

**A Liberal Feminist Reading of Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* and  
*Gently Falls the Bakula***

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## Preface

Globalisation has created a capitalistic society, wherein a stage was set up – where gender disparities are discussed and reforms are encouraged. Women have acquired agency to speak up for themselves in various spheres, including family. Education, wealth and occupation serve as catalysts to women's emancipation. Culture and society have attributed strict rules and conventions in the name of safety and security throughout the pages of history in India. Writers like Sudha Murthy pens stories about women who have faced the brunt of the patriarchy and enforced morality.

The current paper discusses the state of women in her novels *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *Mahashweta*. The relatable tales and critically studied in the light of egalitarian liberal feminism. John Stuart Mill and related theorists' views and analyses play an important role in tracing empowerment, mobility and transformation (of mindset) in the considered texts. Chapter One is an introduction to Sudha Murthy, John Stuart Mill, both of their works and a background on liberal feminism. Chapter Two titled 'Identity and Education in *Gently Falls the Bakula*' explores the metropolitan life of Shrikant and Shrimati and traditional dilemma that delineates female identity and deny agency to their expression. Chapter Three titled 'Empowering *Mahashweta*: Defeating White Patches of Oppression' analyses the life of Anupama and Anand. *Mahashweta* is a story that reveals the ironical superficial obsession of long-standing Indian traditional culture on external beauty.

Both texts can be used to understand how education and employment can enable women and provide them agency for self-expression and self-realisation.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

With the growing numbers of women-owned enterprises, there has been a sizable amount of inquiry and debate on the discrepancies between male and female entrepreneurship and respective firms. So far, these observations and theories were mostly causal inferences, with little progress made in establishing if such inequalities are commonplace, let alone why they persist. As a result, public policymakers have had little direction on challenging topics, including whether or not women's education and support programmes should be tailored differently from men's programmes. Further, banks that fund new and large corporations rely on their own "gut instinct" to determine if women's and men's companies would operate in a similar fashion or whether they would operate in unique but equally productive ways. A key impediment has been the lack of holistic models for understanding the nature and consequences of issues connected to sex, gender, and commerce. Liberal feminism and social feminism are two viewpoints that assist structure and analysing prior research while also highlighting prospects for future research. According to liberal feminist theory, women are underrepresented in comparison to males due to unequal treatment or structural barriers that deny them critical resources such as business training and experience. Previous research on whether or not financiers and counsellors discriminate against women, as well as whether or not women truly have less relevant education and experience, is compatible with a liberal feminist viewpoint. Those empirical

studies that have been undertaken reveal limited evidence that observable prejudice and any systemic lack of access to resources that women may face impedes their capacity to thrive in business and climb ladders in social institutions such as family.

In terms of progress, women's empowerment policies are of paramount relevance. Women's problems have been subordinated to varying degrees across the world to accommodate the patriarchal norms of society that have historically come down on us. From female foeticide to women's reduced access to various work opportunities, the 'second sex' has been subjugated and denied basic rights and advantages. This paper tracks discrimination in the economic and social sectors, covering government and non-governmental activities in selected novels to offer better and more pleasant human circumstances for women to be fully mobile and enter the public arena. The primary goal of this article is to track the legal discourses of India and their subsequent revisions, which have aided in improving societal situations. Several past legal pronouncements of the Supreme Court and other Indian courts have sustained some landmark judgements favouring women's enhanced visibility and accessibility. However, these interventions are insufficient to bring about the necessary improvement in the situations of women in India, which differ among castes, classes, ethnicities, faiths, and regions. This article presents some major recommendations for women's empowerment in the Indian social context. Liberal Feminism, as perhaps the most popularly renowned socioeconomic and cultural feminist ideology, rushes to the rescue in a world with polarizing disparities, most

obviously gender differences. This strain of feminism underlines the pressing need to grant equal freedoms and privileges to women all over the world, which are formed in conjunction with social, family, civic, and sexual roles. In certain words, the promise of liberal feminism is to achieve equality for women using legal and social reforms. Liberal feminists unanimously agree on the need to reassess the socially-conditioned discriminatory status of men and women by minimizing moral imperative, while rejecting any type of an idealised utopian society. In his article on Liberal Feminism, *The Return of Feminist Liberalism*, Ruth Sample emphasises the demand to endorse autonomous choices for women, either in the public or private spheres, stating,

“Liberal feminists avoid the promotion of particular conceptions of the good life for either men or women, instead of defending a broad sphere of neutrality and privacy within which individuals may pursue forms of life most congenial to them” (Sample 2).

According to global nonprofit ‘Catalyst’ (who promotes and build workplaces that work for women), women even now encounter numerous obstacles if they desire to make it to the top in their vocation notwithstanding embodying half of the labour pool worldwide. Only 27.4 percent of senior management staff roles in the corporate sector are held by women, and one-quarter of companies remain to have no women in such positions (Catalyst, 2016). By first analysing the lack of equity and denial of mobility, this study will seek to gain insight into the reasons and remedies proposed by education and empowerment movements presented by the feminist movements that aim at

helping women's professional and societal development. Using a gender critique of liberal feminism, we can explain the reasons behind the lacklustre of some of these solutions.

One of the most ardent appeals for gender rights in social and political life came from the leading advocate for nineteenth-century liberalism, John Stuart Mill, in the 19th century. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* was welcomed by feminists both then and now as a thoroughly researched defence of women's presence in the country's political arenas. Mill's liberalism had a tremendous effect on nineteenth-century national movements and efforts to incorporate women and other marginalized groups into the realm of political engagement. Leftists in the nineteenth century aimed to bring previously excluded groups into the political realm, therefore redefining the country in terms of a democratic electorate. Both feminists and progressives regarded the fight for women's equality as an integral aspect of the liberalism platform.

Egalitarian-liberal feminists believe that exercising personal autonomy is contingent on certain facilitating scenarios that are poorly available in women's livelihoods or that cultural and organisational configurations frequently fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other aspects of women's wellbeing. They also believe that women's interests and abilities are under-represented in the fundamental surroundings in which they live, and that basic arrangements that foster such circumstances lack credibility since women are under-represented in democratic self-determination procedures. Egalitarian-liberal feminists attribute such individualism deficiencies to the gender scheme or familial hegemonic



norms and establishments and believe that the girls cause must endeavour to detect and solve them. According to egalitarian-liberal feminists, the country may and should be the women's liberation partner in advancing women's independence since protecting and promoting citizens' autonomy is a legitimate responsibility of the state. However, there is a dispute between many egalitarian-liberal feminists concerning the significance of individual liberty in a decent life, the proper role of the state, and how egalitarian-liberal feminism should be validated.

After establishing that women were denied the agency, autonomy, and equality that they deserve, Mill proceeds on to examine why this is the case even with all of civilisation's advancements. He believes that women's positions are based on tradition and the use of force rather than on a sensible appraisal of their circumstances. Women are subjected because 'no other way has been tried'. Furthermore, their dominance is based only on the law of the strongest. Despite the fact that women's subjugation looks natural, Mill observes that all republics appear natural to those who wield them. Mill's position here is based on three more parts of the liberal ideology. For starters, it exemplifies the liberal hostility toward authority and Mill's lifelong struggle against power abuses. Second, it exemplifies one of the basic elements of liberalism and Enlightenment rationalism: the conflict of rationale on the one hand and culture and power on the other. Third, it demonstrates the liberal creed's reformist principles. 'Modern' living mandates that women be granted the equality, competence, and independence that men were striving to accomplish. The persistent subjugation of

women demonstrates that contemporary life's rational ideas have not yet triumphed over the 'law of the strongest'.

