



International Journal of
Humanities In Technical Education
(A Bi-annual Refereed Journal)

**Quest for Self in Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* and Varsha Adalja's *Ansaar*
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Introduction

Novel is a popular modern literary form of writing which is begotten as the summary of human life filled with joys and sorrows and has moral purpose for the society as well as for the individual. It provides micro spectrum in human nature and their dealing with each other. It presents an authentic view of human life. R. K. Dhawan remarks:

“Literature reflects not only the social reality but also shapes the complex ways in which men and women organize themselves, their interpersonal relationships and their perception of the socio – cultural reality. Of all the literary forms, the novel is considered to be the most socially oriented because it depicts human relationships in its varied aspects.” (Dhawan, 10)

T. D. Burton stresses the importance of novel in India- a vast country with such geographical, historical, social, economic, cultural and religious diversity-as it provides an immense scope for the treatment of miscellaneous materials in different perspectives. To quote him:

“The novel at its best has provided a matchless illusion of reality, a sense of both the moment and of time passing, and a compelling vividness as a shared experience. It is the art of everyday life.” (Burton, 201)

Indian Writing in English has established itself as a distinctive literature. Women writers in India have had a major role to play in shaping the literary landscape of India. These women writers have given literary work in India an unmistakable edge. They are able to sensitively portray a world that has in it women rich in substance. Their women are real flesh-and- blood protagonists who make you look at them with awe with their relationships to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families; their mental make-ups and themselves. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. They have a deep insight and exploration of womanhood.

Among all literary genres, novel reflects the contemporary social conditions in a realistic manner. The portrayal of woman in novels is also governed by the prevailing attitude towards

women in society and the author's response to it. The status of women has been rapidly changing and the novelists capture this transition in their novels.

In the Post-Independence period a number of Indian writers of fiction in English try to explore and manifest Indian reality. They get more and more psychologically intended and try to assess the sociological effect on the psyche of their characters. In Hindu religion marriage is an important *sanskar*- a vow. This bond is considered as a serious vow and pledge of love and companionship during both the time of prosperity and adversity. It is essential for the propagation of humanity. But this vow is severed in *Mahashweta* and *Ansaar* as the life of the women protagonists takes turn and twist.

Sudha Murty

A renowned technocrat and a philanthropist, Sudha Murty is also a disciplined writer. She is writing in the back ground of Indian English Literature. She has been revered with awards for her philanthropic and literary acquisition. Her writing has not only enjoyed a large reading public but has also made us to think and rethink over the serious matters. In her writings, Sudha Murty deals with the problems faced by women in the corporate world. Being the chairperson of Infosys, a teacher, and a humanitarian she has a deep insight into the emotions of people whom she meets every day as a part of her work. Her novels are fascinating and fathomable. They are unique and stimulate spiritually the readers to aspire and to calibrate their mental outlook.

Quest for self in *Mahashweta*

Mahashweta by Sudha Murty deals with the stigma of leukoderma. It is a story of a very homely and cheerful Anupama. When the novel opens one sees her as a woman collecting charity funds for the poor children by organising dramas in which she herself plays pivotal role. Dr. Anand, a handsome person, is bewitched by her beauty and falls in love with her by her. Initially Anand's mother Radhakka was reluctant about this marriage but Anand makes her agree to the proposal and ultimately, the marriage was accomplished and the both were tied in the nuptial. Initially, Anupama was happy with this marriage. But arduous time commences when after some time Anand started to England and Radhakka wanted Anupama to join Anand after the Lakshmi Puja, which would be after two months. On the day of

Lakshmi puja a hot live coal fell on her leg and she discovered the white patch on her leg. Because of her lowly position in the family, Anupama doesn't dare to discuss it with her in-laws, but visits the skin specialist secretly. She consulted a dermatologist and found it was Leukoderma or vitiligo. She had to lie to Radhakka to make visits to the skin specialist. Unfortunately one day she was caught by Radhakka and her disease was revealed. They treated her like untouchable and send her to her father.

Anupama was blamed for hiding the disease and marrying Anand wilfully. He was the only person who knew the truth. He just believed what his mother said ignoring the other side of the coin. Ignorant villagers circulate malicious rumours about her. Anupama wrote many letters expecting soothing words from him but all in vain. Anand has turned a deaf ear to her plights. He didn't pacify her nor even met her when he came to India for his sister's marriage. This has made Anupama's life miserable. Poor Anupama worried for three years, suffering the humiliation of her step-mother, Sabakka as her daughters were not married because of her. The taboos of a narrow-minded indifferent society combine to break her spirit pushing her to the edge of suicide. Her condition had become so pathetic that she was on the verge of committing suicide. However the indomitable human spirit emerges victorious and Anupama rebuilds her life and career with great maturity of thought and action.

