

Empowering Voices: Gender Realities and Female Resilience in Sudha Murty's Literary Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how Sudha Murty's literary works—*Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, *The Real Jewels*, *House of Cards*, *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, and *The Mother I Never Knew*—address issues of gender inequity and female resiliency. Critical gender issues like dowry killings, female infanticide, cultural expectations of women, economic dependency, and the difficulties faced by single mothers the predicament of elderly women, patriarchal restrictions, social norms, and the structural difficulties encountered by women in Indian society and the changing roles of women in contemporary India are all addressed by Sudha Murthy through her stories. She reveals how society views women, including their desire for empowerment, education, independence, gender roles, and economic reliance. She emphasizes the value of uplifting women by promoting honesty, empathy, and perseverance through her real-life experiences. The purpose of the study is to examine how Sudha Murty's narratives support gender equality and female empowerment while also illustrating the hardships and resilience of women in a patriarchal culture. Using a gender perspective, a qualitative literary analysis is used to look at Sudha Murty's themes, characters, and narrative devices. The study contextualizes Sudha Murty's portrayal of women's struggles and resiliency by using ideas from gender studies and feminist literary criticism. The research shows that Sudha Murty's writings continuously draw attention to the structural obstacles that women encounter, such as a lack of education, social expectations, and financial reliance. Her stories also highlight the resilience, tenacity, and flexibility of female protagonists who defy patriarchal norms and reposition themselves in society. With an emphasis on *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, *The Real Jewels*, *House of Cards*, *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, and *The Mother I Never Knew* this essay examines the themes of gender inequity and female resiliency in Sudha Murty's literary works.

KEYWORDS: Education, Resilience, Female Empowerment, Patriarchy, Sudha Murty's Narratives and Gender Inequality

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INTRODUCTION

Literature has frequently been a potent tool to draw attention to, analyze, and oppose gender inequality, which has long been a problem in communities all over the world. Well-known Indian author, philanthropist, and social activist Sudha Murty has frequently used her writing to highlight the difficulties women experience in a patriarchal culture. Sudha Murty's perceptive narratives not only highlight the prejudices and inequalities that women face but also honor their tenacity, intelligence, and capacity for change. The realistic stories in Sudha Murty's writings, which have their roots in Indian social realities, capture the real-life experiences of women from a variety of socioeconomic situations. She highlights the value of education, independence, and the need for greater gender equality in her novels and short tales. This study uses a gendered lens to analyze *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*, *The Real Jewels*, *House of Cards*, *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, and *The Mother I Never Knew* examining how Sudha Murty depicts the constraints placed on women and how they resist and go beyond them. This study aims to draw attention to the subtleties in Sudha Murty's portrayal of female autonomy, familial responsibilities, and societal expectations by using feminist literary criticism and gender studies as analytical frameworks. The purpose of the article is to show how literature can be used to support social change and provide voice to underrepresented groups by analyzing these chosen works.

Objective of the Study

This study aims to investigate how gender inequality and patriarchal structures are portrayed in a few of Sudha Murty's works, emphasizing how her stories challenge the limitations society places on women while highlighting the strength and empowerment of female characters who resist these expectations. It explores how Sudha Murty breaks down gender boundaries by using education and independence as transforming tools that help women reframe their roles and become independent. The study also looks at the wider ramifications of Sudha Murty's storytelling in solving gender issues in Indian society, highlighting the ways in which her stories encourage readers to challenge long-held prejudices and promote a more just and inclusive society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

M. Tharun & P. Brinda (2024) "Depiction of Women by Sudha Murthy in the Select Short Stories, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Write and Other Stories*, *Grandma's Bag of Stories*, *Bird with Golden Wings and Other Stories*"- focuses on how Murthy portrays women as strong, ethically upright, and essential to family and society. It highlights how the author presents women as role models through realistic and uplifting stories, fusing cultural

values with contemporary issues. The essay highlights Murthy's tales as a celebration of women's resilience, insight, and capacity for change in daily life.