The mainstream patriarchy supports the claim that the issues of women from privileged social classes are the only ones worthy of consideration. Feminist reform seeks to achieve social fairness for women within the present framework. Women of privilege demand equality with men of their class. In patriarchy, a societal structure that positions men as superior and women as inferior develops a pattern of sex role phenomena that is profoundly imprinted in the minds of both men and women. It indicates that the culture's structure and their reliance on males make women vulnerable to exploitation. Patriarchal culture enforces fixed gender norms on women in order to keep them submissive. As a result, it is not possible for women to break men's dominance over women unless they first recognise that women are not intended to remain passive, and men are not destined to become aggressive.

There are a lot of reasons why women who are usually positioned in the household realm want to work or pursue a profession in the public domain. This is utilized not only to generate monetary gain but also to manifest themselves. Going into the public sphere to work or have a job is a worthwhile decision for women who are not married since they may realize themselves while earning their own money. In other words, women have the ability to draw more attention to themselves. This is not the case for women who are already married since they must necessarily take a dual position, namely as a wife, mother, and worker, causing their spotlight to be fragmented. In the type of society discussed

previously, the workload of a working woman will be greater than that of a working man since they must attend to their family (husband and child) and other household problems after work, and sometimes even while full-time job.

Several Indian writers disclosed the state of Indian society and the oppression of women. Indian English books portrayed Indian women's struggle to find their own identity. Many Indian English authors represent the issue of feminism and expose the emotional turmoil and scope of liberal feminism in India. Various feminist-oriented English books show how a woman suffers from household tyranny and tries hard to gain acceptance and achieve their once long-forsaken dreams. The author sides with the liberal feminist notion that women should always free themselves from patriarchally imposed societal boundaries. The women in the selected texts go through an adventure to recreate themselves and manifest their individuality. We have examples of strong-willed, assertive, and opinionated women who shaped their opinions and behaviour and demonstrated their power by challenging themselves and defying society's prejudices. Jane Austen's words, in her *Persuasion*, rank high priority here: "I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives" (14).

Mrs Sudha Murthy, an Indian humanitarian volunteer and novelist, has penned a series of short narratives and fiction in a suggestive way that show a realistic depiction of all cultural issues, women participation, loss of identity, and the need for altruistic standards to make living worthwhile. Her value-based works are heavily focused on everyday life, and readers may empathise with some

of the characters. Her works are entrenched in Indian culture, with incidents inspired by everyday life, events, and encounters. These findings show that women are unable to speak out for what they rightfully deserve. Passive sufferings, stoic sacrifice, familial bonds, quiet, social indifference, denial, solitude, fear, isolation, rejection, failure acceptance, individuality, loud protest, and challenging societal conventions have all perished. Sudha Murthy is regarded as one of the most distinguished and significant woman authors in Indian English. A close examination of her works reveals that she seeks to investigate the psychological states of her characters because she believes that the inner life of a man or woman determines his or her character more than the exterior circumstances of life. There is a qualitative difference between feminine sensibility and feminine approach. Women characters produced by Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai of the Western literary canon are more metaphorical, distorted, and controlled. Sudha Murthy describes emancipation as moving from slavery to freedom, from hesitation to self-assertion, and from weakness to power.

Women in the texts researched, such as Shrimati and Anupama become victims of their circumstances. They achieve their potential and bounce back later in life. A woman does not need to bound herself to constraints and set beliefs to suit society; she needs to go beyond and awaken herself to a variety of different options to accomplish her desire. She must begin on a new trip inside herself. The themes mentioned above strongly feature in Sudha Murthy's aesthetic representation of the female characters.

Sudha Murthy's 2008 novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* depicts the inadvertent subjugation in many households. The novel's metaphorical message is that women's lives are more similar to the blossoms of the Bakula Tree. Bakula is a medium-sized evergreen tree that can help to calm any chaotic or congested atmosphere. Shrimathi is a blessing to Shrikanth's life, just as the tree is to the soil. Shrimathi's life, like the blooms of the Bakula tree, gently spreads happiness and success in the life of her husband, Shrikanth. Shrimathi's affection for Shrikanth, according to a common proverb, 'lasts like the scent of maulsari (bakul),' but Shrikanth does not reciprocate Shrimathi's respect and affection. The Bakula tree has been around for a hundred years. Flowers are what draw people to the tiny, light greenish tree. It has a beautiful odour. Even after the blooms have dried and turned brown, they emit a faint aroma. Women, as per the given text, are like Bakula's blooms. They give up their careers and their entire lives for their family members.

Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta* addresses with two categories of females: those who are reasonable, kind, soft-hearted, and understanding, such as Anupama, Dolly, and Sumitra, and those who are self-centred, such as Anupama's stepmother, mother-in-law, Girija. She lives there with Sumithra, her college roommate. Despite the white patch, she welcomed her; this is the first eye-opening incident in the narrative for the readers, as via her roommate Sudha Murthy demonstrated the shift in society's perception. For the time being, Anupama accepts a clerical position (despite being overqualified for it), which boosts her confidence. There, she meets Dolly, who becomes a close friend, and

she decides to stay with her. Meanwhile, Dolly is involved in an accident, and Anupama's blood donation shows the reader that leukoderma is not a barrier to blood donation. The women in both texts, grow individually when they find their own ways to deal with different modes of rejection from society.

Liberal feminists of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries claimed women's capacity and right to engage in public life, at least via suffrage. They investigated the traditional marriage as well as the legislative basis of divorce and land ownership. They questioned the norm of denying women admittance to the same high-quality education as men, as well as to the vocations. Liberal feminists advocated for the removal of women's status as legal dependents of their fathers or husbands. Liberal feminists such as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Virginia Woolf relied on the liberal tradition's principle of equality and personal liberty by examining laws and customs. They contended that, just as class status at birth was no longer a constitutional basis for discrimination against males, sex at infancy was no longer a valid cause for prejudice against women.

Rationalisations varied among liberal feminists. Some feminists maintained that men and women shared equal self-worth; others held that certain women were superior to certain men. As a result, all women ought to be granted the option to exhibit their merits; some even contended that women's attributes were greater to men's. The latter expected impact on public economic and political operation.

Stuart Mill called on each of them when it was tactically beneficial to do so.

However, the liberal argument generally took the form of claiming that personal

progress demands the opportunity to educate and magnify one's qualities.

Disrespecting women right to be educated and the careers meant refusing them the chance to realize personal capacity. Besides that, liberal feminists maintained that women's public engagement would enhance the quality of life as a whole.

Though liberal feminists argued that culture, in broad sense, would profit from qualified women's accomplishments, typically, the initial liberal feminists did not devote due importance to the situations of working-class women. They wanted women to be exposed to the male version of real-world experience, which was that of a white working-class male. Nonetheless, more strident liberal feminists like as Maria Stewart (1803–79) and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906) paid close emphasis to the plight of Black women and employed women.