Resolved to re-ignite her life, she moves to Bombay to meet her friend Sumitra. She was affectionately invited by Sumitra and Hari, her husband. She stays in their house for a year and Hari finds a job for her. She finds the real man in Hari and moves to Dolly's house. She helps Anupama, as Anupama helped Dolly a lot when she met with an accident. Dolly made Anupama to stay in her house as she left for Australia after her marriage. Here Anupama gets her life worth living. She also becomes a professor and once again directs plays on the stage. Anupama meets with an accident and was treated by Dr. Vasant. Dr Vasant was impressed and infatuated by her personality and her noble character and proposes her for marriage. But she told very clearly:

“I don't want to get entangle again in the same circle of husband and family. My past had taught me a very valuable lesson.”(*Mahashweta*, 150)

Meanwhile Anand realizes his mistake and searches for Anupama. After a long time he finds her but now Anupama rejects him. Anand's sincere change had no way melted Anupama's heart. She wiped away her dream:

“Like Rohini to Chandra, like Lakshmi to Narayana, am I to him. Just as the creeper depends on a tree, emotionally I depend on him. I cannot live without him, for his sake, I am ready to renounce everything. Let society say anything it wishes. I do not care...” (*Mahashweta*, 151)

The novel ends with the same play *Mahashweta* that has brought them together. A new woman has emerged with the value of identity and revolt against the tyranny and double standards of the hypocritical society.

Mahashweta is an inspiring story of courage and resilience in a world marred by illusions and betrayals. This poignant story offers hope and solace to the victims of the prejudices that govern society even today. She is determined to rebuild her life against all odds. Anupama goes to Bombay where she finds success, respect and the promise of an enduring friendship. In the first half of the novel, Anupama is portrayed as meek, submissive, enduring and condemning her fate and expecting help from her husband. But in the second half of the novel she emerges as a confident, self-sufficient, guiding and a respectable person. Murty has depicted her as a confident woman finding her own identity.

The novel exhibits that though the country is globalised, people too are advanced in making money but not maintaining human relationships. The reading of *Mahashweta* by Sudha Murty will show the path of a satisfied life.

Through this novel the writer attacks the stereotypes that we often live with but cannot and do not reject. The book compels the reader to look inwards and question our attitudes.

Varsha Adalja

A well-known litterateur, **Varsha Adalja**, is a Gujarati novelist, playwright and negotiator. She began her literary career as an editor of *Sudha*, a women's weekly from 1973–1976, and later with *Gujarati Femina*, another women's magazine from 1989–90. She holds an executive office with Gujarati Sahitya Parishad since 1978. She has explored lepers' colonies,

prison life and has worked among 'adivasis'. She has penned 40 books including 22 novels and seven volumes of short stories. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for Gujarati language for her novel *Ansaar*, 1995. She has also produced an award winning television film on leprosy. Many of her novels delineate women's lives and explore the problems they face in the contemporary world. The broad range of life in a modern city is also central to her writings. She researches backgrounds pedantically before depicting in her novels. Her novels often portray women who have consistently been exploited and marginalized but who gain strength and insight through those very experiences. Varsha Adalja has projected women in her writings with contemporary realistic approach. Her novels and stories present a true and realistic portrayal of woman.

Quest for self in *Ansaar*

The first edition of *Ansaar* came in 1992 and the last edition came in February 2013. The root of this novel lies in the true story published in magazine of 'Shram Mandir'. It was published as periodical in 'Janmabhoomi Pravasi'. *Ansaar* (1992) focuses on the sufferings of a leprosy patient named Rupa. It criticizes double moral standards of the so-called modern society. Gunavant Shah remarks:

"Varshabahene navalkathaoma potano maulik avaj gujarati prajane sambhalavyo che. Temne samvedanshiltani aradhana kari che. Ansaar ne kendriya Sahitya Academyno award malyo che te yogya j che." (Shah, 2)

(In her novels, Varshaben has made Gujarati people heard her most fundamental voice. She has worshipped sensitivity. *Ansaar* was aptly conferred Central Sahitya Academy Award.)

