



**Resilience, Identity and Social Stigma in Sudha Murthy's Mahashweta**

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**Pages No: 39-42**

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**Abstract:** *English literature often shows the social realities of gender discrimination, cultural expectations and societal prejudices. Sudha Murthy's novel Mahashweta tells the story of Anupama, a woman whose life changes dramatically after she gets leukoderma. The novel explores the rooted prejudices associated with physical appearance, social status and gender in Indian society. Through Anupama's journey from admiration to rejection and finally to self-realization Murthy highlights the trauma experienced by women who are marginalized due to illness and patriarchal expectations. The narrative shows how beauty, marriage and social reputation determine a woman's in a traditional environment. However the novel also offers a message of resilience and independence as Anupama overcomes discrimination and rebuilds her life with dignity. This paper analyzes the themes of stigma, identity formation, gender discrimination and empowerment in Mahashweta. It also examines how Murthy critiques values and emphasizes self-respect and personal transformation. Ultimately the novel becomes a reflection of social reality while simultaneously presenting a message of hope and empowerment for women who struggle against oppressive societal norms.*

**Keywords:** *Sudha Murthy, Mahashweta, feminism, social stigma, identity, patriarchal society women empowerment.*

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Indian literature often reflects the struggles, hopes and transformations of individuals living within cultural systems. Sudha Murthy is a known Indian writer for her simple yet powerful narratives that highlight social issues, particularly those affecting women. Her novel Mahashweta is one of the significant works that examine the intersection of gender discrimination, social stigma and personal resilience. The novel revolves around Anupama, an beautiful young woman who enjoys admiration and respect in society. However her life takes a turn when she develops leukoderma a skin condition characterized by white patches on the body. Her marriage collapses as her husband and in-laws reject her due to the disease and the social stigma attached to it. As a result Anupama is forced to leave her home and confront the harsh realities of social rejection.

Murthy uses this narrative to explore how society often evaluates women primarily based on beauty and marital status. When these attributes are threatened women become vulnerable to humiliation, isolation and emotional suffering. The protagonist's journey however is not one of suffering but also one of transformation. Through education self-confidence and determination Anupama reconstructs her identity. Finds meaning beyond societal expectations. The novel therefore becomes more than a story about a woman's struggles; it is a critique of social norms that marginalize individuals based on superficial

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standards. It highlights the effects of discrimination and reveals the strength required to reclaim dignity and independence.

One of the themes in *Mahashweta* is the concept of social stigma associated with physical appearance. In traditional societies beauty plays a crucial role in determining a woman's value and social acceptance. Murthy exposes this attitude through Anupama's experiences. At the beginning of the novel Anupama is admired for her beauty and talent. She is a college student and a gifted theatre performer who enjoys admiration from her peers. Her marriage to Anand further elevates her status. However this admiration proves to be fragile and conditional. When the white patches of leukoderma appear on her skin the same society that once celebrated her beauty begins to reject her.

The reaction of Anand and his family demonstrates how social attitudes toward illness and physical difference can become deeply discriminatory. Of supporting Anupama her husband abandons her and distances himself emotionally. The disease becomes a symbol of shame and impurity within the family structure. Another significant aspect of the novel is its critique of structures. In Indian society marriage is often considered the most important achievement for women. Once married women are expected to adapt to their husband's family and accept their authority.

In *Mahashweta* this patriarchal expectation becomes evident in the behaviour of Anand and his relatives. Although Anupama is innocent and blameless she is treated as a burden once her illness becomes visible. Of questioning the injustice of the situation the family prioritizes social reputation and convenience. The absence of support from her husband illustrates the unequal power dynamics within the marriage. Anand's decision to abandon Anupama demonstrates how patriarchal authority allows men to escape responsibility without facing consequences. Women on the hand are expected to endure suffering silently.

The theme of identity formation plays a role in the novel. At the beginning of the story Anupama's identity is largely defined by factors such as beauty, marriage and social approval. However these factors collapse when she is rejected by her husband and society. This crisis forces Anupama to question her sense of self. She realizes that her value cannot depend entirely on the opinions of others. The journey toward self-realization begins when she decides to leave her past and move to Bombay in search of independence. In Bombay Anupama experiences an environment where she can redefine herself. She pursues education develops skills and gradually rebuilds her confidence.

Economic independence is another theme in the novel. Murthy emphasizes that financial autonomy plays a role in empowering women and enabling them to escape oppressive situations. After leaving her husband's home Anupama realizes that she must rely on her abilities to survive. She begins working and gradually establishes a life. This experience transforms her perspective on independence and self-respect. Resilience is perhaps the powerful theme in *Mahashweta*. Despite experiencing betrayal, humiliation and loneliness Anupama refuses to surrender to despair. Her courage and determination allow her to transform suffering into strength.

