

Thematic Concern of Sudha Murthy's novel *the mother i never Knew*

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Abstract: Sudha Murthy writes on the background of Indian English Literature. It has already flourished and enriched by many Indian English Novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth prawar Jahabvala, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and Shobhaa De. . Their work is thought provoking and emphasizes the significance of ongoing from almost all strata of the societal group. Sudha Murthy writes about the people of her surrounding and blends them into stories. She harbours forbearance of human behaviour; her excellent manner of presentation about the social challenges makes the world to amend it from time to time. Her stories deal with common people's lives and she is famous for her views on donations and realisation but this novel portrays her loyalty as a woman and as a mother and also as a writer. The sociological and suspense novel *the mother i never knew* is remarkable for its structural innovations; it touches the humanistic approach, the interpersonal relationships of the Characters, and the inner hollowness of being a mother. The present paper is a visionary and thoughtful exploration of the theme of the novel and its symbolism, the complexity of the two stories, the theme of injustice done to women; their tragedies are the most prominent feature s of the novel. The book comprises two novellas that explore quests by two men-each searching for a mother they never knew they had. Deception and injustice to the women is the main central theme of the novel.

Keywords: Human Behaviour, ambience, poverty, rejected, illegitimate, disclosed, adoption, toughened, patriarchal, unjustified, sociological and aggravated.

I. Introduction

There is rich and superior contribution of women novelists in Indian English Literature. Women Novelists enthusiastically had focussed on different facets of life and have handled the disparate issues with utmost care of today's generation. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth prawar Jahabvala, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Sudha Murthy are remarkable writers in today's literary world. These writers put forth the reality of the society and explained the rights, arrogation, accountability and various experiences of existence and also the extortion by the patriarchal hegemony. Their work is thought provoking and emphasizes the significance of ongoing from almost all strata of the societal group. Sudha Murthy writes about the people of her surrounding and blends them into stories. Murthy a prolific writer and has written many best sellers, dealing with day today life and its associated struggles. She harbours forbearance of human behaviour in her work and her excellent manner of presentation about the social challenges makes the world to amend it from time to time. Her stories deal with common people's lives and exposes views on donations and realisation but this novel portrays her loyalty as a woman, a mother and also as a writer. It's a conflict with the characters inner self and outer existence. It combats speculations, pertaining the Indianness of provincial Literature. The attempt to constitute one's individuality and to assert one's similarity has contributed the women to compensate a reckless confrontation corroborating the prevailing socialistic agenda of the day.

She brings the full ambience in front of our eyes, the social mistakes done by the society, their impure thoughts and considerations. She has fully exposed the behaviours and outrage over the weak gender women by the strong people. She has taken utmost care and had shown her exquisiteness in crafting her novel like the great writers Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The tone of the writer is very sombre and informal. The sociological novel *the mother i never knew* is remarkable for its structural innovations; it touches the humanistic approach, the interpersonal relationships of the Characters, and the inner hollowness of being a mother. The novelist has written the novellas from the male point of view externally, but the undercurrent is about the affliction and injustice done to the motherhood to prove a fight against the established forms of patriarchy. The present paper sums the injustice done to the two innocent mothers Bhaggava and Nirmala and it will also accord the females to comprehend their rights and will definitely alter the mind of community.

II. Discussion:

Sudha Murthy's objective work *the mother i never knew* comprises two novellas and explores quest by two men –each searching for a mother they never knew they had. The novel runs backward and forward extravagantly. It also arouses expectations about the future course of events. The reciprocal relationship of indecisiveness and amazement is a principal source of the charismatic power and liveliness of an ongoing plot.

It's more prudent in its gist and manner. In the first novella injustice is done to Bhagiratti (Bhaggava) by her own husband and mother-in-law. She became a destitute by her own people who also made her to live as a widow and his son as an orphan. Her step-son Venkatesh a bank manager didn't know about his another mother and start to search his father's past. Sudha Murthy dives deep into the hearts of the people and dig out their behaviours, faults and agonies in these two stories.

Murthy emphasizes the pleasant ambience in front of the readers, she focuses on the type of food eaten by the Karnataka people, the various places of Karnataka and how people address to one another like amma, avva and anna. Rural life is juxtaposed in the novel. The novelist aroused curiosity in Venkatesh to meet his step-brother Shankar and to know about him. He brings the oasis in the desert of life of Bhaggava. Murthy makes her character to actively participate in celebrations such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra, Kannada Rajyotsava and Ugadi by giving full enjoyment to her characters and brings out the importance of Indian culture and festivals in the novel. The novelist also makes us familiar with the thread ceremony at Shiggoan and the food ate by Venkatesh on the Banana leaf. The various types of food such as Chakkali, Avalakki and Besan laddu is being described to bring the taste to the mouth of the readers. Bakula flowers and Elaichi bananas in Yellapura and the Marikamba Temple in Sirsi are also described to bring the beauty to the Karnataka state. It represents an aspect of novelist experience of her place. The names of Indian rivers are also exposed in the novel. Sudha Murthy once interacted with the audience at Bangalore at Page Turners recently opened bookstore on MG road mentioned:

"Be honest, original and tell the truth, Real-life experience, true to the core, makes interesting reading, be it non-fiction or even while writing a novel."¹(dna,30 Aug 2010).