- S. Keerthana Priya & Dr. K. Suresh (2024) "Real-Life Anecdotes in Sudha Murthy's *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life and How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories*" - analyzes the use of real-life anecdotes in Sudha Murthy's *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life and How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories*. The study focuses on Murthy's ability to incorporate personal experiences into her stories in order to reflect on societal challenges and teach moral lessons. It emphasizes her storytelling's relatability and genuineness, which appeal to readers from a wide range of backgrounds. It illustrates how Sudha Murthy's works serve as both entertaining tales and provocative meditations on human values and societal reality.
- Anjali P Pande (2023) "Life Style and Humanity in Sudha Murthy's *Wise and Otherwise – a Salute to Life*" - The study examines lifestyle and humanity in Sudha Murthy's *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*. The essay highlights how Murthy's tales, which are based on actual events, successfully capture the spirit of moral dilemmas, human values, and social dynamics. It looks at how the book reflects a range of experiences and provides readers with ideas about moral integrity, compassion, and perseverance. Murthy's perceptive narratives, which relate everyday occurrences to essential human truths, are emphasized.
- Sreelakshmi S (2023) "Sudha Murthy's Select Works as Panopticon of Indian Values"- examines the chosen works of Sudha Murthy as a representation of Indian cultural ethos and values. The review emphasizes the ways in which Sudha Murthy's stories reflect both traditional and modern Indian society, highlighting themes of empathy, familial relationships, and moral quandaries. It highlights how Murthy uses straightforward yet profound storytelling to preserve and advance Indian cultural values. The research presents her writings as a literary panopticon that gives readers a thorough understanding of India's social dynamics and moral structure.
- P. Mathumathi (2022) "The Quintessence of Values and Morals in Sudha Murthy's *Wise and Otherwise*"- demonstrates how Murthy reflects the moral complexity of daily life by using examples from real life to examine issues like kindness, integrity, and resilience. It highlights how her stories are universal, transcending social and ethnic divides while maintaining a strong foundation in Indian customs. She emphasizes how Murthy can motivate readers with tales that combine moral wisdom with simplicity.
- Biji Gopakumar Pillai & Angika Nanasheeb Vasudev (2021) "Reflection of Indian Values in the Selected Work of Sudha Murthy"- examines how Indian ideals are reflected in a few of Sudha Murthy's works. The article emphasizes how Murthy uses storytelling to support and spread traditional Indian values like compassion, honesty, and relationship respect. It looks at how her stories highlight the value of ethical behavior and cultural heritage in influencing both individual and society conduct. Murthy's ability to incorporate timeless Indian ideals into relatable stories that appeal to all ages is highlighted by the study.
- Nazma Yasin (2019) "The Indomitable Voice: An Analysis of Sudha Murthy's Life and Her Selected Literary Works"- examines the life and works of literature of Sudha Murthy, emphasizing the importance of her distinctive narrative voice. Emphasizing themes like gender equality, generosity, and moral integrity, the study demonstrates how Murthy's writings demonstrate her unwavering energy and dedication to tackling social concerns. Her capacity to use personal experiences to create narratives that speak to universal human emotions and values is examined.
- Rimah Saleh Alyahya (2019) "The Social and Ethical Values in the Select Novels of Sudha Murthy" - explores the moral and social principles present in a few of Sudha Murthy's books. The critique emphasizes how Murthy's narratives are deeply intertwined with ideas of social responsibility, compassion, and integrity. It highlights her capacity to depict common hardships and moral conundrums while promoting moral clarity and social harmony.
- Raosaheb Vaijanathrao Kangne & B. T. Lahane (2018) "Cultural-Socialism in *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life* by Sudha Murthy"- focuses on Sudha Murthy's *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life* and its cultural-socialism element. In highlighting the significance of moral responsibility and social justice, the review highlights how Murthy's work combines cultural values with social consciousness. It examines her narrative style, which celebrates human compassion and unity while challenging social standards through personal tales.
- M. Baby Sahila (2000) "Exposition of Indian Values in the Select Novels of Sudha Murthy"- examines the exposition of Indian values in a few of Sudha Murthy's novels. The review emphasizes how Murthy's writings are full of traditional Indian values, including respect for elders, family ties, simplicity, and integrity, and it highlights how she is able to convey these values through relatable stories that appeal to both traditional and modern readers. In this study, Murthy is presented as a writer who skillfully combines cultural heritage with universal human experiences in her narratives.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical frameworks used in this study's qualitative literary analysis approach are gender studies and feminist literary criticism. *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, *The Real Jewels*, and *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*, *House of Cards*, *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, and *The Mother I Never Knew* are the chosen works that are examined in order to comprehend how Sudha Murthy depicts gender inequality. Comparative analysis of various narratives to look for recurrent themes in Sudha Murthy's portrayal of women's struggles and strengths, close reading of the texts to identify themes of gender bias,

