

Transformation in the Character of Anupama in Mahashweta

Sudha Murty

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Abstract: Sudha Murty is a woman of many dimensions. She represents hope in a country denuded of vision and commitment to real causes. She expresses herself with simplicity, humor, involvement and compassion. Her inspirational words are "I'm still Sudha. I play different roles like all women, that doesn't mean we don't have our own identity. Women have that extra quality of adaptability and learn to fit into different shoes. We have to extract our freedom by making the right choices in our lives, dedicated by us and not by the world."

The select novel **Mahashweta** is one of the best works of Sudha Murty. This novel is an exploration of new dimensions of Indian literature. Sudha Murty relates the legendary moment to the present moment in the novel. The depth and the potentiality of the protagonist is heightened through the mention of the Indian classics. It generates a light of the reality and parades the supremacy of an Indian female. In this novel **Mahashweta** the protagonist, Anupama is depicted to be a product of rapid transformation and intense churning taking place in the society due to various struggles for women's autonomy and empowerment. It is an image of an emerging and struggling woman with no defined path and woman is portrayed the usual share of pain, anguish, sorrow, conflicts and the humility to accept failures. It focuses on feminine issues in contemporary Indian Society. However a woman in the role of wife is handicapped physically, psychologically and culturally to empower herself without any spousal help and positive action. The present paper is to focus on Sudha Murty's **Mahashweta** to consider how the wellbeing can be achieved in unequal Indian Society and extended to global wellbeing.

Sudha Murty brings to us a story of a woman Anupama who got married and later on discovering she has leukoderma. The intelligent and well-based Dr. Anand first met the charming Anupama, time stood still. He was moved beyond words by her simplicity and striking beauty. Anand was tall, fair and good looking. God has

been fairly kind with looks as well as talent to Anupama. She was a superb actress, a classical singer and an excellent student all rolled into one. The only hitch is, that she hailed from a very poor family which included her father, a harsh step mother and two step sisters. Since Anand was madly in love with her, his mother Radhaka had to agree to the wedding though half-heartedly. For Anupama, it was a dream comes true. But, Anu's happiness was short-lived and all is shattered when she discovers that she has leukoderma which is still treated in India as a curse.

The superior manner and courage in the character of the protagonist is subsided once she marries to Dr. Anand and she merely lives for the love of her husband without considering anything about her career. The educated girl like Anupama who wants to support her father after getting her job and who actively participates in programmes to help the poor and needy, merely resigns to a humble daughter-in-law of an affluent family with a domineering mother-in-law and an arrogant sister-in-law with an only intention to impress her in-laws family. Thus the family which has to provide security and status to a girl after marriage is in very much contrast to the stark painful misfortunes that Anupama experiences in the novel. Sudha Murty draws the attention of the readers towards the suffering of the patient with a cosmetic disease named leukoderma while presenting her as a human being who torments herself to maintain her dignity. Absence of her husband, the domineering and superstitious mother-in-law and the white patches on her leg ruin her life after marriage. Anupama's character is shown as a typical of all victims of leukoderma.

Even though leukoderma is curable it is considered as curse in our society. Everyone looks down on them as a mean creature. They face negligence and indifference in every walks of life. Sometime they are often thrown out of the family by their parents, wife and husband. The story revolves around Anupama and the hardships she has to face after being abandoned by her in laws family and her own family members due to her

illness. The author portrayed that how Anupama tackled them and made the best for her out of it.

The name **Mahashweta** is taken from the female protagonist Maheshweta in Banabhatta's play **Kadambari**. While Banabhatta made it a happy ending, life doesn't always give one a 'lived happy ever after' type of ending. While the Mahashweta of Kadambari wears white to get her beloved, Pundarica, back to life, the Mahashweta of this novel turns white. The link is just in the white colour. Mahashweta is a very famous Marathi novel written by Dr. Sumati which deals with the topic of leukoderma.

Sudha Murty's **Mahashweta** is one of the appealing novels depicting the mindset of a leukoderma affected girl. A black spot on white skin is loved but not a white spot on the black skin. Anupama underwent this pain and disgrace in the society due to no slip-up of hers and struggles to rise above the situation. The entire grief was the result of the white patches on her. Even though she was educated, she had to bear a lot, socially, mentally and physically. Society around her doesn't understand this and everyone avoids her. In spite of her efforts to put her situation private, it was known to her ma-in-law. She looked as if a calamity had befallen them. It was shocking for Anupama to see them all suddenly inhuman that her in-law decided to set her journey to her parents. Her step mother also objected her staying told her;

"Once people find out that she has leukoderma, both my daughter's future will be at stake". (**Mahashweta**, p.66).