She is an honest author and is always true to the subject at hand. Respect for mother is also realistically expressed by Murthy by allowing Venkatesh to visit her step mother Bhaggava with some fruits. Murthy foregrounds Bhaggava as a strong, old Brahmin widow, thin, with a torn white sari with a clean shaven head and seemed burdened with poverty. Bhaggava though an orphan child was devoid of her parental, social, and economical love and suffered a tough life. She was beautiful in her youth with fair colour and long black hairs and studied till fourth grade. While staying with her maternal uncle Gopal in Shurpali, she was married to her neighbour's distant relative Setu who was a cook in mutt in Matunga and was studying in Mumbai. Setu (Venkatesh's father) was young, intelligent and very handsome. After marriage Setu's mother asked him to stay in Mumbai for the exams. After some days Bhaggava became pregnant, Bhaggava's mother-in-law came to perform seemanthan and was miswhispered that Bhaggava was in contact with Hanuma(Gopal Uncle's son) and the child which she bear is not of her son Setu. She interfered in the marital life of his son by giving a wrong message and orders him to abandon her on the claim of infidelity. Setu her husband deserted her, and later she was told that her husband died in a train accident. The humanist Shobhaa De also comments on hypocrisy in relationships:

"Fake, insincere or disingenuous is not the best way to be in any relationship, least of all in this, the most intimate one. Harmless hypocrisy is okay. Manipulative hypocrisy is not."²(Human reltns in S.De's novels, 197.).

How sincere and correct may be a woman, but she is always manipulated and tortured by the patriarchy. It is very difficult for a woman to make judgements, as she believes total in her husband. Setu an hypocrite didn't inform her that he is alive, and also not decided to meet her, take care of her. He was encouraged by the dubiousness and the relative obscurity of others conviction. She became perplexed, aggravated, engrossed and deeply undermined. The husband whom she trusted had betrayed her. Bhaggava had no desire to live and no one was there to take care of her she attempted suicide went to drown in the river Krishna. She recounts:

"I am an unfortunate orphan .Krishna you are my mother and I'm coming to be with you forever. You know the truth about me—I'm coming to be with you forever. You know the truth about me—i 'm pure. Take me into my arms and rid my baby and me of this disgraceful life."³(77).

Marriage is a best relationship, but the marital breakdown is more dangerous. Sudha Murthy foregrounds the deplorable seriousness in Bhaggava's life. She portrays that Bhaggava was shunned as a curse to the family. She was talked as she killed her parents at the time of birth and now she killed her husband. She was also avoided as a plague. She accepted challenges and became invisible. Bhaggava never asserted for her rights, her condition was same as Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* of Manju Kapur. She was in the hands of the fate. As it is rumoured that women are women's worst enemy. She suffered antagonist behaviour, gone through the trauma of allegations, indignity. She was blamed with baseless rumour and her own mother-in-law played dirty politics with her might she wanted to marry her son with more dowry. She spends her life with heavy burden of responsibility, lived as a widow though having her husband alive. It was a sheer injustice done by her husband though she was virgin and pure and sacred .Dwight Sanderson mentions:

"The art of dealing with problems of rural life is necessarily a technology involving the application of many Sciences and disciplines just as the technology of bridge building involves not only mechanics, but

metallurgy, geology, meteorology and other disciplines, for the determination of the method of constructing a particular bridge.”⁴(Sanderson,RSCO,LLC.P.11).

Murty framed Bhaggava as a widow and she had to face many societal taboos and also suffered from financial stringency. She was saved by Chouda and she further left the village. She started to live in Dharwad and worked in houses like a maid to make her both ends meet. She thought her husband dead and wanted to respect by his son always and perform *shraddha* always on his death anniversary. She bathed newborns, took care of their mothers and cooked for people. Her hands became rough and she toughened up. Her son Shankar was a debilitated victim of childhood negligence by his father. Bhaggava's strength was Shankar; she made him to stand on his feet by making him a primary school teacher and on account of his job he was transferred to many places and later married a nice girl. Bhaggava suffered an entire life. The story exhibits that Bhaggava's son Shankar suffered a poor man's life; he had no land and his daughter Mandakini used to take tuitions. On the other hand, contrary to it Murty disposes the beauty of Venkatesh family's beautiful home which was named as Anandita, which contains four bedrooms with attached toilets, teakwood doors, ultra modern facilities and separate quarters.