It would be crucial to highlight that tradition lays the groundwork for gender discrimination. Murty has documented how social traditions instinctually persecute women and praise men. In order to examine the text from this stand point, two central characters and two supporting characters are taken into example. Discrimination against women has become part and parcel of cultural mores. Shrikantrao Deshpande, the father of Shrimati, is an individual who is not anxious to obtain any career. He has never acquired a single paisa in his life. However he is lauded by society. Shrikantrao's wife, Kamala, is a well-educated woman. She is the family's sole earner. She does not, however, have economic liberty. She is also dominated by her mother-in-law and is frequently accused of using obscene language. According to cultural conventions, she is not supposed to open her mouth in response to her mother-in-law's husband's overbearing

personality. In the family, she is supposed to be an introvert. All such themes related to the characters of *Gently Falls the Bakula* are explored in the second chapter. The third chapter explores the unique battle of women in *Mahashweta*. The empowering nature of education and identity are explored towards the conclusion. Through this, Sudha Murthy's works unravel the need of mobility in a society dominated by patriarchy. Liberal feminist observations will serve as catalyst to this endeavour.



## Chapter Two

### Identity and Education in *Gently Falls the Bakula*

Sudha Murty is a talented writer who has included Indian culture in her creative works as it is. She has a deep appreciation for her region's culture and customs, which is evident in practically all of her works. The novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* is no exception to this rule. The title of the book is a symbolic depiction of her region's cultural customs. Bakula is a unique flower with a wonderful aroma. It is utilised as a gift to the region's spiritual power. Murty consciously picked the flower to represent Shrimati, one of the primary characters. Bakula has a particular bond with Shrimati. The cultural practice in Hubli is to braid one's hair with bakula flowers. The bakula flower is considered as the flower of riches and joy in their culture. The flower is shown as a love emblem in many ancient traditions. Shrimati and Shrikant, the protagonists, are both passionately and logically drawn to the flower. Murty used the flower to show how the conventionally understood flower forms a conceptual link with one and an empathetic bond with the other.

Human beings are classified as male or female based on biological distinctions, whereas humans are classified as masculine or feminine based on cultural differences. The intensity either of these natures determines one's freedom and mobility in society. Gender discrimination is thus a socially created phenomenon. It is stated in the context as follows:

Since they considered themselves aristocrats, the landowners did not believe in working. They spent their time indulging themselves

in all sorts of bad habits. It was a purely patriarchal society where the head of the family decided everything – be it arranging a marriage, making a donation to a temple or an ordinary household matter. The women were always in the background, suppressed, and subservient, irrespective of their age (Murthy 12).

Shrikant and Shrimati are virtually identical in terms of potential traits and socially defined standards. In essence, Shrimati is a game ahead of Shrikant in education. However, the societal treatment they undergo is rather different. She is tormented by her in-laws after they are linked in the knot of wedlock. He is regarded as a financial asset to be traded on the marriage market. Shrimati is mocked by her mother-in-law because she is unable to meet her mother-in-law's requirements. Dowry is a custom that contributes significantly to women's subjugation. Both families admire Shrikant, but Shrimati is made to feel oppressed by her mother-in-law. Shrimati, like her mother, does not verbalize her displeasure with the harassment. She attempts to win their hearts, but she ultimately fails. The novel also reveals the contemporary cultural attitude of women as the primary reason for not having a child. Shrimati is depressed since she has been criticised for not having a kid. This pains Shrimati's heart profoundly, and it is conveyed as follows: "She remembered Gangakka referring to her as a barren woman. How could she convince the uneducated, unsympathetic Gangakka that she was not to be blamed, but neither was Shrikant. She continued sobbing" (Murthy 98). It becomes evident that culture views men and women from a different perspective.

The concept of matrimony is not an exemption to culture's role in growing the gender disparity. There are culturally specific conventions that women must observe in the organization of marriage. It is represented via Kamala's words: "In our society, you marry not only an individual, but also his family" (Murthy 53). Although Shrimati first objects to her mother, she recognizes the gravity of her mother's remarks only after her marriage. The female mentality is inherently geared to the culturally constructed rules of society. It gives birth to the popular theory of 'psycho feminism'. Shrimati isn't immune to the psycho feminist stance. In her sentimental devotion, she is willing to make any cost for the sake of marriage with Shrikant. It is clearly noted, "Living like this may be very common in our culture" (Murthy 113). Feminism as a movement is all about equal opportunities and access for all genders, keeping in mind that historical systematic oppression of women. In failing to acknowledge that feminism is and should be for both the husband and wife in a wedlock, any attempt at liberation falls short.

Many roadblocks appear on the path towards liberation. One of them is religion, or specifically, the attitude of a society's value system towards religion. The author has presented the difference of attitude in both the characters: "Though Shrimati and Shrikant had such a common cultural background, their temperaments were very different" (13). The writer has exposed the socioeconomic backgrounds of the two households. Murty has also demonstrated how religion plays a role in fostering animosity between the two families.

To comprehend the conflict between emotional and cognitive allegiance to equality, it is crucial to investigate how the notion of freedom affects Shrimati and

Shrikant differently. They both value their cultural identities, but their perspectives diverge. Shrikant sees culture through a rationalistic lens, but Shrimati sees it through an emotive one. The first instance in which the primary characters' attitudes differ occurs back on the train. Shrikant offers his hand to meet her in one instance, but Shrimati finds it strange. Murty has presented the dilemma in the minds of Shrimati: "Shrimati was confused for a moment. A gesture, like shaking hands with a man, was not common in the society of that time" (26). A basic gesture that equalises people has become something frowned upon due culture, with gender hardening the awkwardness.

They started out in a small one-bedroom apartment in Bandra. Shrikant was a diligent worker who worked late into the night at times. She slowly became one of the passengers on the crowded trains. Shrimati obtained a part-time job to help her mother-in-law pay off the loan for Shrikant's education. She quit from her work after sixteen months. Shrikant was promoted to manager, and she told her husband about Bhamati. Bhamati represents all the women who give up their youth for the sake of their husbands. Shrimati intended to start her PhD, but he was sent to Delhi. Her single shot to climb occupational heights got shattered here. Her husband and his family completely undervalued her educational qualifications. According to M. Phule, "Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil" (2). If we consider the above definition, we come to know that whatever revolutions that have taken place in our history, education is at the base of them. Since Shrimati is more education than Srikant, it can be inferred that she knows better (than her husband).

Many unexpected events occurred in Shrikant's life, and his boss was impressed with his results in Delhi, so he was promoted to project manager and dispatched to Los Angeles, USA. They were sent to America, and their lives were completely changed. She had corresponded with Professor Collins. She was enthralled by the business, the roads, the people, and everything else in the United States. Soon after, he was promoted to General Manager and returned to India, where his life was at its summit, with a new vehicle and chauffeur and a three-bedroom flat overlooking the sea in Bandra. Shrimati was astonished since everything was above her wildest imagination. Shrikant had grown exceptionally busy and was doing a lot of touring. He travelled between twenty and twenty-five days every month. His life focused solely around his business. Shrimati's education and job prospects are completely devalued in this way. Sadly, this phenomenon is more real than fiction.

