

## Empowering Assertiveness In Sudha Murty's Mahashweta

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### Abstract:

Human psychology is a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in various ways, including identity, self-acceptance, and societal norms. The novel Mahashweta by Sudha Murty presents a comprehensive exploration of several psychological aspects that are relevant and prevalent in contemporary society. The novel provides a nuanced depiction of diverse themes, including the complexity of identity, the process of self-discovery, and the implications of societal pressures. This is a powerful novel that challenges the stereotypes of women in society. The protagonist, Anupama, is a strong-willed woman who refuses to be defined by her husband or societal expectations. Through education, she gains the confidence to pursue her own dreams and ambitions. Her journey is a testament to the resilience and strength of women in the face of adversity. This novel demonstrates that women are no longer passive objects of male dominance but rather independent thinkers in today's society. The primary challenge that women face is that they tend to be more concerned about their husbands, despite the fact that their husbands do not care about their wives and often mistreat them at home. At this point, women begin to rebel against their husbands and forge their own identities apart from them. Her journey towards self-acceptance and understanding her skin condition represents a fundamental aspect of the narrative. This paper analyses how the author uses the journey of the protagonist to illustrate the psychological impact of societal norms on individual identities.

Key Words: self, identity, women empowerment, vitiligo, resilience, stereotype.

## Introduction

Sudha Murty and her philanthropic works have left an indelible mark on Indian society. Her passion for education and healthcare has made a tangible impact on countless lives, and her dedication to giving back has set an example for others to follow. As a member of the Gates Foundation, public healthcare has always been a top priority for her. She has initiated several programmes in India that have had a significant impact on the lives of many people. Her passion for helping society stems from her belief that education and access to technology are fundamental human rights.

She has worked tirelessly to provide computer facilities in every school in Karnataka, ensuring that students have access to the latest technology and can develop their skills. Her dedication to improving public health care has also led her to launch several programmes aimed at providing healthcare services to underprivileged communities. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed, and she has received numerous awards for her contributions to society. Through her work, she has shown that one person can make a significant difference in the world and inspire others to do the same.

The author deserves much of the praise for her role in establishing "The Murty Classical Library of India" at Harvard University, which has greatly contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about Indian culture across the country. Her work, *The Dollar Bahu* is her well-known novel, and it has been met with universal acclaim from readers. The novel *Mahashweta* is what brought her name and fame in the field of feminist writing. Her writings have opened up new perspectives and discussions on various issues related to women and society.

When Ms. Murty first met JRD Tata, who helped her get involved in community service, her life underwent a significant transformation. Tata constantly advised her to give back to the community because she would receive so much love and care in exchange for the money. The same idea, which she applies throughout her life, ultimately leads to her becoming an outstanding social worker.

Sudha Murty, a writer, is the best soul in the literary world because of her generosity. *Mahashweta* is one of the best novel that can be used to demonstrate to society that

women are the greatest warriors in the world and should develop their own identities. Society believes that men can control women; however, this novel effectively disproves this notion. The main character defies the expectations of society and forges an independent existence for herself. Wife is the one who carves out her own place in the world through her own labour; husband never provides her with an identity of her own.

This novel tells the story of a woman who is broken but still manages to break the psyche of society and create her own place and identity in the world. Despite her husband's lack of support, she perseveres through hard work and determination to carve out a space for herself. Her journey is a testament to the resilience of women in the face of adversity.

The novel highlights the importance of self-discovery and self-acceptance, as well as the power of community support. Through her struggles, the protagonist inspires readers to embrace their own uniqueness and stand up for their rights. This novel is a celebration of women's strength and courage, reminding the readers that they are capable of achieving anything if they set their minds to it.

The oppressive and limiting beliefs of male-dominated societies frequently plague the lives of many women. However, there are a select few who refuse to succumb to such thinking and instead strive to change the status quo. One such woman is Anupama, the protagonist who embodies the ideals of female empowerment and individuality. Through her unwavering determination, she challenges the notion of both male and female dominance in society and creates her own unique identity.

