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# 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*

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## Abstract

*Sudha Murthy, a renowned Indian author writing in English, explores the challenges confronted by women within a male-dominated and tradition-bound society in her novels and short stories. This article delves into how Murthy's female characters grapple with the constraints of a conservative environment, as depicted in works like "Mahasweta" and "House of Cards". Women across the nation encounter various hurdles in striving to maintain their dignity, spanning realms such as employment, healthcare, and property rights. Consequently, the journey towards women's empowerment in India remains a formidable one. Through Murthy's narratives, the narrative sheds light on the prevalent issues of violence, degradation, and exploitation faced by women. Globally, women and girls confront persistent challenges including violence, discrimination, inequality, and poverty, despite their foundational contributions to society. This article aims to draw attention to a resilient and proactive women's movement, comprising individuals capable of challenging patriarchal norms, addressing the underlying causes of inequality, and advocating for their full rights.*

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Inequality.

## Introduction

Sudha Murthy, though not explicitly labeling herself as a feminist writer, often portrays educated, astute, middle-class, urban women in her works who are well-versed in contemporary issues. These characters grapple with the dilemmas and choices typical of educated urban women, navigating the tension between modernity and tradition. Despite their strong will, Murthy's protagonists aren't depicted as radical individuals seeking to upend social and familial structures merely to assert their freedom. Instead, they confront injustices within their cultural milieu while striving to understand their own identities. In the realm of Indian English Literature, Sudha Murthy stands out

among many prolific authors. She is a multifaceted figure – a businesswoman, educator, social worker, and accomplished author proficient in both English and Kannada. Her writing eloquently captures the experiences of ordinary middle-class Indian women, blending simplicity with depth. Many of her works serve as protests against the exploitation and marginalization of women within patriarchal systems. Sudha Murthy's fame extends beyond her literary achievements; she is also recognized for her philanthropic endeavors through the Infosys Foundation. Additionally, her pioneering role as the first female engineer at Tata Motors underscores her commitment to challenging gender norms. This defiance against sexism is mirrored in the heroines of her stories, who awaken to reclaim their rights. Moreover, Sudha Murthy has made significant contributions to children's literature, imbuing her tales with Indian traditions and values to impart moral lessons. Notable among her works in this genre are *"How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Write and Other Stories," "Grandma's Bag of Stories," "Bird with Golden Wings and Other Stories,"* and *"Magic Drum and Other Favorite Stories."*

Post-Independence Indian writers have depicted women across a spectrum of roles and experiences, particularly focusing on the dynamics within married life. Broadly, they have categorized married women into three generational archetypes. Firstly, there are those from the older generation who conform to the traditional notion of a husband as Pati Prameshwar, whether by choice or societal pressure. Secondly, there emerges a cohort of women who assertively strive for their own identities within the confines of marriage. They challenge societal norms, seeking autonomy without severing marital ties, navigating a path where they confront what was rejected to them attain what they desire. Lastly, the third generation portrays women who are willing to terminate their marriages if they don't find compatibility with their spouses. At times, they defy orthodox conventions, a departure considered morally objectionable by society.

Indian feminism isn't adversarial towards men; rather, it serves as a platform and movement to highlight social and cultural issues that adversely impact women within a male-dominated society. Postcolonial Indian English writers delve into significant aspects of women's experiences, including their journey towards self-realization, emancipation from traditional roles, interactions with men, and aspirations. Drawing from their unique social contexts, these writers offer diverse perspectives on how women can assert themselves, articulate their desires and needs, navigate challenges, and assert themselves. Despite their individual approaches, a common thread across their works is the portrayal of women as victims of patriarchy. Central to their narratives is the transformation of women from idealized figures to resilient, self-reliant individuals on a quest for self-discovery and empowerment. Despite their strong resolve, Murthy's protagonists refrain from radical actions aimed at dismantling social or familial structures merely for the sake of showcasing their freedom. Instead, they confront injustices within their cultural milieu, striving to assert their identities while addressing societal injustices.