Shrimati began to feel isolated; one day, she was surprised to notice grey hairs on her head, a sign of old age. She desired a child, and they sought advice from a doctor, who stated that the human body is not a computer. They have a normal potency or 'sub-fertile' characteristics. Shrimati felt completely powerless and depressed. "The gates of her dam of sorrows broke open, and tears gushed out as floods. All the children she had dreamt of would remain only dreams" (98). Her in-laws started to refer her to as a barren woman. However, Shrikant consoled her. He was pragmatic, stating that no one could expect their offspring to care for them in their old age. He also intended to establish a charitable fund for

disadvantaged children. The notion that she wouldn't be able to experience parenthood was causing her great pain.

The infrastructure of negligence leads to the next level of structure, one that of apathy. The structure refers to the society's economic, social, and political organization. Shrikant becomes a cultural product who immigrated to Bombay; he grew and climbed corporate ladders just as patriarchy wanted him to. The shift to Bombay influenced the mind of Shrikant. The socio-economic structure of Bombay affects the thought of Shrikant, and he becomes all the more materialistic. His attitude towards life changes, "every dinner, every conversation, every relationship was based on profit and loss" (119). The question of Shrimati's education and job prospects is nowhere to be heard. In a way, culture and patriarchy managed to distance man and woman in a family in the novel. When Shrikant becomes more and more successful, his ideology is influenced by the cultural pattern. This way, capitalism joins hand with culture against egalitarianism. The couple become no longer made for each other as one starts making for more for oneself. The novelist clearly depicts the change in the ideology of material wealth as:

Initially men work for money but soon, money becomes unimportant. It is power. There is nothing like power. Once the intoxication of power catches hold of an ambitious person, there is no escape from it. It is a vicious circle. Like in a whirlpool, it is difficult to come out of it. More work, more involvement and more

power. The individual loses the ability to see and enjoy anything outside his work (Murthy 142).

She had lost her identity. She was little more than an obedient servant. She was unhappy, but she couldn't deviate from the norms. She was physiologically and psychologically weary. She longed to leave the house. Love, respect, and the exchange of thoughts and aspirations had all but vanished from their lives. He seldom discussed the firm or other topics with her. Shrikant Deshpande, who was only concerned about his name, popularity, position, and prestige, had forever changed. In his hectic life, he had forgotten about his better half. She didn't want to bother him because he worked every day of the week.

Shrikant was unconcerned about the developments in Shrimati. He was never serious about it. Every meal, every discussion, and every connection were calculated in terms of profit and loss. She was tired of the pretentious women who were always talking about jewelry and sarees. She became enraged one day at a party when their guest Dolly ridiculed India's past. Shrikant lost control and remarked that the corporate world is so distinctive from history. He couldn't comprehend what there was to celebrate about in India's history. Shrimati became so enraged that she responded angrily and wanted to emphasize to Shrikant the glory years of India and how we Indians keep ignoring it. She also said that industrialisation had enslaved India with no tenderness, much like a stepmother. They became strangers dwelling under same roof. She reflected on History and Mr. Collins once more. It was time for her to take a life changing decision, a decision about her destiny. Shrikant, whom she adored, cared for, and cherished,

had faded away. She had the impression that she was seeking for a route of love in the dark, without a lamp. Emotions and sentiments seem to have no value for Shrikant: “When there is no business, no economic growth. There is nothing like power; power is like liquor” (89). Shrimati chooses to leave the area, into the domains of History and liberty. She endured every stinging insult in order to keep Shrikant content. Shrikant was adamant about not changing his temperament. Shrikant looks back at his dominant past and realizes how unkind he was to his wife by not granting her justice. He acknowledges that he was the stimulus for her exodus, her liberty, nevertheless his professional inclination triumphed at the expense of his personal situation:

She made up her mind. She could not stay here. She had to go someplace where she could get the same joy that Shrikanth got from his work. That pleasure was more valuable than money. She was going away not to earn money, but to find her individuality (Murthy 156).

The Bakula tree, whose flowers symbolised the love between them, had fallen, sadly. The novel’s major goal is to make men, society, and the male-dominated culture aware of the psychological, emotional, and social challenges women confront. Thus, one can see from this story that the writer has rejected the stereotypical picture of women and suggested that education has the potential to liberate any woman. Srikant’s failure originated from his obsession with a patriarchal stretch of mind, yet it proved to be a pivotal event in Srimati’s life. Her pent-up emotions drove her to make a daring move that defied patriarchal



society's stringent conventions. She refused to surrender to the familial crimes any longer and chose to give up Srikant:

Shri, I am getting a scholarship. I have thought over this matter for the last few weeks before taking this decision. I did not bring anything with me when I got married to you. Now also I am not taking anything from this house. My flight is scheduled for tonight... now. I can leave peacefully (Murthy 160).

It is notable that Shrimati ends the cycle of the need for acceptance and embraces here individuality through liberation. Her reaction was not a harsh reaction against patriarchy but more leant towards her own empowerment. While egalitarianism in the materialist feminist radicalisation encompasses women no longer being women, it does not involve them becoming 'like men'. This is because, like in case of *Gently Falls the Bakula*, after the active dismantling (rather than the liberal framing) of existing sex inequalities, the social designations of men, women, and any other gender as a significant social and political category would cease to exist. In *Rethinking Sex and Gender*, liberal feminist Christine Delphy writes:

We have to take into account the necessarily dialectical nature of all struggles for inclusion into the universal, that is, for the capacity to be considered in our singularity as persons and not as women, blacks etc. Women have common interests. Even if we define such interests as bringing to an end category of gender, the accomplishment of this interest necessitates firstly becoming

conscious of this community of interests and therefore a regroupment. Attempting to abolish gender categories is in no way contradictory to the formation of political communities of gender – it would be absurd to claim that ‘to get somewhere, let’s pretend we are already there’ (Delphy 71).

Sudha Murthy’s novel can be stretched to reality and a statistical enquiry on empowered (or employed) women belonging to middle or upper class is necessary. Although the magnitude of the interaction between education and employment varies by country, bordering absence in certain cases, South Asia is exceptional in documenting a substantial negative relationship between women's education and labour productivity. Poor and illiterate women in South Asia have traditionally been involved in the labour field, while employment rates among educated women remain comparatively low. In India, secondary school education for women nearly quadrupled between 1980 and 1995, while labour force participation remained steady or even dropped (Lam and Dureya, 1999).

Education, on the other hand, is connected to profession through both income and substitution benefits. Women who are educated marry educated men who have better income. As high-income households have less need for women's contributions to the family, this motivates women to leave the work sector. But at the other hand, educated women earn better wages than less educated women, which should inspire them to work. While higher-income households may be less likely to involve women's income, studies show that when employed, qualified women earn more, and it has been seen in other countries that, in the absence of

patriarchal limitations, this income benefit should surpass the replacement effect.

In the light of *Gently Falls the Bakula*, if both the central couples were working, one could witness a case of power struggle as the liberative force of education fights against suppressive force of patriarchy and culture.

