



THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW WOMAN IN THE SUDHA MURTHY'S NOVEL "MAHASHWETA"

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to study the evolution of a new woman in Sudha Murthy's novel *Mahashweta*. With the dawn of freedom, particularly India's national struggle, the position of women took a turn for better. It was strongly realized that so long as women of country were not uplifted or granted equal status with the men in all walks of life- political, social, economical, educational, India could neither progress nor make any significant advance in any field. Our women have a great part to play progress of our country, as the mental and physical contact of women with life is much more lasting and comprehensive than that of men. For nothing was it said, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." In accordance to this proverb an apt example is Dr. Sudha Murthy, who is a prolific fiction author in Kannada and English and has published several books that promote her views on feminism, charity, hospitality and self-realization through fictional narratives. She is a recipient of many awards and the most notable amongst them are the Padma Shri and the R.K. Narayan's award for her contribution to literature. The new women depicted by Sudha Murthy are hard working, dedicated, delicate and docile. They normally go for complete surrendering but the very essence of self-respect always remains with them, ultimately, forcing them to become rebellions though in a very subdued way. The present paper is based on the psychological realism, exclusively to the main characters of the novel, Anupama and Anand in *Mahashweta*. The novel furnishes mixed and sundry ideas prevailed in orthodox Indian society and conscientious firmness of a new Indian woman.

Key words: Indian English Literature, Modernism, Fiction, Henry James and Psychological Realism, Sudha Murthy and realism, New women.

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INTRODUCTION

While reading history of English literature, we are convinced to the fact that it started as a literature of imitation, a true follower, for a pretty long time, of the British literature, but the change is evinced after their departure and gradually it acquired its own form – everything of its own – and at present, it has its own identity, claiming several

prizes throughout the globe. During the seventy years of its effective history, Indian writing in English crossed many mile stones and finally accepted as a major literature of the world. Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand tried their best to give a new identity to writing in English.

The term 'Modernism' implies "new and distinctive feature in the subjects, forms, concepts

and styles of literature and other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century –a deliberate, and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but Western culture in general.” So the parameter is that of the West, and our concern is that of the East, our tradition and culture, that of India only, because Indian English literature is basically literature of India, though not divorced from the rest of the world. However, Gordon explains, while talking of Ved Mehta, that “he realizes modernization is not the property of the west alone, that is a worldwide trend characterized by universality and it has led to fundamental cultural information of the West as much as it has in the case of his own culture.”

K. R .S . Iyengar, too, feels, “Norms are changing everywhere, and they are changing in India too. The “stream of consciousness” method of narration ...rarely tried by the Indian novelists...of course, Shakuntala Shrinagesh and Anita Desai have made intelligent use of the method... Zig-Zag in narration jumbling the past, present and future to change the novel with suspense and piquancy, characterization on the basis of purposeful inconsistency and a functionally experimental prose style.”

However, a close scrutiny of the available texts confirms the fact that the modernity of Indian English Literature is the culmination of our traditional endeavor accompanied by global awareness. Regarding Indian English literature one thing can be taken for granted that it is the desire that makes an artist not the design, it is the content that moulds the form and not the form influencing the creator.

Psychological Realism and Henry James

Realism finds its subjects in everyday life. Writers of realistic fiction tend to use simple, direct prose to depict ordinary men and women in everyday situations. They value the individual above plot, creating stories that explore the psychology of the characters. Henry James is considered the father of the realistic psychological novel. James portrayal of characters and situations departed from the romantic fictions of the 18th and 19th centuries which had centered on characters whose difficult

lives were corrected through perseverance, hard work, and love.

What is ‘real’? Without getting into some long-winded and tedious metaphysical discussion, we can generally agree that ‘real’ is what we see, feel, hear, or otherwise experience in some way. But what about the interior experiences we can’t detect with our five senses? When writers want to get the inside scoop characters’ internal lives, they resort to psychological realism, which is the faithful and consistent depiction in literature of inward human thoughts, feelings, and personality traits. This type of honest portrayal of real-life human emotions got its start in the late 19th century with the works of Henry James. For James and the other Authors who followed his example in the 20th century, novels get the opportunity to explore the intense and starkly realistic characters in fiction. By demonstrating the deep truths that can be found even in fiction and by straining against old ideas like Romantic Idealism, Psychological realism became widely popular among those participating in Modernism. Modernism was a literary movement of the early 20th century dedicated largely to violating previous conventions of literature and exploring the human condition.

Psychological realism is common place in 21st century literature, with many current works of fiction at least partially representing characters internal thoughts and feelings in some contents. In this type of writing character and characterization are more important than usual, and they often delve deeper into the mind of a character than novels of other genres. The psychological novel can be called a novel of the "inner man," so to say. In some cases, the stream of consciousness technique, as well as interior monologues, may be employed to better illustrate the inner workings of the human mind at work. Flashbacks may also be featured. While these three textual techniques are also prevalent in literary modernism, there is no deliberate effort to fragment the prose or compel the reader to interpret the text.

Sudha Murty and Psychological realism

The concept of psychological realism by Henry James is based on exploring the different human actions, the buried ambitions of the characters and effective pattern of a human being

inner psyche which results in their different vision, mental state, which states according to their life and requirements. In the same way Sudha Murty, 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. She has explored in-depth the workings of the inner mind of the women characters in her works. In her novels, the reader is brought face to face with the legitimate longings, dreams, hopes, fears, disappointments and the traumatic experience that have been faced by a lot of women. The portrayal of the dependency and struggling to survive independently has been well elaborated within the stories.

