
QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN SUDHA MURTHY'S '*DOLLAR BAHU*' AND '*MAHASHWETA*'

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Introduction

The present paper is an attempt to explore the theme 'Quest for Identity' from Sudha Murthy's works 'Dollar Bahu' and 'Mahashweta'. It also gives a glance on how today's Indian society is creating a dilemma in women. On one hand it is accepting an educated woman, woman having jobs but on the other hand the suffering is not over. With lots of expectations and orthodox mentality at the same time, it is generating a 'Pygmalion Effect' on women. Sudha Murthy is a teacher, a philanthropist and chairperson of Infosys. Murthy has done realistic portrayal of Indian women in her works. 'Dollar Bahu', 'Mahashweta', 'Wise and Otherwise', 'The mother I never knew', 'Three Thousand Stitches', 'The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk' are some of the notable books by her. Though the expectations and responsibilities of family are carried out in well manner by the female protagonists of these given stories- Vinuta and Anupama - the result of this devotion, care and love is contrasting. The great expectations of 'Superwomen', the social dogmas, orthodox system, barbs, typical family oriented mentality, disgusting male dominion can be seen in simple and striking manner in these works. Murthy, at the end of these stories portrays the developed women. The empowerment of women, the change from dilemma to decision-making can be seen in these same stories. These stories are their journey to find their identity.

Keywords: Quest for Identity, orthodox system, Pygmalion effect, Superwomen concept, Dogmas, Barbs, Male domination, Deep psychological trauma, Stigma, Rebel, Empowerment.

Quest for Identity in Sudha Murthy's '*Dollar Bahu*' and '*Mahashweta*'

Sudha Murthy is an Indian social worker, author, a teacher, a philanthropist. Murthy began her professional career as a computer scientist and engineer. She is the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation and a member of public health care initiatives of the Gates Foundation. She has founded several orphanages, participated in rural development efforts, supported the movement to provide all Karnataka government schools with computer and library facilities, and established the 'The Murthy Classical Library of India' at Harvard University. In 2006,

Murthy was awarded the Padmashri, the fourth highest-ranking civilian award from the government of India.

Elaine Showalter's three phases in Feminist Tradition gives a particular dimension to this tradition. The phases are:

1. Limitation
2. Protest and
3. Self Discovery

Likewise Murthy has portrayed three types of female characters:

1. The Sufferers
2. The Oppressors and
3. The Helpers

The two phases of women's psychology are characterized deliberately in Sudha Murthy's fictions. Firstly a enthusiastic family-oriented woman willing to submit before custom bound restrictions of matrimonial life. On second phase, when humiliation and injustices seriously do affect their self-respect, do not hesitate to rebel and revolt.

Simone de Beauvoir's book 'The Second Sex' states,

"Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependent crumble, between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator."

It's not about strength or weakness of a woman; it's about the stereotypes of society that has been observed and practiced repeatedly boundless of time, era, place etc.

"Feminism is not about making women strong, women are already strong. It is about changing the world perceives that strength."

It is not the thing that women cannot create their place and aura. Women had done, doing it and will do in the best manner. But this image of 'Superwoman' is dangerous. Indirectly they are possessed and used whatever the situation would be and whichever the era would be. This system is indirectly deceiving women by false praising her.

Can we imagine a world where the same freedom of male is given to women and household chores are shared? The results will be awestruck. If they can handle both places perfectly. What will be the result if some of their work is shared by men and family?

In this 21st century, the Techno-era too, we cannot see a woman without extra load. It is assumed that she should be the epitome of 'Superwoman'. A woman has to do everything as

per her family demands. She has to follow all rituals, she has to learn all household chores, she has to marry someone according to her family, she has to bear labor pain as many times the patriarchal society as authority decides, she has to nurture her children, she has to look over all her family at the same time her job, she follows all nonsense things today also for the sake of her family - A family which do not even think about her. How sarcastic!

The creativity and ability of women is always questioned rather underestimated. They are always treated secondarily. The responsibilities carried out by them are always taken as granted.

In Murthy's 'Dollar Bahu' we can clearly observe how a greedy Gauramma makes comparison in between her two daughter-in-law Jamuna and Vinuta on the basis of 'Money' and 'Belongings'. So it is obvious that 'Dollar' (Jamuna) gets the love and trust by the higher authority (Gauramma) and devotion, care and selfless love (Vinuta) is underestimated. It is the typical orthodox mentality of Indians, especially Indian mother-in-laws. Gauramma, who live in Bangalore with Shamanna dreams of America where one of her son, Chandru is settled. And even finds a bride for him who is only daughter of rich parents. This is the point where she forgets the sacrifices done by her daughter-in-law, Vinuta. Now, disrespecting dollar takes the place of devoted rupees. The only person in the house, Vinuta, is taken as granted always. Finally she knows the difference and returns as per said, 'Old is gold'. The greedy pride is placed by regret.

In Mahashweta, Anupama, the protagonist marries Anand in fairytale way. Both lead happily married life. The tension is build up when a white patch is developed on Anupama's arm and foot. This tension is confirmed with the name 'Leukoderma' (Vitiligo). Then the happening is what happens in such condition in stereotype society. Anupama, the lady who was praised always before this incidence, is abandoned by husband and in laws. She returns to natal home in village. There we see the society paralyzed with stigma, barb and ostracism. It is followed by a deep psychological trauma. It leads to Anupama's suicidal thinking. But then owes to rebuild her life. This is the phase where we see 'woman as rebel'. She manages to live her life on her terms at the end. The whole story shows vicious psychology, oppression by customs, mentality stuck to stigma and barb, domination by society and orthodox system. The story, on the other hand, also shows the precious quality and development, individualism, women empowerment and quest for identity.

Sudha Murthy's portrayals are realistic. They are not larger than life or difficult to believe rather they are from us. Though being one of the developing countries, India is stuck to social dogmas. The orthodox system present here is never-ending. As being a patriarchal society, male domination is not new in India. These stereotypes leave a deep psychological trauma generating Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal effect). Women, for this society is not more than a sex object or slave. They always force women to act according to them. They do not think women as an individual rather expect them to forget their existence for the sake of their dominion. Murthy, by little incidences of devotion shows the oppression. Though this devotion is worthy, it does not have any effect on this selfish society.

The sarcastic part of this oppression is that another woman is responsible for this oppression, under the influence of patriarchy and being the caretaker of this system. Gauramma in 'Dollar Bahu' is the best example of this. Anupama is again the victim of this mentality. How a woman, who may have gone through the same condition, can do such injustice? But this is the bitter truth.

Women here do not enjoy their marital life, they cannot have their decision. Marriage is always a commitment for women. She has to change her lifestyle, she has to carry out all her responsibilities, she has to obey the family, she has to be like 'a bird in a cage', she has to forget her career for the sake of household chores, she has to just think about her children and what not.

But there is an end to all such things. Women empowerment is the last phase which is seen in these books. Gauramma's regret gives the value to Vinuta in 'Dollar Bahu' finally and Anupama's independence and decision-making quality frees her from social taboos.

Conclusion

'Dollar Bahu' and 'Mahashweta' are not just the stories but mirror of Indian society, the society which is paralyzed with dogmas and barbs. The orthodox system following male domination is questionable. But the journey from oppression, dominion and depression towards freedom, empowerment and decision-making is presented in well manner. Vinuta and Anupama are not just the characters but they are the representatives of our society which always tries to restrict the so called 'Second Sex'. The reality is a bitter truth and cannot be neglected. Though Murthy tries to develop the sense of empowerment and makes free the characters from this dilemma and restrictions. It is a worth depiction of society and end is thought-provoking and path-breaking.

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