Anupama's journey is a testament to the power of perseverance and self-belief. She refuses to succumb to the patriarchal norms that have been imposed on her and instead chooses to pave her own path. The protagonist's story is a reminder that change is possible, and that it begins with individual action. In this novel author presents how women overcome their inner complexities when they are isolated. The author says when Anupama was down:

The sun had risen higher; there were numerous wild flowers getting

ready to blossom; birds were flying out from their nests in search of

food. Life had begun to have new meaning for her. Whatever the

circumstances she found herself in, she would meet the challenge head-on,

and win. She was now ready to face the world, determined to stand on her

own feet and build a new life for herself. She prayed to the goddess, Give me

the courage to live no matter what happens! (79)

She feels new energy in her. By challenging the status quo, she creates a ripple effect that inspires others to do the same. Anupama's legacy will continue to inspire generations of women to come, reminding them that they too have the power to create their own unique identity and make a difference in the world.

It is a miserable reality that many men view women as objects to be admired and discarded when they no longer meet their standards of beauty. This mindset perpetuates harmful societal norms that prioritise physical appearance over inner qualities such as intelligence, kindness, and compassion. It is important for individuals to recognise the damaging effects of this way of thinking and work towards changing it.

Women should not be made to feel inferior or unworthy because of changes in their physical appearance. It is shown when Anupama asked Vasant to define beauty, he says: "One's beauty is seen in one's nature. A good human being who is compassionate to others, who tries to understand the other person's difficulties and reach out to them in their hour of need has real beauty. Such people should always be cherished and honoured" (132). This proves that true love and respect should transcend superficial beauty standards and be based on mutual understanding, support, and appreciation for each other's unique qualities. Only then can we create a society that values all individuals for who they are rather than what they look like.

This novel focuses the majority of its attention on the problem of a woman who suffers from a skin disease that causes a change in the colour of her skin. The change in her skin's colour prompted her to seek treatment from dermatologists, which in turn caused her life, relationships, and sense of well-being to crumble and made her feel isolated and alone in the world. When it is confirmed she is affected with leukoderma the disillusionment of Anupama is stated thus: "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 could go home and sleep after finishing the day's work. But where could she go? To her father's house? That was impossible" (56). She could not find love from anyone of her family members. Even the most trustworthy person in her life, her husband, who is also a physician, is unwilling to assist her in this situation.

This has caused a great deal of stress and anxiety for the woman, as she feels like there is no one she can turn to support for her. Despite this, she remains determined to find a solution to her skin condition. She has started researching alternative treatments and has found some promising options that she plans to explore further. While the road ahead may be difficult, the woman is determined to take control of her health and well-being and find a way to overcome this challenge.

She decides to make her own fortune because the trauma in her life has taught her that no other person will lend a hand to her. The condition of her skin is not likely to be a problem for her throughout her life, but the fact that her husband is unwilling to accept her as she has caused her immense emotional pain and suffering. Once Dr. Rao explains Anupama "that tiny white patches like that had ruined many marriages, shattered many hearts, broken many engagements. Most patients who learnt that they had leukoderma were overwhelmed by the social implications of their affliction" (49). She never dreamt that would happen in her life. The lines from the book highlights the societal stigma attached to physical differences and how it affects the lives of individuals who are different from the norm. It also emphasises the importance of self-acceptance and self-reliance in the face of adversity.

Anupama's beauty attracts her husband, and when she starts to get patches on her body, that same beauty makes him want to leave her right away. It shows the unfortunate reality that many women face in their relationships, where their worth is tied to their physical appearance.

It is a sad truth that society often places more value on a woman's beauty than on her intelligence or character. The author's criticism of men who hold themselves superior to others is not only relevant to Anupama's situation, but also to the broader societal issues people face today. People must recognise that everyone has inherent value and worth, regardless of their physical appearance or gender.

The protagonist's journey of self-discovery and rebellion against male dominance has been a long and arduous one. She has refused to conform to societal norms that dictate that women must be submissive and subservient to men. Instead, she has carved out her own identity, one that is independent, strong-willed, and unapologetic. Despite facing numerous obstacles along the way, she has remained steadfast in her resolve to live life on her own terms. And while her husband may now be willing to accept her for who she is, she knows that she is not simply a "new woman."

When Anand apologizes and requests Anupama to reunion with her husband, she refuses to comply with. She says: "Husband, children, affection, love...they are all irrelevant to me now. It is too late for us. I am no longer the naïve Anupama whose world revolved around you. I know what my goals are and where I am heading, and I don't need anyone's help to reach my destination. I am not dependent on anyone for emotional or financial or support and that has given me enormous strength. I thank God for having been so fortunate" (148).