## Chapter Three

### Empowering *Mahashweta*: Defeating White Patches of Oppression

Of the thousands of flowers that blossom on a tree only a few will bear fruit. And out of those few fruits, insects and squirrels will eat some. The tree does not keep anything for itself. Does that mean that the life of the tree is wasted? (Sudha Murthy, *Mahashweta*)

*Mahashweta* is an uplifting and eye-opening tale for modern Indian girls. The title, *Mahashweta*, is based on the renowned thinker Bana Bhatta's Sanskrit classic *Kadambari*. The leading lady of the Sanskrit tale is called *Mahashweta*, and she is the daughter of King Gandhara. *Pundarika*, the hero, died at a tender age. *Mahashweta* couldn't cope with the idea of him disappearing, so she confronts the dilemma by undertaking a hard penance in the jungle while adorning a white saree. She is restored with her lover, *Pundarika*, owing to her persistence and heartfelt passion.

*Mahashweta* (2007) is one of Sudha Murthy's grandest works. *Anupama*, a young, captivating and courageous girl, leads the spotlight in the story. She marries as though in a fairy tale, but is diagnosed with leukoderma as the story progresses, and her life becomes tragic. The novel begins with "the female child is stronger than the male child at birth, as adults it is the man who becomes the oppressor, and woman who suffers (Murthy 1). According to Simone de Beauvoir, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". All entities labelled as 'male' has a hand in creating the meaning of being a woman in society. The

woman is strong enough and don't have to 'man up' for equality; the very thought of hierarchy is the problem that feeds gender oppression.

Egalitarian feminism rejects the development of a single comprehensive explanation, emphasizes plurality, and leans toward equality. It can be used to explain feminism's reactions to injustices and exclusions. The goal of postmodern feminism is to destabilise the patriarchal conventions that have contributed to gender imbalance in society. The plaque of inequality stems often from the little things, like the patches that spread on Anupama's face. When white patches on Anupama's face started appearing, she recognised the true face of patriarchy, conservative society's condemnation and conditional view on beauty.

Only education and her hard work held her hand in difficult times: "You know that from the first year of college till now, I have survived on scholarship" (Murthy 20). On the contrary to the earlier opinion that women are considered a liability to the house they reside, Anupama enacts some historical dramas for her personal requirement. She contributes funds to her father and sustains her family from her income. Anupama marries doctor Anand and gets to live a loving relationship in the first quarter of the novel.

Like Rohini to Chandra, like Lakshmi to Narayana, am I to him.  
Just as the creeper depends on a tree, I depend on him. I cannot  
live without him, and for his sake, I am ready to renounce  
everything. Let society say anything it wishes. I do not care...  
(Murthy 6).

It exhibits her absolute affection and commitment to give it up all for him. As a stereotypical Indian woman, she relinquished herself to Anand without thinking about her education and skills. She solely lives for her husband's affection and is indifferent about her profession. Radhakka, Anand's mother, welcomes their romance half-heartedly for the greater good of her son. Radhakka was delighted with her daughter-in-law's beauty but Anand's sister Girija was envious and saw her as a threat. "His face was expressionless as he said, 'you have vitiligo' ... It is also known as leukoderma'" (Murthy 49). Burnt incense slipped on her leg when she was doing the pooja, inflicting a wound. The injury was in a white surface that was gradually growing broader. The ailment, known as leukoderma, was seen as inauspicious in traditional culture. They handled her as though she were a hazardous virus. It is a vitamin D deficiency, but they interpret it as a penance for her sins. Anupama contrasted her life to Girija's clandestine affair, which was not true and led to a pleasant existence, but Anupama's misfortune was not her doing.

Neglected by her unappreciative in-laws and exhaustive husband, she is required to move to her father's home in the village. The negative stereotypes of the wedded woman residing with her family members, her stepmother's constant barbs and the stigmatization that precedes her skin condition forces her to consider suicide. When her friend Sumitra married Hari Prasad, she longed for her happiness:

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? (65)

“Radhakka looked triumphant, ‘Take your daughter back with you; She need not come back until she’s completely cured and my son returns and sends for her” (Murthy 58). Here we can see the infringement of women’s fundamental freedoms. When a woman ends up leaving her husband’s home, she has nowhere to sleep. Anupama is forced to evacuate her husband’s home. A woman who isn’t with her man faces a lot of social ostracisation. Even the daughter’s parents would judge her residing with them post her marriage as a horrible omen. Anupama struggled greatly as a result of her residence in her stepmother’s household. Anand’s inaction has a psychological repercussion on her. When considering women’s position, particularly in the family and matrimony, Mill frequently invokes the notion of slavery: a wife “is the actual bondservant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called” (Mill 284). Certain biblical words can be alluded here: “So husband ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28). Anand comes up short to be a respectable partner and neglects the pledges he made to her upon their engagement. If he cherishes Anupama as if she were his own life, he would never leave her to suffer.

Here, it is necessary to address the ‘shortcoming’ of the white patch and relate it with the way how the family and society used to subjugate Anupama.

Mill formulates the fundamental argument of *The Subjection of Women* in the light of this event:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and... ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mill 261).

Mill's judgment of women's class rank is centred on his assessment of the systemic injustice that excludes women from official and civic life, politics, and decision-making. He underlines that this type of social injustice is one of the major impediments to human growth and moral betterment. When examining the effects of women's enslavement, he observes that such situations have a severe impact not just on the lives of women, but also on the livelihoods of males. Such a condition harms both men and women, and as a result, women's inferiority has a detrimental impact on society as a whole. As a liberal thinker, Mill emphasizes his firm belief that women's subjugation, which denies them freedom, is an unfair transgression of the ideal of liberty. Furthermore, it is a cultural contradiction, "an isolated fact in modern social institutions... a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else, but retained in the one thing of most universal interest" (Mill 275); and Mill declares that this "relic of the past is discordant with the future, and must necessarily disappear" (Mill 272). Thus, even though culture is valued highly in society, one must determine whether the 'relic'



serves any function at all. Leukoderma has a scientific background and the dark side of tradition forced the eyes of the conservative society shut.

Since of Anupama's leukoderma, her in-law's relatives prevented her stepsister Nanda from marrying because they thought it was a genetic condition. Sabakka began scolding Anupama, and she couldn't stomach seeing her sister cry despite her own predicament. Anand's silence made her question her identity as well. "The moment Radhakka found out, she sent the daughter-in-law packing. Now she is searching for a new bride for Anand" (Murthy 74). Anupama mentions a speech she executed on stage, "Why did God give strong arms and the courage of lion to man?" A likely answer can be 'to take care of the woman from her problem and give her inner strength to keep living'; however, when it gets to Anand, he continues to fail to liberate his wife. She couldn't stand the torment any longer, so she considered suicide.

Anupama makes every effort to get the rights; when she is unsuccessful, she travels in pursuit of her autonomous individual identity. She gathers all her might and resolves herself in supplication to the goddess, "Give me the courage to live no matter what happens!" (Murthy 79). She further lashes out:

You should be ashamed of yourself. You have called me your sister ...will you behave with your sister like this? I have always considered Sumi as my own sister and I will certainly tell her all about your edifying qualities. Get out of my way; I want to go out (Murthy 88).

Meanwhile, regardless how insignificant they are in their society, their regular challenges are enough to elicit strong sympathy and concern for the world in which the characters live. She now has the conviction and fortitude to live an independent life in a new location. She struggles against the norms of the society, and by the conclusion of the story, she has reversed everything and walked down the forbidden paths, maturing into a completely distinct person. She explained with heart and tenacity, “We have become good friends. Let us remain so, and not complicate our relationship by getting married” (Murthy 150). In this regard, she embodies the postmodern woman caught between liberty and convention. When Vasanth proposes to her, as a mature girl with a powerful personality, she challenges the notion and informs him that she doesn’t really want to devote to another relationship. She rarely misses to preserve her cultural practices here.

