

Breaking The Silence to Accentuate Ostracism: an Audacious Response of Anupama



Prema S., Ramesh Kumar S.

Abstract: Contemporary Indian English fiction has occupied the dynamic place in modern times. Indian English fiction blossomed rapidly due to the emergence of women writers. These women writers tried to express the abhorrent facets of human life. The twenty first century women writers try to awaken the readers about the existing realities of contemporary social values. Sudha Murty is one such proficient writer, who tries to instill many social values of life through her writings. Mahashweta is one such noteworthy novel by Mrs. Murty. It is an inspiring tale about a courageous woman, Anupama, who travels in the world of marriage which is full of illusions, betrayals and the social stigma. This paper analyses the hidden veracities behind Anupama's fairy-tale marriage, and her hardships in facing the society because of leukoderma. Murty explored the outrageous effects of ostracism - the existing social exploitation- in this novel so diligently through her protagonist Anupama and her daring revolt in overcoming the atrocities of mankind in order to survive in this world as a mere human being.

Keywords

Barbs, Leukoderma, Ostracism, Social stigma

I. INTRODUCTION

Sudha Murty is one such proficient writer and a philanthropist, who contributed much to the Indian literature through her stories. She is a prolific writer with more than two hundred books to her credit. All her writings enable readers to grab some positive message out of it for their betterments. She used the novel as one of the literary mediums to explore the existing social exploitation, revolt, violence and despair. Her works are the realistic portrayal of modern technical societal problems and its predicaments. She deals with the problems of women in a simple language without much exaggeration in it. Mrs. Murty throws light on the social stigma and the existing norms and traditions of Indian society through her protagonist, Anupama in the novel, *Mahashweta*. This story reflects the life of Anupama after her fairy-tale marriage to Dr. Anand. Issues like social stigma, ostracism, barbs of in-laws, and step- mother are the various themes in this novel.

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Mrs. Murty tries to portray Anupama, as a well- determined personality against all such odds and atrocities of the society and her dexterous handling of things in life.

II. METHODOLOGY

Anupama has a profound love for acting and interested in theatre arts. She used to act in many plays during her college days and one such play is *Mahashweta*. The essence of the story is the love between the beautiful Mahashweta and handsome Pundarika. Dr. Anand, who is very passionate about his profession, though he did not find interest in theatre and plays, he decided to go for the programme because of Anupama. Anand was spell bound after witnessing the heart rending love of Mahashweta for Pundarika. During her action, her face glowed with passion and she delivered her dialogue so naturally with complete dedication and passion for acting. He realized that she was not gorgeous in her outfit but also an excellent actress and he witnessed the versatility of Anupama.

III. AN ENDORSEMENT OF VERSATILE ANUPAMA

Sudha Murty tries to bring out the sufferings of middle class Indian society through her characters. Here Anupama, who belongs to the middle class society, clearly reflects the typical mind-set of financial crises. Anupama, who is also drawn towards Anand, is so practical about the social strata of the society to which she belongs, she was very clear that it would be unrealistic for her to dream a life with Anand. Considering her family's financial background, she was reluctant to express her feelings for Anand. She was aware of Anand's blessed life and his financial strata. This reflects the typical mind set of the middle class Indian society. The struggles faced by Anupama's father Shamanna and her step-mother Sabakka, to bring up their girl children is an unendurable suffering.

IV. SOCIETIAL DISTINCTION

Anand always longed to marry a beautiful girl. Radhakka, Anand's mother, wanted to match the bride with her status in the community. This reflects the typical attitude of the mother-in-law. Though he was aware of his mother's attitude on money and status in the society, he was sure that she will agree considering his happiness. With a heavy heart, Radhakka accepted Anupama as her daughter-in-law. During the wedding, all the relatives engrossed themselves in adoring the wealth of Radhakka.

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But Anupama, who was not really interested in the material wealth of the society remarked as, “To me the greatest jewel is my Anand. The rest only weigh me down” (36). This reflects about the real love of Anupama towards Anand.

Though she is from the poor financial background, the material wealth of Radhakka did not woo her heart.