Her in-laws, her step mother and people in her village humiliate her and at last her husband also stops sending letters to her and cut the relationship. Anand does not support her and leaves her to fend for herself. Adding fuel to the fire she came to know of her husband's recent arrival to India and his return to England for the further studies. After a long fight to get back with Anand she loses all hopes. She was constantly wondering how she could reduce her father's burden. Sometime she wished mother earth would open up and swallow her, just as she had swallowed the virtuous Siva. She felt that she was like a hot iron ball resting on her father's back when she wanted to be as light as a flower. She had entertained the thought to commit suicide but some unseen power held her back. Sudha Murty depicts the brilliant decision of Anupama towards life:

"Whatever the circumstances she found herself in, she would meet the challenge and live. She was now ready to face any gossip; and she was

determined to stand on her feet and build a new life of her own. She looked back and prayed to the Goddess, give me the courage to live no matter happens and started walking briskly." (**Mahashweta**, p.86).

It reveals the drastic change in the mind of Anupama in spite of the struggles she faced in her life. These words energize and refresh and encourage any deserted, depressed or abandoned women of that sort.

Then she gathers all her courage and moves to Mumbai and makes a good career for herself. She gets her dream job of lecturer in a college and starts directing Sanskrit plays and getting awards for them. The story is a depiction of how Anupama becomes matured with circumstances and realizes her dreams without losing patience and confidence. Anupama states that occasional failures makes an individual more mature. She likens herself to a tree, which does not keep its fruits to itself and at the same time finds fulfilment in this act of selflessness.

When she knows that she has an attack of leukoderma, gets panicked and tries to get treatment secretly from a dermatologist, but it results into a futile effort. Anand's deaf ear to her plight makes her lament endlessly. But Anupama never tries to approach him or question him for his indifference towards her though she feels that marriage is a lifelong commitment. She realizes that Anand has a weakness for beauty and out of infatuation he marries Anupama to exhibit her as the index of pride. He marries Anupama just for the physical attraction but not for her inner character. After these bitter experiences she moves to Mumbai and tries to find her own life.

Man has conquered the outer world through study, experiments, job and quality life style but not the inner world. There is lot of variations shown in Anupama's character in this novel that is shown as a typical of all the victims not only of leukoderma but any kind of diseases. She was abandoned and deserted by her family members and she faced humiliation and the negligence of the society where she belongs. But in Mumbai, she emerges again into a different individual who does not consider what people talk about her. Sudha Murty quotes Anupama's transformation as;

"As for Anupama, now the days felt light as feathers" (**Mahashweta**, p.100).

One of Bana Bhatta's earliest Sanskrit novels was **Kadambari**. It's the story of Mahashweta- the extremely beautiful Gandhara princess. On a picnic with her friend Kadambari,

she meets the handsome rishi –putra, Pundarika. Here to love at first sight and that runs deep for Mahashweta. But unfortunately, Pundarika meets with an untimely death. Mahashweta's undying love for her beloved brings him back to life and they are reunited. In this book, Anupama enacted Mahashweta where Anand supposedly hooked on to her for life. But his love was skin- deep. Anupama later emerges as the real "Mahashweta"- the white one.

Meanwhile, Anupama's father Shamana is dead and Anupama sends money for the rites. The same step mother who considered her as bad omen now writes sweetly to her, only because she wants Anupama's money. Anand goes in search of Anupama from village to village but reaches a dead end. At his friend's insistence, Anand attends the play where he beholds Anupama as the director of the play. After quite an effort, he gets her contact address and meets her. She makes her decision clear that their relationship is over.

At last Sudha Murty insists on the permanent inner beauty of mankind that lies not in the outward appearance or the external beauty that is short- lived. Even the most beautiful people change so much as they grow older. Whereas the beauty of Nature is permanent. She states:

“According to me, one's beauty is seen in one's nature. External beauty is inherited and is temporary. A good human being who is compassionate to others, who tries to understand the person's difficulties and reach out to them in their hour of need has real beauty. Such people should always be cherished and honoured”. (Mahashweta, p.146).

This Indian novel Mahashweta has shown women to be subservient as that is, what is expected in traditional Indian family, where a woman may become the enemy or enemy of the new member. In this story, the protagonist raised at every bitter situation that caused so much pain only to gather her composure and live. It was very difficult to undergo the social stigma and still retain one's personality. Anupama happened to rise like a meteor and exemplify her life to the stigmatized groups. She has been portrayed as a woman who has acquired composure through the pain she has experienced and stood as a role model to the stigmatized. Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional. The inevitable pain has not led to suffering in Anupama's life but calmed her. Just as, if you are going through hell, keep going, Anupama has gone through the hell of life as a patient of vitiligo but still has managed to face every painful situation so admirably.

Mahashweta shows human being's self - exploration comes only after a severe suffering but not as a normal individual. The transformation or the progression of the character of Anupama is projected in the novel through the various stages of her life with love, marriage, social taboos, inhibitions and indifference towards the victim of disease like leukoderma, the problem of rehabilitation after abandoned by the family, extent of growth and recognition as human beings and values by the fellow human beings.

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