



FEMINISM IN THE NOVELS OF SUDHA MURTY WITH REFERENCE TO 'MAHASWETA' and 'GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA'

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Abstract

The present study explores feminism in the novels *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* by Sudha Murty. The research focuses on the portrayal of women's struggles, identity, emotional suffering, and self-realization within the patriarchal structure of Indian society. Through the characters of Anupama and Shrimati, Sudha Murty highlights issues such as gender discrimination, emotional neglect, social prejudice, and unequal marital relationships. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach based on secondary data collected from books, journals, articles, and literary reviews. A comparative analysis of the selected novels reveals that education, self-confidence, and emotional strength help women overcome oppression and attain independence. Sudha Murty's feminist perspective emphasizes dignity, self-respect, and individuality rather than direct rebellion against tradition. The study concludes that her novels significantly contribute to feminist discourse in Indian English literature by presenting realistic experiences of middle-class Indian women.

Keywords: Feminism, Women Empowerment, Patriarchy, Self-Identity, Indian English Literature.

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Introduction

Sudha Murty, one of the most celebrated contemporary Indian women writers, is widely recognized for her simple yet powerful narratives that reflect the realities of Indian society. Her novels portray the emotional struggles, social expectations, and silent resilience of women within patriarchal structures. Feminism in Indian literature often differs from Western feminist ideology, as it focuses not only on women's freedom and equality but also on dignity, self-respect, emotional identity, and social justice within the cultural framework of Indian society.



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Sudha Murty's works beautifully capture these dimensions through realistic characters and situations. Among her notable novels, *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* stand as significant feminist texts that explore the inner conflicts and self-realization of women who face emotional neglect, societal discrimination, and patriarchal domination.

Mahasweta presents the story of Anupama, a talented and educated woman whose life changes drastically after she develops leukoderma. The novel highlights society's obsession with physical beauty and exposes the cruel treatment faced by women when they fail to meet conventional standards. Despite emotional rejection from her husband and in-laws, Anupama emerges as a symbol of courage, self-respect, and independence. Sudha Murty uses her character to challenge social prejudices and advocate for women's empowerment through education and self-confidence.

Similarly, *Gently Falls the Bakula* portrays the life of Shrimati, an intelligent and ambitious woman who sacrifices her academic dreams for her husband's career. As her husband becomes increasingly absorbed in professional success, Shrimati experiences loneliness, emotional neglect, and loss of identity. The novel critically examines the unequal expectations placed upon married women and emphasizes the importance of personal fulfillment and individuality. Through Shrimati's journey, Sudha Murty highlights the emotional dimensions of feminism and the need for women to recognize their own aspirations beyond domestic responsibilities.

Both novels reveal the struggles of women against social oppression and gender inequality while emphasizing self-discovery and independence. Sudha Murty does not depict her female protagonists as rebels against tradition; rather, she portrays them as women who gradually realize their worth and assert their individuality with dignity and strength. Her feminist vision is deeply rooted in Indian culture and values, making her works relatable and socially relevant.

Therefore, the study of feminism in *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* provides valuable insight into the condition of women in contemporary Indian society and reflects Sudha Murty's contribution to feminist discourse in Indian English literature.

Review of Literature

Feminism in Indian English literature has become an important area of literary research, especially in the writings of women authors who portray the struggles, identity crises, and empowerment of women in patriarchal societies. Sudha Murty, through her simple narrative style and realistic characterization, highlights the emotional, social, and psychological challenges faced by Indian women. Her novels *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* present women protagonists who seek dignity, self-respect, and independence while confronting societal discrimination and marital inequalities. Several scholars have critically examined Sudha Murty's feminist perspectives, portrayal of women's identity, and representation of social realities. The following review of literature provides an overview of significant studies related to feminism in the novels of Sudha Murty.