resilience, and empowerment, and the application of feminist literary theory to interpret character development and societal commentary are all part of the methodology.

FINDINGS

Many important motifs in Murty's works are revealed by the study: her stories emphasize gender inequities by exposing women to systemic obstacles like economic reliance, social expectations that are too strict, and the denial of education. The female characters show resilience by being strong, flexible, and determined to forge their own identities in spite of social constraints. As *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read* illustrates, education becomes a transforming force in dismantling gender boundaries. *The Real Jewels* is another example of how Sudha Murty quietly challenges patriarchal conventions that minimize the contributions of women, highlighting the necessity for social change in the direction of gender equality. The study also shows that women may overcome patriarchal oppression through education and independence, which promotes societal transformation and women's empowerment. Sudha Murty's writings inspire readers to reconsider conventional gender norms and acknowledge the significance of female empowerment in creating a more equal world by illustrating these challenges and achievements.

DISCUSSION

Education

Sudha Murty's works emphasize education as a way to empower women and break down gender stereotypes. According to *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, reading turns into a transformative instrument that helps women regain their autonomy and dignity. The protagonist's grandmother expresses regret,

"All these years I have depended on others to read and write for me. I feel helpless when no one is around", "... In those days people never considered education essential for girls, so I never went to school. I got married very young and had children At times I used to regret not going to school, so I made sure that my children and grandchildren studied well... The joy of reading cannot be described in words. One has to experience it.... (Murty, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, 9&10)"

demonstrating the way that women are confined to a situation of dependence due to illiteracy. Sudha Murty emphasizes how having access to education gives women the self-assurance and information they need to question confining social conventions. Her stories highlight the importance of gender-inclusive educational policy and promote literacy as a fundamental right, as seen by the grandmother's resolve:

"I will learn to read and nobody can stop me." (Murthy, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, 2004, p.9&10)"

Her stories challenge societal beliefs that value male education over female literacy and support programs that promote female education by highlighting lifelong learning. This story demonstrates how reading can overcome social injustices and redefine identities. Mridula's education also empowers her to confront her husband's immoral behavior in *House of Cards*, highlighting the way that knowledge empowers women to exercise moral agency. Sudha Murty's focus on education supports the idea that literacy is a transforming instrument that enables women to overcome patriarchal constraints and pursue independent lives, rather than just an ability.

RESILIENCE

In her works, especially in *Wise and Otherwise*, Sudha Murty's female protagonists show incredible fortitude in the face of hardship. In *A Salute to Life*, women from a variety of backgrounds bravely and resolutely overcome their obstacles. They are resilient because they actively defy social norms rather than passively enduring them. While attempting to maintain their dignity and self-respect, Sudha Murty's protagonists deal with social censure, familial expectations, and financial difficulties. In another, she describes a mother who is praying for her daughter, who was burned by stove, will die. For example, Sudha Murty describes a widow who decides to educate her daughters in defiance of social pressure: The words of daughter and mother make us feel in this tale:

Amma, she said, I do not know how long I will live.
But I want to tell you something.
If only my parents had educated me, if I had a job,
if my parents had fewer children,
I would not have come to this position'.....'
...I am the unfortunate mother of the patient
you were just talking to. I am praying to God
that she should not survive.