Mahashweta is an inspiring story of courage and resilience in a world marred by illusions and betrayals. This poignant tale offers hope and solace to the victims of the prejudices that govern society even today. Anupama's fairytale marriage to Anand falls apart when she discovers a white patch on her foot and learns that she has leukoderma. A feeling of misery engulfed Anupama. She realized that her position had become lower than that of a servant in just one day. The servant can go home and sleep after finishing the day's work. But where could she go? ; To her father's house? Where would she find kindness and trust? ; With Anand? But how would she reach England? She did not know the answers to any of the questions that plagued her.

Abandoned by her uncaring in-laws and intensive husband, she is forced to return to her father's home in the village. The social stigma of the married woman living with her parents, her stepmother's continual barbs and the ostracism that accompanies her skin condition force her to contemplate suicide. When her friend Sumitra was getting married to Hari Prasad, She prayed for Sumi's Happiness:

"Let your husband be a man who will only shower happiness and love on you. It is better to have an understanding husband than one who is merely handsome and wealthy. Marriage is a Gamble. The result cannot be predicted beforehand. Finding the right match is a matter of chance. I was unlucky in this. May you be more fortunate?" (MS,65)

A small white patch had ruined her career as well as her marriage. Murty beautifully expressed the interior monologues of a Protagonist and her husband. Anupama had essayed many roles on stage-

"Samuktha, Vasavadata, Noor Jahan and countless others. She would get so immersed in the characters that, long after the plays had been staged, she would still remember the dialogues. But Anand, who had never been on stage, surpassed her in real life! Anand was a Doctor; he knew more about the 'disease' than most people. Then why was he behaving in such a manner? What would he have done if his mother or sister had fallen prey to the affliction? Would he have deserted them as he had her? He would probably have sympathized with them and taken care of them, but when it was his own wife, the woman he claimed to love, he had abandoned her. The rules were different ...and society would not question his behaviour... They could not imagine the difficulties, the sorrow and the despair of someone in her position." (MS,75)

Anupama wrote a letter to her Husband, but Anand had not replied to it. Anand began to rationalize:

"Anupama is being treated by the best doctor. I shall wait and see what happens. There is no way I can call Avva and ask her to take Anupama back. She is old-fashioned, and once she makes up her mind, she won't change. And in such situation it is better that Anupama with her parents rather than avva. It's best if she handles the present situation on her own. I shall write to her after some time, once everyone has calmed down. She will also feel better about it." (MS,122)

Anand immersed himself in work, taking on extra duties in the hospital. He forgot that there was a helpless young girl waiting for his decision, somewhere in a village thousands of miles away. After he returned from England he came to know about his sister's sordid affair with someone before marriage, and he realized that her mother was

pragmatic and opportunistic. Suddenly Anupama appeared to him in a different light. Anand felt responsible for Anupama's misfortunes. A deep sense of guilt and shame pervaded his mind.

"Whatever I have done was wrong, but the time that I have lost cannot be recovered. However, I must rectify the mistakes I have made and shape the future properly. I will beg Anupama to forgive me. She is for superior to anyone I know- in morals, intellect and conduct. With new -found determination he got up." (MS,128)

"To err is Human , to forgive divine, but have I erred beyond the point of forgiveness? I will plead with Anupama to forgive me. After all, we are all human and this is part of life."(MS,134)

There was no salvation for the sin he had committed. He would never have peace of mind for as long as he lived.

Evaluation of a new woman

The shock of seeing Anand after so many years left her speechless. Anupama smiled sadly. There were so many things that she had once wanted to tell Anand. She had devoted her, mind, body and soul to him, loved him without reservation, and in return he had hurt her deeply. Anupama reacts:

"Was it my fault that I got this white patch? Is it my fault that I am a poor man's daughter? Now that you are here, answer me."

"You knew that I did not have this before our marriage. You could have told your mother...They wanted an excuse to get rid of me and your silence provided them with the perfect cover."

"A marriage is a lifelong commitment; for better or worse, till death do us part. Wasn't that what you'd said to me before you left for England?"

"How can you possibly expect a burnt seed to grow into a tree? Husband, children, affection, love ...all are irrelevant to me now. It is too late for us. I am no longer the naïve Anupama whose world revolved around you. I know my goals are and where

I am heading, and I don't need anyone's help to reach my destination."

When her friend Vasant proposed her, she told very clearly:

"I don't want to get entangle again in the same circle of husband and family. My past had taught me a very valuable lesson."(MS, 150)

Vasant's friend Satya told,

"I respect Anupama a lot. She is such a balanced person. Even with all the odds stacked against her, she is always optimistic. Life has treated her badly and given her so many shocks, but she is never bitter."(MS, 136)

Anupama started reciting the lines which had been engraved in her mind...

'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 announce everything. Let society say anything it wishes. I do not care...' (MS, 151)

We see the emergence of new woman with the value of identity and revolt against the tyranny and double standed of the patriarchal society.

Conclusion

The Indian woman began to identify herself as a subordinate individual, as a mere instrument of man. This reduced her level of self-confidence. Her roles began to get stereotyped as an individual accepting for herself the composite daughter-wife-mother image. She began to suppress her real feelings and it became difficult for her to untangle her true self from the existing social roles. Over a long period of time, a firm-rooted belief among the majority of women that they were only capable of producing children and managing the household affairs, to the exclusion of all other socially useful activities prevailed .Thus she virtually became a caged bird. Murty clearly expressed by her novels that the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to household

works. The novels show how women always gain self-esteem in facing the adversities of their lives, assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. They are capable of being independent and leading lives on their own.

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