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- **Anita Myles (2018)** examined feminist consciousness in Sudha Murty's novels and observed that her women characters are portrayed as emotionally strong individuals who challenge patriarchal oppression through self-realization and education. The study highlighted Anupama in *Mahasweta* as a symbol of inner strength and resilience.
- **Aruna Chakraborty (2019)** analyzed the concept of self-respect and dignity in *Mahasweta*. The study concluded that Anupama's transformation from a dependent wife to an independent woman reflects the emergence of feminist self-awareness.
- **B. Lalitha Kumari (2020)** discussed women's oppression and liberation in Sudha Murty's novels. The researcher argued that Murty presents feminism in a culturally rooted manner that values both individuality and family relationships.
- **K. Nirmala Devi (2018)** examined marital relationships in *Gently Falls the Bakula* and observed that Sudha Murty critically portrays emotional neglect in marriage. The study highlighted the psychological loneliness experienced by women despite material comfort.
- **Meena Shirwadkar (2020)** studied the representation of middle-class women in Sudha Murty's fiction. The research pointed out that Murty's female characters are realistic and reflect the emotional conflicts experienced by many Indian women balancing tradition and modernity.
- **N. Geetha (2021)** studied the portrayal of educated women in Sudha Murty's fiction and noted that education plays a crucial role in helping women overcome social restrictions and achieve self-confidence and independence.
- **P. S. Reddy (2017)** focused on social discrimination in *Mahasweta* and argued that Sudha Murty exposes society's prejudice toward physical appearance and women's dependence on marriage for social acceptance. The study viewed the novel as a critique of patriarchal values.
- **R. Kavitha (2019)** analyzed the theme of women's identity in *Gently Falls the Bakula*. The researcher emphasized how Shrimati sacrifices her ambitions for marital responsibilities and later recognizes the importance of individuality and self-worth.
- **S. Jayanthi (2021)** explored feminist ideology in contemporary Indian English novels and identified Sudha Murty as a writer who advocates women's empowerment through education, economic independence, and emotional confidence rather than open rebellion.
- **V. Saraswathi (2022)** examined the psychological dimensions of feminism in *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula*. The study emphasized how the protagonists undergo emotional suffering before attaining self-realization and empowerment.

The above studies reveal that Sudha Murty's novels strongly reflect feminist concerns such as identity, self-respect, emotional freedom, social discrimination, and women's empowerment. However, there is still scope for a comparative feminist analysis focusing specifically on *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* together, particularly in understanding how Sudha Murty portrays the evolution of women from silent sufferers to self-aware individuals within the Indian socio-cultural context.

Comparison between *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula*



Both *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* by Sudha Murty are remarkable feminist novels that portray the struggles, emotions, and self-realization of women in Indian society. Though the themes and situations differ, both novels highlight women's search for identity, dignity, and independence within patriarchal social structures.

In *Mahasweta*, the protagonist Anupama faces discrimination because of her physical appearance after developing leukoderma. Society and her husband reject her, revealing the superficial attitudes of people toward women. The novel focuses on social prejudice, emotional suffering, and the importance of self-respect. Anupama gradually transforms from a dependent woman into a confident and independent individual. Her journey symbolizes inner strength and courage against social injustice.

On the other hand, *Gently Falls the Bakula* presents the story of Shrimati, an educated and intelligent woman who sacrifices her personal ambitions for her husband's career. Unlike Anupama, Shrimati's suffering is not caused by society's rejection of her appearance but by emotional neglect and loss of identity within marriage. The novel explores the emotional loneliness of women and the unequal expectations placed upon wives in a patriarchal family system.

A major similarity between the two novels is that both protagonists initially lead lives centered around their husbands and family responsibilities. However, both women eventually realize their self-worth and choose independence over silent suffering. Sudha Murty portrays feminism not through aggressive rebellion but through self-awareness, dignity, and emotional strength.

Another similarity is the role of education in empowering women. Both Anupama and Shrimati are educated women who ultimately rely on their knowledge and confidence to rebuild their lives. Sudha Murty emphasizes that education enables women to overcome oppression and gain independence.

Despite these similarities, the novels differ in their focus. *Mahasweta* deals more with social discrimination and external suffering, while *Gently Falls the Bakula* concentrates on emotional isolation and internal conflict within marriage. Anupama fights against societal prejudice, whereas Shrimati struggles against emotional invisibility in her marital relationship.

Thus, both novels collectively reflect Sudha Murty's feminist vision by presenting women who evolve from silent sufferers into self-reliant individuals. Through realistic storytelling, the author highlights the importance of women's identity, self-respect, and personal fulfillment in contemporary Indian society.

