

Discrimination and Social Stratification: A Feminist Study of Select Works of Sudha Murthy

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Abstract

Sudha Murthy is an acclaimed Indian author, philanthropist, and social activist known for her simple yet profound storytelling. Murthy is best known for her literary contributions, which include novels, short stories, and children's books written in English and Kannada. Her writing often explores themes of social justice, gender discrimination, cultural values, and human resilience. Her style of writing makes her an extraordinary writer. Her novels, including *Mahashweta*, *Three Thousand Stitches*, and *Dollar Bahu*, reflect her deep concern for social issues and provide a subtle yet powerful critique of patriarchal norms. Through relatable characters and real-life experiences, she inspires readers to challenge societal injustices and embrace self-reliance. In this research paper we will study discrimination of women in society, types of themes and women's struggle to gain their identity in the patriarchal society. This study will explore how Murthy portrays women's resilience, economic independence, and their ability to challenge and transcend patriarchal limitations.

Keywords: Discrimination, stratification, patriarchal norms, self-reliance

Introduction:

The feminist movement grew in India in the late seventies and addressed a number of concerns in a patriarchal culture, including gender equality political rights, health, and education. The idea behind the growth of feminism in India was to liberate women from their closed spaces so that they could redefine their identity and understand their rights to claim them. Sudha Murthy is a prolific Indian author social worker and philanthropist who has made significant contribution to Indian feminist literature and society.

Sudha Murthy is a prominent writer. She was born in in Shiggaon, Karnataka.

She pursued engineering at a time when few women entered the field, breaking gender barriers early in her life. Sudha Murthy's books have had a profound impact on Indian literature and have helped to shape the way that readers think about a wide range of social issues. Her books often feature strong female characters who defy social norms and overcome significant challenges as a popular woman novelist. Since childhood they have been groomed to adjust and compromise Their traditional values are deeply rooted and breaking societal norms is impossible for them. Her woman had just brought into the family first as daughters and then as a daughter in law keeping the values intact.

Sudha Murthy's ideology is not man against women her intention is to make women realize their true selves and be conscious of her strengths and potential in her work she has portrayed the transition of women from being submissive to assertive. Sudha Murthy's books have helped to give voice to the marginalized and oppressed in Indian society and have challenged readers to think deeply about the social issues that affect their lives. She is concerned with the plight and predicament of women in her works. She has written about customs traditions and beliefs that prevail in society her female protagonists belong to middle class society Gender stratification is the social ranking of men and women based on gender, which results in unequal power, wealth, and prestige. It's also known as gender inequality. Sudha Murthy uses this term very effectively in her literary works. While her works span various themes such as love, relationships, and morality, they are also a profound reflection of the societal and gender-based struggles women face. Murthy's novels are not overtly feminist in their approach but provide a subtle critique of the gender norms that bind women to predetermined roles.

In *Mahashweta, Three Thousand Stitches, and Dollar Bahu*, Murthy challenges traditional gender roles and presents characters that question societal expectations, highlighting their journeys toward self-discovery and empowerment. This paper aims to analyze these three novels through the lens of feminist theory, shedding light on the feminist themes embedded in Murthy's storytelling. Sudha Murthy's novels *Mahashweta, Three Thousand Stitches*, and *Dollar Bahu* explore

crucial aspects of gender dynamics, social expectations, and the empowerment of women. Through distinct narratives, these works delve into the experiences of women in a patriarchal society, addressing issues of identity, self-worth, and the pursuit of individual agency. This paper analyzes these novels from a feminist perspective, focusing on the representation of female characters and their struggles with societal norms.

Objectives:

The objectives of the present research can be stated as below: -

- 1) To analyze the representation of women in *Mahashweta, Three Thousand Stitches*, and *Dollar Bahu*.
- 2) To identify feminist themes in Sudha Murthy's selected works.
- 3) To make an analysis of author's style of depicting the plight of women.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on feminist literary analysis to examines Sudha Murthy's literary works. The study was of analytical in nature. Secondary data was collected from various resources like journals articles websites online and offline publications. This data was analyzed by qualitative method to provide in depth description.

1. *Mahashweta* – The Struggle for Identity and Empowerment:

In *Mahashweta*, the protagonist, Anupama, is a woman who faces societal rejection due to her skin condition, leukoderma. Her struggle for acceptance,

both within her marriage and in society, becomes a metaphor for how women are often judged based on their physical appearance rather than their intrinsic worth. Anupama's journey of self-realization and the eventual reclaiming of her identity reflect key feminist ideals, particularly the fight against societal beauty standards that value women's appearances over their inner qualities. Anupama's rejection by her husband, who marries another woman because of her condition, highlights the patriarchal mindset that prioritizes a woman's physical attributes over her personal agency. However, Anupama's decision to pursue a career in literature, despite societal stigma, signifies her refusal to conform to these oppressive norms. She chooses financial independence and emotional autonomy over societal validation, underscoring the feminist argument that women's worth should not be determined by their appearance or marital status.