She is a person with her own thoughts, feelings, and desires, and she will not be defined by anyone else's expectations or perceptions of her. In the end, climax of the novel serves as a potent reminder of the significance of standing up for oneself and refusing to submit to oppression or silence by those who seek to rule over others. She is one of the most beautiful girls in the city, and the author uses the first part of the novel to describe the qualities that make her so special.

She has devoted her life for helping others, and she uses the money she earns from the theatre to fund a charitable trust. Her dedication to social work is not just a hobby; it is a way of life. She spends most of her time and energy working for the betterment of others, always putting their needs over her own. Her donation to the charitable trust has become a beacon of hope for those in need, and her tireless efforts have touched countless lives. It is known from the fact that Vasant acknowledges her benevolent nature. He says: "The way you looked after Satya, the love you show your students, and your deep commitment as an artiste...No one else could be like you" (137). This pictures Anupama's kindness to others.

Anupama challenges the conventional wisdom of all women by establishing her own career and refusing to adhere to the long-standing custom of serving husbands. This novel is the most powerful source of motivation and inspiration for women in real life. Women should choose to live their lives with the bravery that Anupama exemplifies rather than allowing life to break them down. The reader can see that each sentence Anupama represents a glimmer of hope in the life of a woman who suffers at the hands of a society where men predominate. When Anand tries to console Anupama, she tells her husband, "I will not be your servant. I will pursue my own career and live my life on my own terms" (95). This stance of the protagonist highlights her determination to break free from societal expectations placed upon women and to forge her own path.

In the novel, the protagonist faces double marginalization because, first, she is a woman, and second, she has vitiligo, which means that she was already depressed as a woman at home, and now she is doubly depressed because of her vitiligo. As an untouchable in the family, she ends up being the most despised woman in the house. In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), the renowned critic Wollstonecraft discusses the equality of men and women. "This is the very point I aim at, I do not wish them (women) to have power over men; but over themselves" (53). This idea illustrates that women dominates women rather than men as Anupama's in law dominates her. In addition to highlighting the new woman who does not bother to leave her husband when he is a bad guy, the author also tries to educate society about the rights

of women. The new society does not want to make marriage into a game of chance, but it does want to ensure that every woman is married to the best possible man who will look after her.

The finding highlights the significance of education in empowering women like Anupama. It is through education that Anupama was able to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to assert herself and challenge patriarchal norms. Education has not only given her a voice but also opened doors to various opportunities that would have otherwise been inaccessible. The success story of the protagonist underscores the importance of investing in the education of the girls, especially in societies where gender inequality is rampant. Educating girls not only benefits them but also has a ripple effect on their families, communities, and nations at large. It can lead to increased economic growth, reduced poverty rates, and improved health outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize education as a means of promoting gender equality and empowering women like Anupama to achieve their full potential.

However, the societal mindset that women are dependent on their husbands still persists in many cultures. This mindset is not only unfair but also detrimental to the progress of women and their empowerment. Women should have the freedom to pursue their passions and careers without being limited by traditional gender roles. It is crucial for society to recognize and value the contributions of women in all fields, including economics, politics, and science. Education and skill-building opportunities should be made accessible to all women so that they can become financially independent and self-sufficient. By empowering women economically, people can break the cycle of dependency on men and promote gender equality. It is time for society to shift its focus from women being dependent on their husbands to women being independent contributors to their families and communities. As Maya Angelou said in her poem *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*:

I say,  
It's in the click of my heels,  
The bend of my hair,  
the palm of my hand,  
The need for my care.



'Cause I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me. (52-60)

From the above quote it is shown that women can be women in her own way and do not need any norms to be followed or imposed on her. Here the protagonist Anupama is portrayed as one of the inspirational and exemplification character. Through her dedication to education, she has been able to soar above the limitations that society has placed on women. Her achievements have shattered the stereotype that women are inferior to men, and have given rise to a new generation of empowered women who refuse to be held back by gender norms. She has shown that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve their dreams and break free from the chains of societal expectations and reminding them that they too can fly high in a male-dominated world.

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