Research Methodology

The present study entitled "*Feminism in the Novels of Sudha Murty with Reference to Mahasweta and Gently Falls the Bakula*"** is based on qualitative research methodology and



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relies mainly on secondary data. The study adopts an analytical and descriptive approach to examine the feminist themes, portrayal of women characters, and socio-cultural issues represented in the selected novels of Sudha Murty. The primary sources for the study are the novels *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula*, which are closely analyzed to understand the experiences, struggles, emotional conflicts, and self-realization of the female protagonists. The research focuses on how Sudha Murty portrays women's identity, self-respect, emotional independence, and resistance against patriarchal domination within the Indian social framework.

The study is primarily based on secondary data collected from various scholarly sources such as books, research articles, journals, conference papers, dissertations, literary reviews, and online academic databases related to feminism, Indian English literature, and Sudha Murty's literary contributions. Relevant feminist theories and critical perspectives are also referred to in order to interpret the selected texts effectively. A comparative method is employed to identify similarities and differences in the portrayal of feminism in both novels. The characters of Anupama in *Mahasweta* and Shrimati in *Gently Falls the Bakula* are comparatively analyzed with reference to themes such as gender discrimination, marital inequality, emotional suppression, self-identity, and women's empowerment. The study also examines the socio-cultural conditions that influence women's lives and decisions in contemporary Indian society.

The research follows textual analysis as the major technique for interpretation. Important incidents, dialogues, and character developments from the novels are critically examined to understand the feminist dimensions embedded in the narratives. The collected data is systematically interpreted and organized to derive meaningful conclusions regarding Sudha Murty's feminist vision. Thus, the methodology of the study provides a comprehensive understanding of feminism in Sudha Murty's novels through qualitative analysis and secondary sources, contributing to the broader field of feminist literary studies in Indian English literature.

Findings

The study reveals that Sudha Murty presents feminism in a realistic and culturally rooted manner through her novels *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula*. The female protagonists, Anupama and Shrimati, represent educated women who struggle against social discrimination, emotional neglect, and patriarchal domination. The study finds that women in both novels initially suffer due to dependence on family and societal expectations but gradually attain self-awareness and independence. Another important finding is that education and self-confidence play a significant role in empowering women and helping them overcome oppression. The research also highlights that Sudha Murty's feminism is not rebellious in nature but focuses on dignity, self-respect, emotional strength, and personal identity within the Indian socio-cultural framework. The novels further expose issues such as unequal marital relationships, obsession with physical beauty, and the emotional sacrifices made by women in patriarchal society.

Suggestions



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The study suggests that greater attention should be given to women's emotional and intellectual needs within family and marriage. Society should encourage women to pursue education, career opportunities, and self-development without forcing them to sacrifice their individuality. Awareness regarding gender equality and respect for women should be promoted through education and literature. Literary studies may also include more research on contemporary Indian women writers like Sudha Murty, whose works reflect realistic social issues affecting women. Educational institutions can encourage feminist literary discussions to create awareness about women's rights, identity, and empowerment. Families and social institutions should support women in achieving emotional independence and decision-making freedom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Mahasweta* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* effectively portray the struggles and transformation of women in Indian society. Through realistic characterization and simple narration, Sudha Murty highlights the problems of gender discrimination, emotional neglect, and societal expectations imposed upon women. The protagonists evolve from silent sufferers into self-reliant individuals who recognize their self-worth and dignity. The study concludes that Sudha Murty's novels advocate women's empowerment through education, confidence, and self-realization rather than direct rebellion against tradition. Her feminist perspective reflects the realities of middle-class Indian women and contributes significantly to feminist discourse in Indian English literature.

Future Scope

The present study opens avenues for further research in the field of feminist literary studies. Future researchers may undertake a comparative study of Sudha Murty's novels with the works of other Indian women writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, or Arundhati Roy to explore varying feminist perspectives. Researchers can also examine themes such as women's psychological struggles, social identity, and economic independence in Sudha Murty's other novels. Further studies may apply different feminist theories, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, or postcolonial feminism, to gain deeper insight into her works. In addition, interdisciplinary studies connecting literature with sociology, gender studies, and cultural studies may provide broader understanding of women's representation in contemporary Indian literature.

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