Anand expresses regret after learning about his sister’s illicit relationship and Anupama’s righteousness. The dejected have validated their identity and contended for their liberties, refusing to accept the oppression that has been thrust on them. They have reshaped their destiny by reconstructing indigenous values, altering the exclusionary and patriarchal notion of the past, and building a revolutionary vision of the present that is absolutely free of any bigotries from the past. Anupama demonstrated her aptitude and directed her life better than she had in the past after much embarrassment and experience, which is signified here as liberal feminism. In the last phase, she demonstrates her consistent engagement in contemporary culture while maintaining her traditional identity and teaches

Anand a lesson. Women are bread-makers as well as breadwinners. Anupama comes as a new being who has received western education and culture.

Mill is often regarded as the most prominent exponent of Egalitarian liberal feminism, and this dissertation on women's subjugation is without a doubt the most convincing piece of liberal feminist theory. However, some of his points of view are more akin to radical feminist concepts articulated during "second-wave feminism." In analysing the grounds and justifications for which asymmetrical interactions between men and women are perpetuated, for example, Mill contends that, aside from social standards and overall attitude, it is in men's interests to preserve women in their subordinate role. Men's will has resulted in the marginalization of women from civic spaces; this is to "maintain their subordination in domestic life, because the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal" (Mill 299).

This can be seen evident in the family's aversive behaviour towards presenting the once beautiful Anupama in social gatherings. Mill perceives marriage, or more particularly his general societal marital law, as the central feature in producing, sustaining, and enforcing women's enslavement. Women, in his opinion, are trapped in a tough spot: they are not liberated within marriage, and they are not allowed not to marry. This loss of sovereignty to marry stems from their inability to obtain an education or earn a living in the public sphere. As a result, there is significant social and commercial compulsion to marry: legislation and tradition mandate that a woman has few options for earning a living other than as a wife and mother.

Mill's thoughts about women's roles in marriage include not just this critical juncture, but also some positive outcomes. He looks to the future of marital relationship founded on the ideals of equality, teamwork, reciprocity, and fairness amongst man and woman, emphasising that only such a connection between husband and wife is acceptable, both politically and morally:

The equality of married persons before the law, is not only the sole mode in which that particular relation can be made consistent with justice to both sides, and conducive to the happiness of both, but it is the only means of rendering the daily life of mankind, in any high sense, a school of moral cultivation (Mill 294).

Despite the fact that Mill focuses largely on legal circumstances and laws, he is clearly cognizant that women's positions in marriage and in mainstream society are closely intertwined. As a result, he feels that married relationships founded on cooperation and parity would revolutionise not just the home but also the public square. In *Mahashweta*, Anupama is content playing in plays and organising fund-raising events until the arrival of Anand, who is smitten by her beauty and wishes to marry her. "Anand had always had a weakness for beauty. It inspired him to always choose the best of everything" (Murthy 114). Anupama is not eager to marry since she wants to establish herself and earn a life. She, in a manner, has become supportive of her ailing father and became a clear example of egalitarian guardian.

Education is key to women's economic empowerment. It definitely plays a large part, but for a considerable time, most women, especially those in rural

areas, have been deprived this privilege and subjugated to extremely dehumanizing customs and expectations. Anupama used education to sever the hegemonical ties of womanhood with servitude and unquestionable subjugation. Her emancipation was at least possible because of education. Education enables girls to succeed more in their social, professional, economic, and married situation. To women, schooling would involve attending classes, receiving training in technical assistance and skills training, or being mentored in key parts of women's economic empowerment. Having said that, through the setting of *Mahashweta*, we can understand that denying women and girls' equality and justice harms individuals and harms society as a whole.

Women's empowerment is a global topic, with debate on women's political rights at the heart among many public and private sector initiatives throughout the nation. In 1985, the theme of gender equality and women was launched during the International Women's Conference in Nairobi. Education is a pivotal event in women's empowerment because it allows them to adjust to difficulties, face their established roles, and transform their lives. As a result of the importance of education in terms of women's empowerment, India is on track to become a powerhouse and developed country by 2025. This can only become a reality if the women of this country gain freedom.

India now has the highest number of illiterate people in the world. Literacy rates in India have grown substantially from 18.3 percent in 1951 to 74.04 percent in 2011, with enrolment of women in school increasing by 7 percent to 65.46 percent. Our laws, development strategies, plans, and programs

have all attempted to progress women in many domains within the confines of a democratic democracy. The orientation to women's affairs has shifted from welfare to development since the fifth five-year plan (1974–78). In recent years, women's empowerment has been identified as critical in establishing women's status. The National Commission on Women was established by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to protect women's rights and legal entitlements. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution (1993) provided for the reservation of seats in panchayats and municipalities for women, creating a solid framework for their involvement in decision making at the local level.

There is a proactive bond between education and woman liberation. Another essential factor is that in these cultures, the topic of female empowerment has been experiencing serious challenges as a result from certain evil principles and inclinations such as child slavery, underage marriage, lack of education, obscurantism, parental bias, female feticides, and so on, and in such a predicament, women's empowerment is an imperative. To enhance female equality, an atmosphere must be created that allows women to engage in educational programs and reap the results. Educational and other measures for women's empowerment should be put into action in order to inspire women across the world.

Mill's critique of women's social subordination displays his utilitarian viewpoint as well as his engagement in the English liberal tradition. The status of one-half of humanity, which he portrays as subordination, servitude, and slavery, is not merely at contradiction with the principles of equality and individual

freedom. It is also a significant impediment to society and individual advancement, wealth, and pleasure: the subjection of women “dries up... the principal fountain of human happiness, and leaves the species less rich, to an inappreciable degree, in all that makes life valuable to the human being” (Mill 340).

Through education, a woman gains grit and credibility. It enlightens her soul to make a precise decision in life and realize her purpose. She is not cognitively prepared to reunite with the man in order to reintegrate in harmony. “How can you possibly expect a burnt seed to grow into a tree? Husband, children, affection, love... they are all irrelevant to me now” (148).

Poverty, unemployment, and inequality cannot be eradicated by man alone. Women’s equivalent and active involvement is required. Women will not be able to interpret their liberties and their significance until they are educated. Women’s empowerment aims to achieve higher literacy and education levels, better public services for women and their children, equitable ownership of production factors, greater involvement in economic and trade sectors, understanding of their rights, upgraded standard of living, and self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-respect among women.

The country recently introduced the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao initiative, which seeks to make girls socially and financially independent, as well as to raise awareness and enhance the efficiency with which welfare services for women are delivered. To achieve the intended results, such programs need be conducted on a national scale. What must never be forgotten is that both men and women must be

proactive in the process of lifelong learning. That is pure self-expression. The moment has come to shift the focus from “women for development” to “women in development,” with men’s collaboration via group participation and management. That will be a “qualitative” change towards equality. While we are drawn to modernity and globalisation, we must be able to say no to marginalisation.

