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**CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF ORTHODOXY AND EMERGING AS AN
ENLIGHTENED WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SUDHA MURTHY'S
MAHASHWETA.**

Dr. Hina Dobariya

Indian writing in English has created special niche in the heart of the readers from all over the world. There are noticeable writers who have effectively portrayed India with variety of subjects and issues in their books. Sudha Murthy is one of the most prolific writers in India who has written both in Kannad and English. Being a visionary, she has voiced out many issues related to feminine sensibility. *Mahashweta* by Sudha Murthy is magnum opus where the protagonist Anupama's journey has been depicted with gray sheds of life. However, Sudha Murthy has celebrated the true essence of womanhood where Anupama courageously fights against all odd situations and ultimately emerged as a powerful self-reliant individual.

Through very simple story line, Murthy has effectively addressed the issue of true love needed for the life long bond of marriage. Initially, things are rosy and dreamy in Anupama's life where she gets married to Dr. Anand in fairytale manner. However, the moment she discovers small white patch on her body, she is secluded from her own family considering that she is suffering from incurable disease named leukoderma. She starts getting unfair treatment both from her in laws and her husband Anand. As a result, those fairytale and memorable wedding moments turn into unforgettable nightmare. Negligence from her own family members is very painful and jarring experience for Anupama. Abandoned by her uncaring in laws and insensitive husband, she is forced to return to her father's home in the village. The social stigma of a married woman living with her parents, her stepmother's continual barbs and the ostracism that accompanies her skin condition force her to contemplate suicide. However, being a powerful individual, she emerges as a new woman as she decides to live her own dream. She breaks all age old restrictions laid before her way to be successful and self-reliant. To live her dream, she

travels to Bombay and gets lots of appreciation for her work. She also gets good friends who have loved her internal beauty instead of the external one.

To show woman's strength, Sudha Murthy has discussed few issues related to women still exist in Indian society: arrange marriage, negligence from in laws, unsupportive husband, hatred from step mother, social stigma revolve around married women, the myth behind the leukoderma as hereditary and infectious disease etc. The writer shows that Indian women are that powerful who survive even amid the above mentioned problems as Anupama has done. Murthy wants to highlights how sometimes marriage brings pain and loss on women's part though they are very dedicated and loyal to their husbands. For example, Anupama has given her body and soul to her husband. This can be highlighted wherein she says "Like Rohini to Chandra and Lakshmi to Narayana, am I to him. Just as the creeper depends on a tree, I depend on him" (Murthy 151). She really keeps the vows she has taken while getting married with Anand. She promises to be with her husband in any situation and for that she does not care for what society will say about her. Even she makes her mind to denounce anything for her husband and his happiness. Her love is soul deep one. However, to sharp contrast, Anupama does not get anything from her husband not even simple sympathy for the problem she is going through. It shows Anand's love which is only skin deep. Anupama's emotional breakdown for not getting support can be observed when she best wishes her friend who is going to marry shortly:

Let your husband be a man who will only shower happiness and love on you. It is better to have an understanding husband than one who is merely handsome and wealthy. Marriage is a Gamble. The result cannot be predicted beforehand. Finding the right match is a matter of chance. I was unlucky in this. May you be more fortunate (Murthy 65).

Initially it is very tough for Anupama to live abandoned life. She constantly worries for where she will go, with whom she will live, what will happen to her etc. For a moment she feels as if her life is ruined and she is left for nothing and nowhere. She even contemplates to commit suicide. According to Murthy, the reason for any such negative thoughts, comes to Anupama's mind, is the treatment she is getting from her own people who are representative of Indian orthodoxy and rigidity which is limited to women and their code of conduct only. Anupama's

return to her father's home becomes matter of constant ostracism whereas Anand's selfish treatment to her own wife is accepted without any question.

Anand was a Doctor; he knew more about the 'disease' than most people. Then why was he behaving in such a manner? What would he have done if his mother or sister had fallen prey to the affliction? Would he have deserted them as he had her? He would probably have sympathized with them and taken care of them, but when it was his own wife, the woman he claimed to love, he had abandoned her. The rules were different ...and society would not question his behavior (Murthy 75).

Being very sensitive woman writer, Sudha Murthy has expressed bitterness for the gender discrimination prevails in Indian society where only women have to suffer on a name of marriage and responsibility. Women are treated as if they are dunce and docile and worthy for nothing. In short, they are taken for granted for anything and everything. To break this rigidity, Sudha Murthy has portrayed her heroine Anupama in *Mahashweta* with new and positive shades wherein she emerges as new enlightened woman. Towards the end of the novel, she is shown as a woman who does not need anyone's sympathy to live and survive. There was time when Anupama believed that she could not live without her husband and his support. But the same Anupama survives in city like Bombay and gets lots of admiration for her work on stage. Her courage is revealed when she questions:

Was it my fault that I got this white patch? Is it my fault that I am a poor man's daughter? Now that you are here, answer me. You knew that I did not have this before our marriage. You could have told your mother...They wanted an excuse to get rid of me and your silence provided them with the perfect cover. A marriage is a lifelong commitment; for better or worse, till death do us part. Wasn't that what you'd said to me before you left for England? ...

How can you possibly expect a burnt seed to grow into a tree? Husband, children, affection, love ...all are irrelevant to me now. It is too late for us. I am no longer the naïve Anupama whose world revolved around you. I know my goals are and where I am heading, and I don't need anyone's help to reach my destination (Murthy 134).

These words explicate Anupama's journey from self sacrifice to self discovery. We see the emergence of new woman who values her identity as woman and questions tyranny and double standard of the patriarchal society.

Sudha Murthy has portrayed the character of Anupama in such a way where she becomes true representative of many voices remained unheard for long. Anupama's emancipation is indicative of liberation of many women who were like caged birds. Anupama's emergence as a powerful individual breaks the age old belief that women are only capable of producing child and managing household affairs. Instead, Anupama's decision to be self reliant proves that women are not helpless and dependent. They are equal to men or even above than them.

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Dr. Hina Dobariya

Assistant Professor

BITS Edu Campus