After their wedding, Anand and Anupama spent every minute in each other’s company so preciously. Anand was about to leave for England in order to pursue his higher studies. Radhakka wished Anupama to do the Lakshmi Puja during Deepavali festival in her house, Lakshmi Nivas. Both of them agreed to the need of Radhakka and it was decided that Anupama would join Anand in England after Lakshmi Pooja. Mrs. Murty clearly brings out the typical attitude of mother-in-law through the character Radhakka. She did not want Anupama to be dazzled by her wealth. She was not interested to take Anupama to the goldsmith with her. Even to attend a small function, Anupama need to get permission from her mother-in-law. She should also perform her duties according to her mother-in-law’s instructions. Radhakka instructs her as, “Give the child a silver bowl as a gift. Remember to wear your emerald ornaments and take the car. But don’t stay too long in their house” (40-41). These lines clearly picture the nature of Radhakka as a dominant mother – in -law. She decides all her activities, namely what she should wear? How she should go? How long she should stay? Etc.

According to Radhakka, the purpose of attending a function is to flaunt one’s wealth. Anupama witnessed a different world after her marriage life. She was a free bird before her marriage. But after her marriage, she felt like, “she was locked up in a gilded cage” (41). She travelled in a different world of cultural atmosphere after marriage. All her love for acting and staging her performances had completely vanished after her marriage. Her duty after her marriage is to adorn herself and exhibit all the wealth of her mother-in-law, as a reflection of her status in the society. She was depressed totally because she never imagined such kind of life before marriage. Her only ray of hope was Anand. She believed that he would not hold similar views as that of his mother. She felt like a stranger in her mother-in-laws house. The materialistic attitude of Gangakka depressed the heart of Anupama to the core. Her only comfort was her dream day to join hands with her beloved Anand. She is encircled in the world of her mother-in-law.

V. LEUKODERMA: AN OUTRAGEOUS LIFE CHANGER

One day, Anupama noticed a small white patch on her foot. She suspected it to be leukoderma. She decided to check with the doctor to prove her suspicion to be false. But the situation in which she was encircled in really pathetic. If she wished to go out, her mother-in-law would instruct her driver to take her out in the car. Anupama was worried that if she meets the doctor, it will be definitely reported to her mother-in-law. Thinking about her situation which encircled her life after marriage made Anupama to brood constantly to God. She could not control her tears after knowing the real fact. She was much worried about the consequence after knowing her condition. In due course it becomes much harder for her to

conceal her problem. Radhakka thought that the people who had venereal disease used to visit dermatologists. According to her, “The very thought of those patients was distasteful to her” (51). This line clearly pictures the ideology of Radhakka about the prevailing social problems.

Being a person of uncompromising nature Radhakka took a hard decision and assaulted Anupama and criticized her without mere consideration. This shows her attitude towards wealth, power and money. The astrologer in the house of Radhakka, harmed her verbally. Anupama was assigned to collect Parijata flowers to perform pooja for goddess Lakshmi. But after knowing about Anupama’s leukoderma, he did not allow her to collect flowers and he was arrogant in his behaviour he says, “Don’t come in here and pollute everything. He took the flowers she had collected, threw them outside, and poured some water on the basket to purify it” (54). Anupama was dumbstruck after knowing the ostracized treatment by her family members and society.

Anupama began to feel humiliated and suffocated in her mother-in-law’s house. Even food, her basic necessity of life, was sent to her room. She was not allowed to mingle with others. She was unable to prove that she had her white patch only after marriage to anybody, including Anand. She trusted completely on Anand, because being a doctor, she felt that Anand will persuade his mother. Radhakka wanted to send her, to her father’s house because of her disease. So she sent a telegram to her father and asked him to summon very urgently. This reflects her callous attitude. Radhakka made so many sarcastic comments to her father. Anupama being so innocent took her belongings and a portrait of Anand and left home with a heavy heart.