One of the striking elements, in Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta* is the portrayal of psychological trauma experienced by the protagonist. While the physical condition of leukoderma affects Anupama's body, the emotional consequences of the disease prove to be more devastating. Murthy carefully depicts the turmoil that Anupama undergoes when she realizes that her husband and society begin to view her differently. The psychological trauma begins with the discovery of the disease. At first Anupama hopes that the white patches on her skin are temporary and harmless. As the condition becomes more visible, fear and anxiety start to dominate her thoughts. The uncertainty about her future and the possibility of losing her

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husband create an emotional burden. Murthy uses this stage of the narrative to show how illness can affect a persons well-being especially when social stigma is attached to the condition.

The reaction of Anupamas husband further intensifies this suffering. Anands silence and distance reflect the inability of relationships to provide emotional support during times of crisis. Of standing beside his wife Anand gradually withdraws from the relationship allowing societal expectations and family pressure to influence his decisions. This abandonment creates a sense of betrayal and loneliness for Anupama. Murthys depiction of emotional isolation highlights the vulnerability of women within social structures. Once a woman loses her perceived value she often becomes invisible or unwanted. Anupamas isolation symbolizes the experiences of many individuals who suffer from diseases that society does not fully understand. Through this portrayal the novel encourages readers to think about the importance of empathy and compassion in relationships. Despite the devastation she experiences Anupama gradually learns to confront her trauma. Her journey toward healing begins when she realizes that her self-worth cannot be defined by the judgments of others. This realization becomes the foundation of her recovery and personal transformation.

Education plays a role in the empowerment of the protagonist in Mahashweta. Throughout the novel Murthy emphasizes the importance of knowledge and intellectual development as tools for overcoming limitations. For Anupama education becomes a means of reclaiming control over her life after she is abandoned by her husband. When Anupama moves to Bombay she finds herself in an environment where she must depend entirely on her own abilities. This stage of the narrative marks the beginning of her transformation from a wife to an independent individual. By pursuing education and professional opportunities she gradually builds an identity based on her talents rather than her physical appearance.

Murthys emphasis on education reflects the social message of the novel. In traditional societies women are often discouraged from pursuing higher education or professional careers because their primary role is believed to be within the household. However Mahashweta challenges this notion by showing how education enables women to achieve independence and personal dignity. Anupamas determination to continue learning and working demonstrates her resilience and courage. Of surrendering to despair she chooses to focus on self-improvement and intellectual growth. This decision allows her to develop confidence and independence which ultimately help her rebuild her life. The novel therefore presents education not as a practical necessity but also as a symbol of freedom. Through knowledge and self-awareness individuals gain the ability to question norms and resist oppressive structures. Anupamas transformation shows how education can empower women to overcome discrimination and create lives for themselves.

Another dimension of Mahashweta is its critique of social values and cultural attitudes. Murthy uses the story of Anupama to expose the nature of societal judgments that prioritize appearance and reputation over compassion and humanity. The behavior of Anupamas in-laws demonstrates how social prestige often takes precedence over responsibility. Of offering support and understanding they view Anupamas illness as a threat to their family's reputation. Their actions reflect a society that's more concerned with public image than with the well-being of individuals.

Murthy also highlights the role of ignorance and misinformation in perpetuating discrimination. Many people believe that diseases like leukoderma are contagious or hereditary leading to fear and social exclusion. By addressing this issue the novel encourages readers to question misconceptions and adopt a more scientific and humane perspective. At the time Murthy presents characters who represent compassion and kindness. These individuals offer Anupama support during moments and help restore her faith in humanity. Their presence in

the narrative suggests that while society may contain prejudice and injustice it also has the capacity for empathy and change.

Through this portrayal Murthy emphasizes the importance of human values such as kindness, understanding and respect. The novel ultimately advocates for a society in which individuals are judged by their character than their physical appearance or social status. The conclusion of Mahashweta conveys a message of hope and transformation. Anupama's journey from suffering to empowerment shows that adversity does not have to define a person's destiny. Instead challenges can become opportunities for growth and self-discovery. By the end of the novel Anupama emerges as an independent woman who has learned to value herself beyond societal expectations. Her transformation reflects the theme of resilience that runs throughout the narrative. She no longer seeks validation from those who once rejected her but instead focuses on building an fulfilling life.

Murthy's portrayal of this transformation serves as an inspiration for readers women who face discrimination or social pressure. The novel encourages individuals to believe in their strength and to pursue independence and self-respect. Mahashweta is an exploration of social prejudice, gender discrimination and personal transformation. Through the experiences of Anupama Sudha Murthy exposes the realities faced by women who are judged according to superficial standards of beauty and social reputation.

The novel critiques attitudes that prioritize appearance and marital status over individuality and character. At the time it emphasizes the importance of resilience, education and economic independence in overcoming social injustice. Anupama's journey from rejection to self-realization symbolizes the possibility of empowerment in the most difficult circumstances. Her transformation shows that true strength lies in self-respect and determination than external approval. In this way Mahashweta remains a contribution to contemporary Indian literature. It encourages readers to challenge attitudes and recognize the inherent dignity of every individual. By presenting a narrative of courage and transformation Murthy inspires hope for a compassionate and equitable society.

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