In the novel the novelist has given all priorities and luxurious life to Venkatesh and on the other side made to suffer Shankar whose father was also same but her mother was disserved and had to undergo only sufferance.

The novel discloses that Setu was the same person Venkatesh's father Madhav Rao who has changed his name from Setu Madhav Rao to Setu. He had missed the train and that train committed an accident and it was a second chance of life to him. He had committed a sin by deserting his wife and to compensate it he send a money order to her but she had unreceived it and she had left it for Shirupali. Setu was a mamma's boy, he was wrong on many levels, he had listened to his mother and had discarded his wife and remarried to Venkatesh's mother. The present novel is not only a subjective picture of wife desertion but it also emphasizes that one must not believe on other without proper investigating the real condition of our owns. Sudha Murthy had not only written a fascinating novellas but she has also exposed the patriarchal domination in our country and the sufferance of women in ignorance.

Following the novelist step Bhaggava's step- son Venkatesh searched her and her son Shankar and he tried to help her with by giving an amount of fifty –lakhs rupees as a help inherited from his father .He had done this to repay his father's mistake. Venkatesh daughter Gauri a doctor, possess good values as his father and had helped Venkatesh by giving her own money. This made Bhaggava to succeed in her life and it recounts her patience. She is Murthy's today's modern woman with education and sensibility and never like cheating in her life.

It's semantics, the complexity of the two stories, the theme of injustice done to women; their tragedies are the most prominent features of the novel. In the mother i never knew the psychological crises of her characters, are treated to a greater length. It also focuses on how women rights are suppressed and neglected by man. The mothers in this novel are oppressed and subjugated by the traditional society who never cares about the needs and desires of women. The great novelist Anita Desai enumerates:

“I am interested in characters that are not average but have retreated or have been driven into despair and so turned against or made to stand against the general current. It is to flow with current, it makes no demand and it costs no effort. But those who can't follow it, whose hearts cry out 'the great no' who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what demands are and what it costs to meet them”.⁵(Ram,21-23).p.77 . The women mentioned are alone by heart, mind and spirit.

The other story is of Mukesh an illegitimate son of an abandoned birth mother, who was shocked after knowing his reality that he was an adopted child. The second novella portrays the journey of Mukesh from one mother to other. He was born to an ignorant teen age mother Nirmala Kumari than he was adopted by Rupinder and lastly he was brought up by Sumati.

Sudha Murthy had painted Nirmala as a teenage mother who is a tenth class student, an alone daughter of Zamindar and was in too much care and protection by his authoritarian father commits a mistake in her life. His father Zamindar wanted to marry his daughter into an influential family. She gets bonded with a person named Anand who was living in the outskirts of her home. He was poor, handsome college student from a different community, who was studying old monuments on the outskirts of the village and he became the English tuition teacher of Nirmala. When he was injured Nirmala used to bring three times meals to him. Love is an apparition of obsession. Their relationship of teacher and student metamorphosizes and he touched her unknowingly and they started to spend time from that day. Nirmala had crossed all the boundaries unknowingly in ignorance. A simulated intimacy hooked her in an immoral act and she had to suffer later. Baruch Silas a talented writer and speaker portray:

“Often when we go into relationships, we ignore differences in beliefs, academic levels, family and religious backgrounds, social, racial and cultural discrepancies. Differences in likes, dislikes and temperaments are suspended as immaterial.”⁶(Silas Baruch).

The victim Nirmala passed the exams and meanwhile she also missed her periods. In premarital relationship, she became the unmarried mother. Thomas R. Murray mentions that:

“Some Critics of unwed teenage girl's bearing children have charged that such behaviour is an outcome of irrational decision making in which girls fail to analyze the consequences of their act.”⁷(Thomas,R.M. 2009).

She was unfamiliar about the result of her act and had to suffer a lot. She encountered a embarrassing affliction and had contemplated a baby outside marriage. She told Dulari and Dulari told her mother and the news reached to his father. To maintain the honour of name and prestige the mother was kept away at her father's farmhouse far away from her own family to deliver an illegal baby and to remarry afterwards. She followed her strict father's advice and act accordingly to him. She was told to drop the baby on the temple stairs after the delivery and to maintain secret. It was a more difficult job for Nirmala as a mother to discard her own baby. Her lover was kept unknown from her pregnancy. It was not her total mistake, but the mistake was of Anand who might also have never thought about the result due the flow of love.