VI. AN ARDUOUS LIFE TRAVEL

Anupama relayed completely on Anand and his interest in calling her back, she did not want to give others an opportunity to talk ill about her and her marriage with Anand. So, she remained inside her house waiting for Anand and his call all the way to England. In due course, she lost almost all her strength to cope with the stinging remarks of the people around her. Nandha’s - Anupama’s sister- marriage was called off by her in-laws because of Anupama’s leukoderma. Anupama was blamed for the cancellation of the marriage. Sabakka’s anger had no limits. She erupted like a volcano. Anupama was assaulted verbally everyday by Sabakka and she could not even weep finally because no more tears left inside her. Being an optimistic person, she always wanted to transform joy and happiness to her audience while acting in the plays. She believed in the magic transformation of love and beauty in human lives. In reality, she used to face very tough time, wherein her life is full of pain and sorrow. Everybody treated her with contempt because of a small white patch. Though Anupama wanted to reduce the burden of her father, she was helpless. At a point of time, she wished to get swallowed by the ground beneath her feet. She is travelling all alone in an arduous road of life without even a single soul to console her during her hard times.

After knowing Anand's intention in discarding her relationship, her breath was caught in shock. She believed that being a doctor, Anand would have sympathy in realizing the difficulties, sorrow and despair that she is undergoing. Anupama almost lost all her hopes on Anand. She understood clearly that Anand loved only her physical beauty, and he was no more ready to accept her marred beauty. She gathered all her strength and courage to search for a new meaning in her life. Soon, she could find a job in Bombay with the support of her friend Sumi. Anupama accustomed so cordially with many of the girls from different parts of Bombay.

During her stay in Sumi's house her husband, Hari misbehaved with Anupama. She gathered all her will power and slapped him hard. Anupama managed herself and escaped from the clutches of Hari. She was in the state of complete desolation and despair because Anand had abandoned her during the needy hours and Hari, whom she treated like an elder brother, had betrayed her. It pained Anupama to the core. Soon, she shifted out from Sumi's house before Hari's return from his business tour. Later, Anupama realized that, her job as a clerk, did not nurture her talent and creativity. She always wanted to take up some challenging tasks. She was overwhelmed and became confident and self-assured in her new job as a Sanskrit lecturer. According to her, courage and confidence are the real wealth in one's life. She decided to concentrate on the deeds which will give her confidence and happiness.

VII. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Anand was forced by his friend Prakash for a play at the Tara theatre and he was dazed to see Anupama in the stage with the same dignity and confidence with profound love for theatre. "The more he thought about Anupama, the guiltier he felt" (144). Anupama was literally shocked to see Anand in her door steps after a long time. She shouted an array of questions. She poured out all her sorrows and asked him as: "You never treated me as a human being. I was only a beautiful object that you wished to possess and flaunt. Had I known your attitude towards life, I would have told you to marry somebody else" (147).

Anand begged her to forgive him and his wrong deeds. Anupama expressed very clearly about her decision to Anand as, "It would be better for us to part now and never communicate with each other again" (149). Anand felt very bad realizing his mistake but he tried his best in convincing Anupama. After the contraction of the skin ailment, Anupama realized and understood the nature of the people around her. She lost all her hopes on Anand. She believed that a home is a place where there must be mutual love and affection. She decided her own path so daringly and she wished not to entangle herself in the circle of family and husband.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A small white patch has taught so many lessons in the life of Anupama. She started making a clear decision because her life is endorsed with the social stigma. Even when Vasant proposed his idea in marrying her, Anupama was very clear and confident in her ideas. She was very sure about the prejudices that she needs to face because of her skin ailment.

So she negated him profoundly. Ultimately, Anupama turned to be a lady of soft heart with inordinate strength of mind to face the society. The play Mahashweta was very close to her heart. In this play, Pundarika, the dazzlingly handsome son of a Rishi, faced an untimely death, but finally, the heart rending love of Mahashweta brings Pundarika back to life and they were united in the play. On the contrary, in the real life of Mahashweta, both Anand and Vasant, though they resembled Pundarika, they would be separated forever. Thus the audacious revolt of Anupama imbued hope and courage in the lives of all suppressed women who suffer silently in the world of social stigma.

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