Rupa is a daughter in law of a very affluent and reputed family that include- her Doctor huaband- Shailesh, Vanalataben- mother in law, brother in law- Anup and son- Yash. She was blessed with all the worldly happiness. She has a loving husband. Her mother in law is a known social worker. Gradually, an enemy called- leprosy enters in her life. On the other hand, her brother in law, Anup leaves home to marry Maria, a Christian girl against the wishes of family members. One by one, the wall of her happy life shatters. Vanalataben considered her like daughter, but when she learnt that Rupa has become victim of leprosy, she abandons her from her home. She even intimates Shailesh that her presence is no more

needed in the home. Rupa was left with no other alternative than to leave her home. Alike truth of disease, truth of hypocrisy is also revealed here. Leprosy snatched away her son, her motherhood from her.

Rupa is an idol of compassion. She is sentimental, meek, delicate and docile compared to Anupama who is brilliant dedicated and determined. She has the capability to understand pain and trauma of other people:

“To su e strione matra nirjiv chijvastuoni j jarur che? Prem ni nahi? Hunf ni nahi? Tamne khabar che e..e..bai pase ketketli vastuo hati. Pan ene potanu koi manas joitu hatu. Potanu svajan. Potanu ghar.”(Ansaar, 20)

(Do those women need mere inanimate thing? Not love? Not Warmth? Do you know that..that.. lady has so many things. But she yearned for her own person. Her own relative. Her home.)

This becomes an irony of her own life as she was not aware that this statement is going to fit in her own life.

Shailesh drops her in a distant Matrushi Kashiba Leprosy Hospital of Vadodara. Stunned by hospital's atmosphere, she recalls her husband, her son continuously. Her heart churns and yearns for her family, but the hospitalized patients becomes her family members. Suffocated by the atmosphere of hospital, one day she carefully runs away from there only to learn the news of her own death. She changes her name as Kusum and stays in a hotel. Here she experiences the wicked sight of people. She was saved from the vulgarities of evil Piramji and ones again comes to the leprosy hospital with the help of an Inspector. There she receives love and warmth from humane like Manudada and Jesika. Because of the trickery in the hospital she again runs away from there and adopts her name as Savitri. She accidentally comes to a slum area of lepers. Gradually she feels at home here. Several true workers create an entire 'Shram Mandir'. Her motherhood is satisfied in becoming a foster mother of Meera. An entire family of people striving to live in full bloom and happiness emerges. Is it a sign of spring? This statement frames the conclusion of the novel. Rupa melts by hearing plights of new patients. Her beliefs, previous understanding etc all shatters and she was liberated from the blood ties. Her heart weaves with love in a vast house given by God. At the end of the

novel, Anup, Maria and Yash enters as guests visiting Shram Mandir. She receives the new of death of her husband and her mother in law. Anup wishes to take her to Mumbai with him but for Rupa happiness lies in serving at Shram Mandir. She gives Meera's hand to Yash and her painful journey end with the feeling of 'Vasdheiv Kutumbkam'. All her pains end through Shram Mandir and she decides to spent rest of her life serving lepers.

Conclusion:

To conclude, both novelists depict the pathetic conditions of women in spite of a progressing society. Despite phenomenal advancement in science and technology, the ethics of humanity is diminishing. Their novels capitulate to the reflection of Indian consciousness that presented through legendary episodes, characters, their experiences and the related situations. The novels furnish mixed and sundry ideas prevailed in orthodox Indian society and painstaking firmness of an Indian woman. Through the character of Rupa and Anupama they give some exposition to the fate and trauma of leprosy and leukoderma patients at societal level. With the advancement and extension of science and technology, ethical vigour of human society has decreased instead of increasing. Man has conquered the outer world through study, experiments, job and quality life style but not the inner world. - It exposes many superstitious beliefs of people whose prejudices govern the society even today. The novels show human being's self-exploration comes only after a severe suffering but not as a normal individual. the novels mainly focus issues like love, marriage, separation, social taboos and inhibitions, indifference towards the victims of disease like leukoderma and leprosy, problem of rehabilitation after abandoned by the family, extent of growth and recognition as human beings and crisis of conscience and values by the fellow human beings.

By choosing to be Meera's motherly guardian, Rupa attains and accomplishes her self-actualization. Adalja seems to be more footed in Indian soil as Rupa wish to be foster mother and to serve leprosy patients. This is enough to make them harmonious whole human beings. Whereas in Murty's Anupama self- realisation comes by establishing herself in a career.

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