful life, is a recent phenomenon. As a feminist writer, Sudha Murthy's novels raise a strong protest against the male dominated society where women are denied the freedom to act and live according to their will. Sudha Murthy's novels reveal her protest against the image of woman as an auxiliary. She destroys the distorted image of woman and therefore, the female characters in her novels appear more powerful than men. The protagonist Anupama in "*Mahaswetha*", and Srimathi in "*Gently Falls the Bakula*" are interested in drama and history. Anupama likes drama but she did not allow herself to be a puppet in husband's hands and Shrimathi loves history she too did not follow the subservient life of historical women as they are foot to their husband.... The journey of Mridula in "*House of Cards*" is a journey from a middle class girl to a self-sufficient woman. These women in Murthy's novels prove themselves as an independent modern women with dignity and discipline. Sudha Murthy's protagonists are a group of modern women who, when ill-treated, turn to rebellion, protest and emancipation.

God made man and woman to complete and complement each other and not to compete and crush one another. God meant man and women to be companions and be of "one flesh", but the woman is made to believe that she is not enough and she finds herself worthy and unworthy depending on her husband's appraisal of her. Sudha Murthy in her novels does not promote feminism in a destructive way but motivates young women to

have emotional independence. She wants women to rise like phoenix bird from the ashes of slavery, bondage and bias and fly high up in the sky of self confidence. She tells the message not to lose heart when people be little or feel proud when they praise us...when we have a good understanding of ourselves and our pretentials we are true achiever with genuine happiness and fulfillment.

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