Thus, male supremacy and patriarchal mindset among family should be banished in our Indian society by women’s empowerment. Women’s liberation, in no way, means man’s belittlement. Swami Vivekananda claims, “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.” Education is the key for women to reinforce their soul and triumph as the absolute being in this universe.



## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

Sudha Murthy's novels have demonstrated that, from a liberal feminist standpoint, one of the most significant accomplishments of women's education has been the integration of the two main parts of twentieth-century feminism: equality and difference. John Stuart Mill's and works by other feminist authors reflect the basic structure of progressive liberal feminism in the Indian context: the debate for women's equality and, hence, her participation as an equal in the social and cultural realms. Though a more accurate conclusion would be that nineteenth-century progressive liberals found no conflict in stating that women are both equal and different.

The study's findings showcase the harassment, belittlement, and subjugation experienced by female characters in the books such as *Anupama* and *Shrimati*. It has also been observed that the Man-Woman communication, societal acceptability, and alienation in modern life constitute the hub of *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *Mahaswetha*. It is inferred that the female protagonists in the novels acquire independence via different ways. Major changes in the modern status quo, such as the growth of conservatism, is threatening to govern individuals and undermine stability in interpersonal relationships in varied ways. The path to independence can be cultivated by maintaining a global economic situation that fosters economic, intellectual, and cultural empowerment for women. This, in turn, would ensure the self-growth of all humanity. The various

circumstances demonstrate that the Indian woman went a long way but still have a long way to go.

The best aspect of the *Gently Falls the Bakula* is the finale, which depicts how women transform their ignorance into a norm and fall victim to it. In this story, Shrimati and Shrikant were from an ordinary family, and Shrikant was the one who experienced the hardships of his mother to deliver him with basic requisites and schooling. Naturally, he was eager to claw his way out of the family's poverty. His anxieties were the result of his insatiable desire for career success. Naturally, he was resolved to earn his way out of the family's poverty. His tribulations were the result of his uncontrolled desire for business success. Shrikant gradually became insensible to the finer aspects of life other than his work. Shrimati was very docile, dedicated, lovable, and symbolised the ideal Bhamati. In the end, the walls of liberty closing in on her forced her to decide to leave Shrikant; in the end, she had to be unmindful of the sanctity of the relationship she had with Shrikant.

*Gently Falls the Bakula* illustrates the harsh realities and setbacks of women who have such partners. The household has traditionally been treated the only domain of intervention for an Indian girl inside the nation's patriarchal culture. That is where she is expected to seek happiness in her multiple roles as daughter, sister, daughter-in-law, and mother. Still today, the female child is fostered with the ancient practice that a woman's destiny is whirling around in the ether of her home. Though parents support their daughters' education, the

common assumption is that it is a daughter's responsibility to marry and establish a family.

The conventional stratification in Indian households is that a man supplies monetary support while a woman caters to family and communal obligations. Employers, universities, professional organisations, the government, and communities all have responsibilities to play in combining work and family life, but none of them can tackle the issues on their own. Each individual must comprehend that the optimal working person is one who can devote all other aspects of life to the requirements of the position. Employers alone cannot vastly improve this scenario by imposing more formal family-friendly regulations. This points to the conclusion that the initially mentioned stratification is flawed and pressurising. The system adds more weight to a gender, thus becoming the breeding ground for gender inequality. The solution may not be a reversal of the roles but the distribution of the roles; a certain set of responsibilities shouldn't be categorised based on gender.

Employees must be included in the process of planning and implementing flexible schedules and routines, and enterprises must collaborate with the other relevant parties to guarantee that each party's efforts match and improve on the initiatives of the others. By doing so, the contributors may handle the dual goal of reorganizing work and careers to satisfy both the demands of the organisation and the needs and obligations of the employees' personal and family lives. Reluctance to acknowledge that work and family difficulties are social in nature has left accountability for coping with these issues to individuals and families to handle

on their own. Women are already active members of the labour force, while men are gradually expanding their involvement in housekeeping and childcare.

Only by altering the norms of the entire set of standards impacting work and family ties can successful inclusion of family and work be achieved. It's time to make a difference. Men and women are having to adjust to new circumstances, and there must be a deliberate effort to improve the system. Work and family have long been inextricably linked. The service-intensive globalising economy, as well as the tendency toward extended work hours for some and insufficient family income for others, have exposed and worsened this connection. The rising number of work hours strains employees' personal lives in ways that the assumptions, rules, and institutions that have historically moulded experiences in both work and family life did not expect. The tensions caused by these realities impact families of all economic levels and phases of life. Workers have trouble explaining the regular daily attention required for the well-being of family members, including themselves. Time to care for youngsters and elderly relatives is becoming a major issue. Such time anxieties also make it tougher to deal with family emergencies or periods of special need like birth or childcare. It will only be a matter of time when more Shrikants are formed in the modern cityscape and Shrimatis are denied empathy and empowerment.

Studying the novel, comprehending each point where the protagonist is pushing over the boundaries, creates such a motivating impact that somewhere one continues on to implement it to oneself. Though, it's a moving and emotional story narrated by Sudha Murthy. The book looks into the important subject of

relationships, featuring ambition, power, and self-interest dominating centre stage. It focuses about how people let their marriages perish in order to climb to the top; once there, nothing else matters, not even own family. Sudha Murthy is an individual of sparse words, yet her novels always address other socially pertinent themes and not a word or phrase is misplaced in this book. Her narrative voice is straightforward but effective, and she always fixates on women.

In India, gender disparity emerges from birth or even before. Moreover, social preoccupations drive the conflict between the sexes much farther, spreading and leaking it into every facet of life. Gender inequality has existed in various forms since the beginning of civilization. Girls were barred from receiving an education or reading the scriptures. Nothing could be more outrageous. In India, the inclination for boys over girls in areas such as academics is not surprising. However, the level to which such difference is stressed upon as historically and traditionally mandated and hence undeniable exists even in the current conditions. In most circumstances, such restrictions reinforce existing stereotypes and tend to diminish the freedom of choice accessible to girls.

Individual liberation is made possible by education. Maya Angelou's *Graduation* highlights the capacity of education, which enables people to break free from their personalities and achieve their aspirations. Paulo Freire expresses the same idea. According to him, the greatest altruistic and historical mission of the voiceless is to liberate themselves and their enslavers as well. Only the force that emerges from the oppressed's suffering will be powerful enough to liberate both. An empowered woman is financially and emotionally self-sufficient. This

woman's self-realisation will fortify her inner soul, allowing her to break free from the chains of her family life.

The fundamental causes for India's aversion to feminism date back to the nineteenth century, when the "woman question" was a prominent subject in reformist disputes in India. Influential British intellectuals such as James Mill, enraptured of their "civilising mission," denounced Indian faiths, culture, and government for its restrictions and rituals regarding women. Furthermore, the topic of women's involvement was a crucial instrument employed by colonial legacy to 'prove' the inadequacy of the subject population, as recounted by Christian missionaries who stated that Indians' savage treatment of women proved their moral depravity. As a result, one of the key arguments for British rule in India was the assertion that Indian women needed the supervision and interference of the colonial state. There was no unified effort to modify gender practises, but numerous campaigns on individual interests were launched at different times across India. The main issues were sati (widow burning), female infanticide, underage marriage, purdah (female seclusion), and female education bans. Although sati was abolished in 1829, it has never been completely erased, as Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) suggests. In *Mistaken Identity* (1988), Sahgal also tells hypothetical stories of female infanticide, child marriage, and purdah.