2. *Three Thousand Stitches* – Empowerment Through Social Work and Self-Realization:

Three Thousand Stitches is a collection of real-life anecdotes and personal experiences shared by Sudha Murthy, offering a glimpse into her philanthropic work and the women she has encountered in her journey. Through these stories, Murthy provides a feminist perspective on the struggles faced by women in rural and urban India, addressing issues such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of education. One of the most prominent stories in the collection is that of the women who work in the slums of Bangalore, collecting rags and scraps to support their families. Murthy portrays these women as resilient and

hardworking, showcasing their determination to survive in a patriarchal society that offers little support for their independence. The women in these stories are depicted as active agents of change, not merely passive victims of their circumstances, highlighting the feminist emphasis on women's agency.

Murthy's recounting of her efforts to establish educational programs and vocational training for these women reflects the feminist principle of economic independence as a tool for empowerment. By providing women with the skills and opportunities to support themselves, Murthy contributes to the feminist agenda of challenging traditional gender roles and promoting female autonomy.

3. *Dollar Bahu* – Challenging Materialism and Redefining Self-Worth:

In *Dollar Bahu*, Sudha Murthy critiques the materialistic culture in Indian society, where women are often valued based on their familial roles and their ability to bring wealth into the household. The story contrasts two women, Vinuta and Gauramma, who represent different approaches to life. Vinuta, who is educated and self-reliant, values her relationship with her husband based on mutual respect and love, while Gauramma, the "Dollar Bahu," believes that wealth and social status are the ultimate measures of a woman's success.

Through these characters, Murthy critiques the societal pressure on women to conform to the traditional roles of being good wives and mothers, while also highlighting the emptiness of materialism. Vinuta's refusal to tolerate disrespect and her decision to stand up for her rights within

her marriage reflect feminist ideals of self-respect and autonomy. By choosing personal happiness and integrity over the financial benefits her marriage might offer, Vinuta challenges the patriarchal assumption that a woman's worth is tied to her role in the household.

The novel also discusses how women's relationships with their husbands often depend on financial status and societal expectations. Gauramma's character, who seeks to secure a prosperous marriage, serves as a critique of the commodification of women's roles in society. Through this, Murthy calls for a shift in how women are valued—focusing on intellectual, emotional, and personal growth instead of materialistic measures.

This research explores several feminist themes in Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta*, *Three Thousand Stitches*, and *Dollar Bahu*. The key themes analyzed in the study include:

- **Gender Discrimination and Patriarchy:**

The novels highlight the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that limit women's choices, whether in marriage, family, or career. Women are often judged based on their physical appearance (*Mahashweta*), financial status (*Dollar Bahu*), or societal roles (*Three Thousand Stitches*).

- **Women's Resilience and Empowerment:**

The protagonists in Murthy's works demonstrate strength in the face of adversity, whether overcoming social stigma (*Mahashweta*), breaking free from

oppressive traditions (*Dollar Bahu*), or working for women's upliftment (*Three Thousand Stitches*). The stories emphasize self-reliance, education, and personal growth as tools for empowerment.

- **Social Stigma and Beauty Standards:**

Mahashweta focuses on the stigma associated with leukoderma, showing how women are judged by their appearance rather than their abilities. The novel critiques societal obsession with physical beauty and its impact on a woman's worth and marriage prospects.

- **Education and Economic Independence:**

Education emerges as a powerful means of liberation in *Three Thousand Stitches*, where women escape exploitation through learning and skill development. In *Dollar Bahu*, financial independence gives women the power to challenge traditional family expectations and gender roles.

- **Marriage and Gender Expectations:**

Marriage is depicted as both a source of security and oppression, depending on societal attitudes and financial dependency (*Mahashweta* and *Dollar Bahu*). Murthy questions the idea of a "perfect wife" and challenges the notion that a woman's value is tied to her marital status.

- **Materialism and Family Dynamics:**

Dollar Bahu critiques how wealth influences family relationships, showing the contrasting lives of women in India and abroad. The novel raises questions about

whether financial success alone guarantees happiness and respect for women.

- **Social Reforms and Women's Collective Strength:**

Three Thousand Stitches portrays real-life stories of women breaking free from oppressive traditions through collective action. The book highlights the power of mentorship, activism, and community support in empowering women.

- **Breaking Stereotypes and Redefining Success:**

All three novels encourage women to redefine success on their own terms, rather than conforming to societal expectations. Murthy's heroines prove that self-worth comes from inner strength, knowledge, and perseverance, rather than societal approval.

Conclusion:

Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta*, *Three Thousand Stitches*, and *Dollar Bahu* offer a feminist critique of the gender norms and expectations that women face in Indian

society. Each of these works presents female protagonists who challenge conventional roles, whether it is Anupama's fight against societal beauty standards, the women's quest for economic independence in *Three Thousand Stitches*, or Vinuta's rejection of materialism in *Dollar Bahu*. Through these narratives, Murthy emphasizes the importance of women's education, self-worth, and financial independence as crucial tools for empowerment.

While Murthy's approach is not overtly feminist in the traditional sense, her works subtly question patriarchal values and advocate for women's autonomy. By portraying strong, independent female characters who navigate and defy societal expectations, Murthy contributes significantly to feminist discourse in contemporary Indian literature. Her works inspire women to break free from restrictive gender norms, reaffirming that empowerment lies in personal agency, self-realization, and the pursuit of individual dreams.

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