"People said a widow should not waste money on girls' education. But I knew it was their only chance for a better life." (*Stove Bursts or Dowry Deaths?*, 74 &75)

This illustrates the pervasive social biases against women's education and the need for fortitude in the face of these expectations. Their experiences serve as a reflection of the actual challenges that Indian women confront, highlighting the importance of resilience in the fight against structural oppression. Sudha Murty emphasizes the idea that resilience is a crucial component of attaining gender equity by showcasing women who persevere in the face of adversity. Furthermore, Shrimati's silent resilience in the face of emotional neglect in *Gently Falls the Bakula* emphasizes how, in patriarchal environments, resilience frequently coexists with selflessness.

Female Empowerment

By emphasizing self-actualization over material achievement, Sudha Murty's works change the concept of empowerment. Women are frequently portrayed in her stories as independent thinkers who take charge of their lives in spite of social pressure. By presenting women whose greatest richness is found in their beliefs, wisdom, and services to society rather than in their money or material accomplishments, she challenges traditional gender norms in *The Real Jewels*. In Sudha Murty's stories, empowerment is based on an inward recognition of one's value rather than on approval from others. One of the story's pivotal points is when the protagonist says:

"The true wealth of a woman is not in gold or diamonds, but in the values, she upholds and the lives she touches." (*The Real Jewels*, 22 & 23)

Similar to this, the protagonist's grandmother in *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read* defends her right to an education despite her old age, proving that literacy can empower people at any stage of life. Sudha Murty's stories provide empowerment as an unending path toward liberty, encouraging women to embrace independence and reject social constraints. Sudha Murty's writings encourage readers to recognize empowerment as an ongoing process of self-realization by highlighting bravery and self-sufficiency. She promotes women's proper recognition and respect by urging readers to recognize the hidden efforts and sacrifices performed by women in homes and communities through her stories. The female protagonists in Sudha Murty's works are the best examples of empowerment, which is a process of self-awareness, self-determination, and the capacity to affect healthy change in their environment.

Patriarchy

Sudha Murty's narrative frequently discusses patriarchal monarchy, where women's difficulties arise from instilled gender preconceptions. Through social expectations of deference and obedience, financial dependence, or the denial of education, her stories critique the ways patriarchal systems limit women's potential. The absurdity of gender conventions is delicately depicted in Sudha Murty's works, especially in households where women's goals are frequently disregarded and sons are valued more than daughters. Through her characters' triumphs and disappointments, she emphasizes the significance of breaking the patriarchal cycle and the generational transmission of patriarchal values. She describes a woman in *Wise and Otherwise* who was abandoned by her family after her husband passed away. One of her family members tells her,

"A woman without a husband is a burden. You should live within your limits." (*A Bond Betrayed on Rakhi Day*, 38-39)

A woman without a husband is a burden, according to Gouramma's viewpoint in *Dollar Bahu*, which represents the ingrained patriarchal traditions. You should be mindful of your boundaries. This argument reflects the social conditioning that maintains dependence and subservience by associating a woman's worth with her married status. Sudha Murty challenges these conventions by presenting characters who defy patriarchal expectations. In *House of Cards*, for example, Mridula gradually comes to see her value beyond her husband's ambition, illustrating how women's emotional labor frequently goes unappreciated in patriarchal environments. This is a clear example of how patriarchal attitudes shape women's lives and keep society in control of their decisions. Throughout her stories, women frequently defy patriarchal norms by taking decisive action to declare their independence. In order to encourage readers to reconsider conventional gender roles and push for greater gender parity, Sudha Murty gently challenges these social standards.