Like in Sudha Murthy's novels, writers like Shashi Deshpande also used lower-class women as secondary characters. Their fight for survival and identity demonstrates how a lack of economic and educational options, particularly for

women, has reinforced patriarchy among the working class. In Indian novels, the domestic servants are traditionally poor and illiterate women backing their families and husbands, who are often flat broke and alcoholics. In spite of poverty, childlessness – or even not having a male child – is considered as a catastrophe for which women are accused. Working-class women, whether childless or sole breadwinners, are often mistreated or abandoned by their husbands.

In the late twentieth century, some feminists shifted their focus on the problems of the white, middle-class, heterosexual, married Western woman; nevertheless, the conceptual and applied focus of liberal feminists transitioned from equality to inclusion. While demanding that women be given the same chances as privileged men, feminists also questioned the viability of a western male figure of life experience in which professional and public activities were considered as more significant and rewarding than communal and familial interactions. Consequently, these feminists worked to modify men's and women's differentiated activities at home and in community, such that domestic morality received social, legal, and economic acknowledgment proportionate with its social and cultural worth.

Furthermore, women of colour, lesbians, and women from all over the world inspired Western feminists to look beyond the confines of the white, middle-class, Western experience. As a result, during the twentieth century, liberal feminism's political stance augmented beyond an emphasis on married women's asset rights, divorce laws, and enfranchisement to include labour

regulations, social issues such as child-care, public assistance, healthcare, and schooling, provision of safe, legal abortion, international growth, traditional economic distribution, and human rights.

Even as the liberal feminist platform broadened, theorists and activists questioned whether liberal feminism was conceptually competent for opposing norms of colonialism, global inequality, racism, patronage politics, and other kinds of hierarchy that challenge the study of gender inequality. For example, in the turn of the twenty century, women's human rights empowerment is a global effort of transnational feminists operating in locally specific ways and telling their stories globally. This ideology apparently supports liberal ideas of freedom and equality, but the extent of freedom and equality stretches well beyond traditional liberal boundaries to include worldwide supply of basic needs, education, healthcare, and access to development resources. Thus, the social objectives of current liberal feminists considerably outnumber those of early liberal feminists. Most early-twentieth-century liberal feminists want to challenge basic beliefs, practices, and conventions inside and across communities. This is where egalitarian liberal feminism comes into play and shines brightly in the Indian context, where women empowerment should pursue education as a solution to all problems thwarting emancipation. However, the education system should be purged of any and all patriarchal values if it is to be liberal and thus, favouring equality.

*Mahashweta* is one of the greatest novels on women's education and empowerment. The female protagonist, Anupama, once starred in the play



‘Mahashweta,’ performing the heroine Mahashweta and this is where she met Anand. Anand, a doctor, comes from a wealthy family and tells his widowed mother and sister that Anupama is indeed the girl of his dreams, the one with whom he wants to start a family in life. Despite her dissatisfaction with the alliance, his mother concedes to it for the sake of her son. An extravagant wedding is held, with the groom’s family picking up the tab. It was when Anupama discovers a white patch on her foot, later confirmed as leukoderma by the doctor, her life changed forever (for both better and worse). She becomes ‘Mahashweta’ in the absolute sense – ‘the white one’. Anupama definitely knew what she wanted in the end.

Her feminism was not tarnished by arrogance or hubris in her talents. It was what life had taught her. She didn't oppose Anand since she had a more realistic and steady option in Dr. Vasant; she had also hesitated to tie the knot him. She politely refused, encouraging him to marry someone else who can aid him in his aim to offer medical services to the needy families of the villages. She reassured him that he would always have a collaborator in her. She was aware that her acceptability in a home like Vasant's would be put to the test once more. She had no doubts about Vasant's loyalty or love for her, but she had witnessed life in all its ugliness too closely and did not want to be subjected to it again. Her femininity amplifies her deep desire for a career and a better standard of living. The lives of all of the female characters are circumscribed by gender and sexual inequity. In the novel, inequality is spreading like pestilence, a destructive

disposition that kills motivation, ruins women's spirits, and prevents them from supporting and unifying succeeding generations and other female kinfolk.

Even if Anupama is from rural India with strong cultural values, she is never displayed reliant or subservient to the male-dominated community; Murthy's other works follow a similar pattern. Regardless of what Murthy's women face in modern society, they have always made a decision for themselves and fought there to the finish. The narrative concludes with a sense of relief, liberation, and inner satisfaction. By the final hour, Anupama ultimately turned out to be an absolute Mahashweta. She is self-assured and empowered. Considering everything she has gone through in her life, she is not a pessimist who would reject the notion of kindness and compassion. She is happy and content, admittedly, without a masculine presence in her life. She still enjoys the same plays and novels she enjoyed when she performed in them, but the essence of those classics has expanded for her. Art, literature, and books have given her courage. She acknowledges that just because she didn't have the greatest relationship during her marriage does not indicate that the notion of matrimony is defective. She is also lucky to meet men like Vasant and Satya, for whom charm is more than cosmetic. There are a million insights from this delightful short novel, but the crux of this story is Anupama's path to becoming Mahashweta. The story brings to light Maya Angelo's sense of dignity in being a phenomenal woman: "I am a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That's me."

There is a striking gap in terms of education. Education and income are inextricably linked, and Virginia Woolf stated in *A Room of One's Own* that a woman ought to have wealth and a chamber of her own if she is to compose stories. Kate Millett's remark in *Sexual Politics* is consistent with the norms of the civilised countries. Historically, patriarchy ensured women to have occasional limited literacy while forbidding them from pursuing higher education. While modern patriarchies have lately expanded all literacy standards to women, the nature and value of education provided to each gender is not the same. This distinction is seen in process of socialisation, but it lingers and even pervades higher education.

The son is free to pursue higher education or perhaps study abroad. When it falls to the daughter, unfortunately, she is schooled only as a compromise to a shallow cultural shift, or she receives no education at all. With the country's sovereignty, the intrusion of a westernised education system shook the cultural heads. As a result, the dramatisation of educating the family's daughter/s got fashionable. However, the European ideology of individualism was never permitted to flourish in the classroom. This awful condition of learning for a daughter has been mirrored in the works of contemporary writers, including Sudha Murthy.

The Indian woman started to establish herself as an inferior individual, as a necessary consequence of man. Her self-esteem suffered as a result. Her roles came to be stereotyped as she accepted the hybrid daughter-wife-mother persona for herself. She proceeded to repress her genuine sentiments, making it harder for

her to separate her inner self from the current societal roles. For a long time, the large percentage of women had the solid conviction that they were only worthy of having children and administering domestic matters, to the denial of all other socially valuable occupations. As a result, she resembled a caged bird. Murty's writings vividly indicate that modern-day women have understood that they are neither helpless or dependant. They believe that a woman has the same level of competence as a man. Today's woman is also a direct wage earner, and she is no longer limited to housework. The novels demonstrate how women always develop self-esteem in the face of adversity, establish their identity, and pursuit of self via education. They are adept of being self-sufficient and guiding their own lives.

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