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FROM REJECTION TO RECOGNITION: EXPLORING WOMANHOOD IN SUDHA MURTHY'S *MAHASWETA*

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Abstract

This paper critically Analyzes Sudha Murthy's novel *Mahasweta*, Emphasizing on the protagonist Anupama's groundbreaking journey from social isolation to the restoration of her identity. The narrative highlights the taboo about leucoderma and exposes how patriarchal pattern oppress women whose bodies vary from Exemplified norms of beauty. Through the protagonists battle for Self-respect, Independence, and self-identity, Sudha Murthy probes the intersection of sex, body shaming, and societal demand. Through a feminist framework, this study shows how the protagonist suffers humiliation and rejection that help her rediscover her strength and confidently claim her own identity. The paper claims that *Mahasweta* not only reveals the mistreatment within traditional system but also commemorate endurance and self-empowerment as pathways to reconstructing one's identity in society. By tracing Anupama's quest toward self-acceptance, this paper accentuates Murthy's wider message on the requirement of reconceptualizing femininity beyond physical beauty.

Key words: Leucoderma, Humiliation, Self-Identity, Rejection, Feminism, Oppression.

Introduction

Sudha Murthy shines out as one of the most successful and creative women writers of the current era. Her works provide a vibrant and empathetic depiction of the everyday struggles encountered by common middle-class Indian women living within a male-dominated society. Through her narratives, she covers a broad range of societal, political, and personal obstacles capturing women's inner worlds, their faith, expectation, anxiety, dreams, disillusionment, and even their experiences with the legal system. Much of her writing focuses on the themes such as exploitation, abuse, the pressures of marriage, the impact of taboo, and the changing nature of family relationships in a globalized world.



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Her well-known novel *Mahasweta* delves deeply into domestic abuse and the roles women are expected to play within their families, particularly within their marital homes. Murthy skillfully highlights the real issues women face both in their communities and in their intimate relationships, and she portrays how they struggle to navigate and overcome these difficulties.

This study focuses on the position of an educated woman within marriage as depicted in *Mahasweta*, examining how she is compelled to submit to her husband, mother-in-law, and stepmother. The protagonist, Anupama, endures immense suffering at the hands of an authoritative upper-class family, suppressing her emotions in the process. Through Anupama's journey, the novel powerfully illustrates the painful experiences of a learned woman who becomes a victim of domestic abuse.

The book *Mahashweta*, published in the year 2000, probes deeply into the challenges of human existence. Sudha Murthy depicts with extraordinary compassion and insight, the inner world of women who restrain their emotions and suffer in silence. This paper seeks to explore how the writer has written from the perspective of a woman. She brings attention to the societal discrimination and prejudice linked with leucoderma, a 'cosmetic' and non-transferable skin condition. She highlights that true beauty lies in simplicity and faith in oneself. "Hence, the recommendation is to prioritize one's own well-being and not be overly concerned with the opinions or expectations of others," she recommends that individuals should focus on their own happiness rather than concern excessively about societal standards or judgments, for every individual must chase their own exclusive path. "She discovers independence when she stops relying on others' approval" (Murty 102).

The evolution of Anupama from low self-worth to embracing personal growth

Anupama, a lovely and beautiful young woman, enters wedlock filled with expectation and dreams. But her life transforms when she develops leucoderma, a skin condition that causes loss of skin pigmentation. Rather than receiving compassion, she is dismissed and made to feel ashamed. Her husband, Anand, abandons her, and her in-laws treat her illness like an omen, deepening the stigma around her. Their rejection uncovers a brutal truth: society values beauty over character. Shattered by embarrassment and disgrace, Anupama at first feels lost but her path toward finding herself begins when she prefers to walk away from the toxic environment that oppressed her. Moving to Bombay transforms her life. She slowly rebuilds her confidence, finding joy again through theatre and teaching. "Anupama realizes her value is not determined by society's prejudice" (Murty 58).