Sudha Murthy skillfully portrays the life of an average middle-class Indian woman with clarity and rich detail, shedding light on various patriarchal institutions that mistreat and exploit women. Her writings often delve into the societal roles and positions assigned to women, highlighting the challenges they face. One of her notable works, "Mahashweta," offers a nuanced exploration of feminism and women's empowerment within society. Murthy's interests extend beyond solely women's issues; she delves into the profound social turmoil experienced by young Indians amidst the era of globalization. The shifting landscape of the Indian economy during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, marked by globalization, has profoundly impacted the social and mental well-being of today's youth—a subject that Murthy keenly observes and reflects upon in her writings.

Sudha Murthy's characters serve as mirrors reflecting the everyday struggles and triumphs of the average person. Through narratives like "Amma, What's Your Duty," "The Secret," and "My

Biggest Mistake,” she vividly portrays the experiences of young individuals and their journeys of learning from mentors. Murthy’s storytelling often transports children to different realms, offering passionate depictions of young people grappling with life’s lessons. Central to her tales is the depiction of ordinary individuals navigating societal norms, imparting valuable lessons on kindness, empathy, and community engagement. By presenting relatable scenarios, Murthy’s stories equip children with the virtues necessary to navigate life’s challenges and achieve personal growth. From her narratives, children glean lessons on self-reliance, compassion, and gratitude, learning practical approaches to tackling real-life problems with simplicity and resilience.

Where parents are occupied with work & move away from their narrative place and shift to apartments. Consequently, the opportunity for storytelling within families has diminished, impacting the cultural fabric of society. Furthermore, modern educational practices often neglect the importance of storytelling in children’s development, prioritizing instructional methods over imaginative engagement. However, storytelling offers a unique avenue for children to learn valuable lessons and moral values in an enjoyable manner, distinguishing it from rote learning. It fosters a deeper understanding of right and wrong while providing a space for creativity and enjoyment. Thus, the revival of storytelling traditions, both within families and educational settings, can enrich children’s learning experiences and nurture their holistic development.

In Sudha Murthy’s collection of stories, “The Golden Fish and the Demon: The Bird with Golden Wings,” various narratives delve into profound moral lessons. For instance, in “The Golden Fish and the Demon,” the tale centers on Laxmi, a character consumed by greed who transforms into a hideous demon, serving as a cautionary tale about the perils of avarice. Similarly, “Payasam for a Bear” emphasizes the importance of keeping one’s word. “The Precious Rupee; The Bird with Golden Wings” underscores the significance of hard work in achieving success. Moreover, “The Way You Look At” explores the subjective nature of perception and the influence of individual perspectives on reality.

Sudha Murthy’s storytelling embodies a unique fusion of ancient and modern Indian sensibilities, reflecting her multidimensional identity as both a consultant and psychoanalyst. Through her narratives, she explores into the intricacies of the human experience, offering nuanced portrayals of characters that challenge conventional literary standards. Murthy’s approach to gender issues transcends simplistic binaries, as she elucidates the complexities of patriarchy in Indian society. While not exclusively focused on women’s problems, her works often serve as a starting point for exploring broader societal issues. By examining the dynamics within familial relationships and the impact of capitalism on social bonds, Murthy sheds light on the evolving fabric of Indian society. Her stories intricately weave together elements of magic, tradition, and social conventions, offering a vivid portrayal of the contradictions inherent in Indian life. From beliefs in magic and omens to the enduring influence of the caste system, Murthy’s narratives illuminate the multifaceted realities of contemporary India, prompting readers to contemplate the intricate tapestry of Indian culture and society.