Gender Inequality

One of the main themes in Sudha Murty's writings is gender inequality. Her stories illustrate how gender-based discrimination manifests in daily life, from early beliefs to marriage responsibilities and financial limitations. In *Wise and Otherwise*, she recounts the story of a father who, not wanting to pay for his daughter's additional education, asks, "Why should I spend on a girl who will marry and leave?" But rather than portraying women as defenseless victims, Sudha Murty portrays them as activists who challenge norms and reconsider their identities. Likewise, *Dollar Bahu* draws attention to the preference for male children, which reflects the mindset of society that restricts choices for women and perpetuates financial independence. Through these stories, Sudha Murty challenges the acceptance of gender inequality and emphasizes the necessity of reassessing the conventions that support it. She offers a balanced viewpoint on gender issues through her stories, which emphasize both oppression and resistance. Through education, legislative changes, and cultural transformations, Sudha Murty's works urge society to address the underlying causes of discrimination and go beyond small signs of equality. Her stories inspire a vision of a more equal society by urging readers to identify and confront gender biases in their own lives.

Sudha Murty's Narratives

Deeply examining gender issues, Sudha Murty's stories highlight the hardships and victories of women in patriarchal environments. By illustrating the intricate relationship between gender dynamics, cultural expectations, and individual goals, her novels challenge readers to reconsider conventional wisdom. Sudha Murty emphasizes the value of education, independence, and fortitude in empowering women, Sudha Murty's works promote gender equality. Sudha Murty challenges cultural prejudices and encourages readers to imagine a more inclusive and equitable future through her straightforward yet powerful storytelling. Because her stories speak to universal themes of justice, compassion, and empowerment, her writings are an important addition to gender studies and feminist literature.

Implications

In Indian literature, Sudha Murty's writings make a substantial contribution to conversations on gender inequity, education, and female empowerment. Through emphasizing these issues, her works inspire readers to reconsider conventional gender roles and promote social justice. The study's conclusions highlight the necessity of putting more of an emphasis on gender-inclusive education, social policies that value and encourage the contributions made by women in their families and at jobs, and the use of literature to promote gender equality.

CONCLUSION

The writings of Sudha Murty celebrate the resilient nature of women while offering an insightful approach to gender inequality. *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life, House of Cards, Dollar Bahu, Gently Falls the Bakula, The Mother I Never Knew, The Real Jewels, and How I Taught My Grandmother to Read* all highlight the challenges women confront in patriarchal cultures, their quest for knowledge and self-esteem, and the need for a more equal and inclusive society. Sudha Murty promotes gender equality by calling on readers to recognize and address the ingrained prejudices that influence how society views women through her straightforward but impactful storytelling. The study's recommendations, which are based on an analysis of Sudha Murty's literary works, include a stronger focus on female literacy and opportunities for lifelong learning, policy changes that acknowledge women's economic and social contributions, more literary representation of gender-based struggles, and more strong community efforts for female empowerment. To close the gender gap in education, more focus should be put on female literacy and chances for lifelong learning. Additionally, government and non-governmental organizations should implement and uphold laws that acknowledge and encourage women's contributions to the economy and society. More authors highlighting gender-based challenges and achievements in their writing can raise awareness and spur societal change, and grassroots efforts to empower women by fostering independence and leadership chances across a range of industries should be reinforced. In order to shed light on how literature can be used as a vehicle for social critique and change, this study offers a gender-focused literary analysis of a few of Sudha Murty's works. Even though the paper mostly concentrates on Sudha Murty's stories, more research might be done by contrasting her writing with those of other modern Indian women authors who deal with gender inequality. The results of this study demonstrate the value of narrative in altering the way society views gender roles. Through literature that promotes gender equality, readers might become more aware of the prejudices present in daily life. Over time, this understanding can result in a change in traditional gender roles toward more equal relationships, a better appreciation of women's rights and contributions in all sectors, and a rise in support for laws that promote gender inclusion in leadership, work, and education. The ideas promoted by Sudha Murty can help create a more equitable and inclusive world through continuous literary analysis and social action.

In Sudha Murthy's words:

"Life is always unfair? If you want, you can make it fair." (*Is Life Fair?* 213)

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