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Anupama's braveness and determination show how women can restore their identity even when society tries to restrain them within oppressive roles. She refuses to let vitiligo define her worth. She relies on her inner fortitude to rise above the suffering and mistreatment. Through Anupama's character Murthy emphasizes the power of independence and the importance of believing in one-self. The novel calls on the readers to overcome the destructive stereotypes of the society and understand that the value cannot be evaluated by the beauty. The story of Anupama serves only as a reminder of the fact that it is possible to discover freedom, self-respect, and even self-discovery through resilience.

Anupama's Broken Dreams

The life of Anupama starts with hope and happiness. Being a wife of a well reputed doctor, Anand, she feels that she has entered a bright and safe future. However, all this changes when she develops a tiny white spot on her skin which is the result of the diagnosis of leucoderma. What would have been a bearable situation turns out to be a life changing blow not due to the illness itself but due to the response it elicits.

Rather than be supportive, her husband and in-laws who are caught in a state of ignorance and deep-rooted prejudice reject her. Her wrongly labeled impurity or disease, leucoderma, is immediately isolating. Not only do they break her marriage but they deprive her of her social status leaving Anupama to face emotional rejection as well as social inhumanity.

Prejudice and Cultural Expectations

The physical appearance of a woman is unduly judged by the Indian society as a measure of value and respectability. Anupama is also a victim of such cultural demands where beauty is regarded as a virtue and any illness is perceived as an insight of misfortune. Her in-laws, who cannot see beyond their stereotypes, treat her state cruelly and dismissively, which only strengthens the already existing social stigmas that leucoderma is covered with.

The social stigma impacts Anupama and unveils a culture that gives importance to looks over personal perseverance and individuality. Her experience is symbolic of the way that the standards set by the society still define and more often than not circumscribe the life of women.



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The Cognitive Stress

The denial and humiliation Anupama is subjected to make her plunge into an emotional crisis. She experiences the sense of shame, betrayal, and uselessness and is left wondering who she is, and now what her life is all about. The severe criticism she gets in the society makes her even more isolated and she is on the verge of losing hope. Nonetheless, this suffering is not the only characteristic of the story of Anupama. It also shows that she is extremely strong since she gradually starts recovering and restoring her life not letting the psychological load of stigma to break her. “True beauty is not in one’s appearance but in one’s heart and courage.” (Murthy 45)

Resistance and Self-Emergence.

The actual start of transformation in Anupama comes when she decides to move out of the house of her husband. The fresh start in a new city can help her forget the snuffing opinions of her former life and move into the environment where her talents will be considered and valued. Those around her appreciate her intellect and creativity, and as she is shielded by them, she gains her confidence back gradually. Her artistic endeavors in the theatre and literature allow finding an independent sense of agency and self that stretches way beyond what society attempts to project onto her. This phase of her life proves it is possible to make a step away, and get rid of toxic relationships and use the power of the healing process with own individualism.

Overcoming Social Judgment

Anupama represents a symbol of women who are strong and self-reliant, by the end of the novel. Her strong resolve not to go back to Anand when he is apologetic even speaks of the renewed self-esteem and dignity she has. She stands up against the firmly held system that a woman is worth a lot based on whether she marries or based on her physical attractiveness in a society. The story of Anupama turns into a serious commentary on the decisions that constrain women and a statement of how strong one has to be to transcend them. “People often judge others by their looks, forgetting that real strength lies in character and deeds.” (Murthy 68)

Conclusion

Mahashweta gives a compelling story about the emotional world of a person which is guided by stigma and cultural conditioning. Sudha Murthy provides a powerful story of bravery, recovery, and self-identification



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through the events and experiences of the character, Anupama. The novel urges readers to go beyond the superficial signs of value and appreciate the power that is in every individual. The story of Anupama is a reminder of the need to be emphatic, conscious, and brave enough to take on the challenges of life in one's own time.

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