Throughout history, women have faced significant challenges regarding their autonomy, rights & freedom particularly in decisions concerning their lives and bodies. Across various societies, patriarchal structures have traditionally dictated what is deemed acceptable or beneficial for women. However, as the adage goes, change is inevitable, and societal dynamics evolve over time, including attitudes towards women. In the early stages of societal development, traces of feminist principles or strong feminine influences were prevalent. However, as societies progressed, matriarchal tendencies gradually yielded to patriarchal norms. It’s conceivable that the emphasis on childbirth and childcare, inherent in the survival and perpetuation of any society, contributed to the prominence of female perspectives. In essence, the importance of female thought cannot be

overstated, particularly in shaping the society and addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of women. As societies continue to evolve, it becomes imperative to recognize and uphold the value of women's voices and contributions in shaping a more equitable and inclusive future.

As societies and communities evolve, there's a noticeable shift towards prioritizing control over assets, resources, and people, leading to a diminishing emphasis on the nurturing aspects associated with feminism. This transition often sees a reinforcement of masculine traits such as strength and toughness. Examining religious texts reveals a common trend where women initially held significant roles, only to be gradually marginalized as men started to dominate. For instance, in Hinduism, women were revered as embodiments of the divine, symbolizing love, compassion, and balance in the universe. They served as priestesses, scholars, artists, and advisors, wielding considerable influence in shaping societal norms. However, over time, male insecurities led to reinterpretations of religious scriptures, relegating women to subordinate positions and reinforcing notions of their dependence on men for protection and decision-making. This societal shift restricted women's autonomy, necessitating male guardianship to regulate their lives and actions. Across various religious traditions, similar patterns emerged, wherein women were confined behind veils or subjected to restrictive practices to curb male promiscuity. These actions were often justified using religious texts, perpetuating patriarchal structures and reinforcing gender inequalities.

Societal norms and expectations often impose a conflict between a woman's individuality and the predetermined roles she's expected to fulfill. The pressure to conform to societal standards can force women to choose between asserting their own desires and conforming to traditional roles such as being a dutiful daughter, devoted wife, and nurturing mother. This dichotomy can undermine a woman's autonomy over her own life. Throughout history, various forms of media, including books, songs, and movies, have perpetuated negative stereotypes of women, portraying them as self-centered and selfish if they deviate from societal expectations. An example of this is the idealization of motherhood, which emphasizes a woman's primary role as a caregiver and nurturer. Women are often indoctrinated with the belief that being a good mother, particularly in raising virtuous sons, is the pinnacle of womanhood. Any aspirations or pursuits outside of this traditional role are deemed selfish and discouraged. This societal pressure to conform to predefined gender roles can be stifling for women, inhibiting their ability to pursue their own passions and ambitions. It's essential to challenge these stereotypes and create spaces where women can embrace their individuality and make choices that align with their own values and aspirations, rather than conforming to narrow societal expectations.

## Conclusion

Sudha Murthy's characters resonate with the everyday people we encounter, drawing readers in with their relatability and compelling narratives. Once we start reading one of her stories, we're captivated until the very end, as these characters serve for the stories' central themes. Murthy pays meticulous attention to crafting her characters, ensuring they are portrayed authentically in their appearance, speech, and actions, further enhancing the impact of her storytelling. Many of the characters in Murthy's stories exemplify perseverance and hard work in the face of adversity, with education often serving as a catalyst for self-improvement. Murthy's own journey, from becoming India's first female engineer to achieving success as a prominent businesswoman, serves as an inspiring example for others to contribute positively to society. This commitment to societal betterment is evident in her writing, establishing her as one of the foremost Indian novelists writing in English. While Murthy is renowned for her works in Kannada, her translations into English have expanded her reach and influence. However, her narratives also shed light on ongoing issues such as violence, discrimination, and poverty faced by women worldwide, despite their foundational

contributions to society. This underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to address gender inequality and empower women to secure their rights. Indeed, this article serves as a rallying call to highlight the vital role of the women's movement in challenging patriarchal norms, addressing systemic inequalities, and advocating for the rights and dignity of all women. She has depicted women as resilient warriors in the family

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