The novel depicts that Rupinder ,a childless mother was a hard working Punjabi girl, who approached Nirmala and became friendly with her and came to know about the secret of pregnancy. Rupinder comes in the form of a saviour who was more potent than the destroyer. She was from border of Punjab and Haryana and was married to Surinder who was a school dropout and short tempered man. As Rupinder had lost her child, she insisted Nirmala that she will take care of her baby. There is specific focus on the motherly love in Rupinder for want of a child. Her parents and brother were labourers in Zamindars house. Nirmala delivered a healthy baby boy and gave a golden chain to Rupinder and told her to give her baby this chain afterwards. Nirmala before handling the baby boy to Dulari had touched the baby's feet and uttered:

“Beta, please forgive me. I didn't know how a child was born and I brought you into this world in my ignorance. I don't know how a child was born and I brought you into this world in my ignorance. I don't know what your future holds, but I can't just leave you somewhere to die of hunger or cold. Rupinder is a nice woman. At the very least, she'll ensure your survival and you won't grow up as an illegitimate child.I pray to God that no woman gets punished the way that I'm getting punished now.”⁸(190).

The very astonishing scene is that Dulari had dropped the baby on the temple stairs and it was picked up by Rupinder .The novelist exhibits that the crowd gathered around the baby and Rupinder insisted that her baby died one month before and she became ready to take care of the baby if no one claimed him. She took the baby to Jalna in Maharashtra to her in-laws place. Her husband's family and husband became unhappy to receive an Orphan with a dark patch. Her husband also persuaded her to drop the baby in Orphanage or leave in Gurudwara. It signifies that people don't want other's baby, as they are selfish by terms and conditions and never consider other's feelings and emotions. The love and desire to possess a baby was only with Rupinder not with her family. She gets hurt by the indifferent behaviour of her family.

As (Mukesh) Munna had a dark patch on his right foot and it was considered by his grandmother as a bad omen. He was ignored, rejected by Surinder's family and also didn't receive love and family bonding and it made him to stay at Sumati's house. Rupinder's family decided to shift to Amritsar, but they didn't want Munna to be with them. It was considered that Munna will bring bad luck to them. Sumati planned to take the photo of Neeru and Munna at the time of departure as a token of love. Rupinder suggested Sumati to adopt Munna and she acknowledged it. Rupinder conjectures:

“Give him a good education and raise him to be a good human being. Knowing you, I'm sure that you will do that anyway.’ Though she was crying, Rupinder felt a sense of satisfaction and relief knowing that Munna would have a good future.”⁹(154).

Rupinder desperately uttered that due to his bad condition at her home, a bad mother-in-law and a alcoholic husband and a bickering family made her to give his son to Sumati for his better future. Sumati and Rupinder were friends; Rupinder had helped her by giving water to her. Whoever the mother would be, all love equally and cares the child fully and always think that he must be in safe hands always. She also advised her that he was born on Buddha Purnima and told her to give food to the poor on that day as to celebrate his birthday.

The novel expedited the journey of Munna further, Munna or Mukesh approached Sumati's family and Rupinder introduced her as his son. Rupinder and Munna often visited Sumati's house. Sumati and her husband Krishna loved munna which makes Rupinder happy. Sumati cared him and loved him as his own son. She encouraged and supported him in every phase of life. The society and the family will treat him differently so they didn't tell about his adoption. He was given the opportunity to shed cynicism and to develop self-esteem innocence and vulnerability. She informed her in-laws that she was pregnant and later on delivered a boy. Munna had brought luck to their family and day by day they became rich. Sumati's stitching business grew exponentially with the each passing year. The family expanded the business with a new factory in Bangalore and stayed there. The gold chain gifted by Rupinder during parting to his son was cared always by Sumati. Munna became sad and disturbed when he revealed that he was an adopted child. His mind made him to search

his biological mother and he wanted to meet her. When he approached there he found that his father Surinder died of cirrhosis and mother was working at Gurupreet. He forcefully questioned her why he was given in adoption. Why she had done so.

Rupinder disclosed the fact that after marriage she was sent to his parents' home and her attempts to become pregnant failed and her mother-in-law taunted her often. As the time passed she became pregnant and fell sick and her mother-in law ordered her to go back his parents home and told her to be back after delivery. The story reaches its finale when Mukesh with his skilful intuitiveness succeeds in finding his biological mother.

III. Conclusion:

Sudha Murty manifested that no one supports a woman's delinquencies. She also highlights that how human relationships changes according to the conditions and how a woman feels alienated in male dominated society. In the novel Sudha Murty exhibits the different roles played by different mothers. Bhaggava, Nirmala Kumari, Rupinder and Sumati are not only great women but they are fantastic and adorable mothers who are oppressed and are not given their rights in the male dominated society.

Sudha Murty had exposed through her artistic perception and innovative vision the invisible faults of the society permeating our culture, colluded by the power. This novel is of deception and injustice done by the patriarchal world. Life was not easy to all the mothers exposed in the novel. The novel is cool, the paras written are short and overall the female characters were dominated and unjustified by the male characters. Sudha Murty accentuates that the society hurts the mother, does injustice with her, and also dominates her but for her kid she is always right and loyal may be she biological mother or an adoptive mother. Salute to all mothers!

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