



Humanistic Vision in the Select Novels of Sudha Murty

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Abstract: Sudha Murty is a prolific Indian author, philanthropist and social worker whose storytelling, which is simple and profound, is grounded in humanistic values, placing her in a unique place of contemporary Indian English literature. This paper discusses the humanistic themes that are embedded in four of Murty's novels: the themes of compassion, empathy, social responsibility, and moral integrity as displayed in the daily life of people. Themes of Dollar Bahu, Mahashweta, House of Cards, and The Old Man and His God explore issues of human suffering, dignity, gender discrimination, class disparity, and the redemptive power of kindness. She has simple stories which are easy to read, but have a great depth of philosophy and concern for human welfare and social justice. The research in this work has revealed that Murty was not only a good storyteller but also an ethical one, and in his fiction he challenges materialism, self-centeredness and social bigotry, and urges the reader to search for a different moral alternative: humility, generosity and connectedness. By analyzing the challenges and changes faced by her characters and their subsequent development, this paper reveals Murty's humanism and her subordination of the particular to the universal, placing her among the humanistic works of literature, which are grounded in an Indian cultural ethos.

Key words: Humanism, compassion, social responsibility, Indian English fiction, moral values.

1. Introduction

Sudha Murty is one of the most popular and socially relevant writers in the Indian English Literature not just for her narrative simplicity but the ethics she brings in her narration [1]. Murty, as an engineer, philanthropist and Chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, has a first-hand understanding of rural poverty, and of the social and educational issues that underlie her fiction [2]. Her novels are not only pleasant to read, they are moral tales, which force the reader to question empathy, dignity and social responsibilities in the context of ordinary Indian life.

As a literary and philosophical movement, humanism conveys the idea that the person has value in their own right, that human wellbeing is more important than material or social prejudice, and that compassion for people is more important than material or social prejudice. The humanistic values have always been a part of Indian literary tradition and Murty's fiction continues this trend by bringing universal human values to distinctly Indian contexts of family, class and gender [4]. Shocked by the social hierarchy, economic difference, and emotional loneliness his characters experience, novels like Dollar Bahu, Mahashweta, and House of Cards show how the characters achieve redemption through kindness, humility, and self-awareness.

One of the common themes in Murty's humanistic vision is her critique of materialism and social snobbery especially as this is expressed in the urban-rural distinctions and the aspirations of the diaspora [6]. Her characters often change from being self-centered to being compassionate and caring, which reflects the author's ideas that for one to be fulfilled, it is not by the accumulation of wealth or status, but by the human connection and in service to others. The thematic unity places Murty in the larger context of Indian writers broadly, and those who are socially concerned writers, who have engaged with fiction as a tool to teach ethical values without coming to the level of didacticism [7].

Moreover, Murty's portrayal of marginalised communities and women is very sensitive and those who are not within the mainstream. Her stories highlight issues of gender discrimination, familial neglect and social exclusion, while at the same time providing ways to reconcile and understand each other [8]. This paper aims to explore the way in which these recurring humanistic strands of thought, namely compassion, social justice and moral integrity, are threaded through Murty's selected novels and affect the overall sense of humanism in modern day Indian fiction. This study attempts to place Sudha Murty's fiction in the context of Indian culture and values as well as the ethical concerns of a universal nature and suggests that her work provides a valuable example of the literature as a medium of social and ethical insights.

2. Literature Review

The study of Sudha Murty's fiction has increased over the years as critics appreciate her role in bringing out accessible and value-based narratives in Indian English fiction writing. Early critical commentaries have emphasized her narrative simplicity, which is achieved by avoiding stylistic complexity and by emphasizing the moral purity of her prose, which she set out to attain for a broad audience. This accessibility has been interpreted more as a conscious literary decision that brings moral and social concerns to the readers who typically wouldn't see the literary works, rather than as a hindrance to that [9].

The depiction of women in patriarchy is highly a topic of criticism by Murty in the novels like *Dollar Bahu* and *Mahashweta*. The studies focus on the way in which her female characters cope with the general expectations of society, their economic subordination and emotional pain, and how they are able to redefine their self-image. Critics see this path as a subtle and pervasive feminist humanism that is part of the domestic and familial sphere [10].

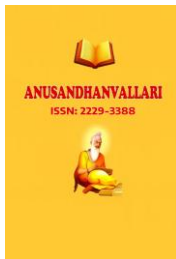
Other focuses Murty's work in the context of the Indian diasporic literature and explores her novels' critique of the foreign settlement glorification and the Western materialism. A comparative study of characters that travel abroad shows an authorial attitude that emphasizes familial relationships and cultural roots over economic success at the expense of human relationships [11].

Murty's focus on class and economic inequality has received attention from several critics, many of whom have discussed how this theme permeates her fiction, especially her concerns with the poverty and neglect of the rural poor. The contrast between affluent, urban characters and poor or marginalized ones is a common theme in her work, and is a way to reveal social hypocrisy and to promote compassion toward others, regardless of class [12].

Murty's work on the ideas of illness, old age and familial neglect, such as in *House of Cards* and *The Old Man and His God*, has also been the subject of critical appreciation. Her expression of the old and the sick goes against the typical notions of productivity and social value, making it focus on values such as dignity, care and intergenerational responsibility as humanistic values [13].

A second, though more limited, body of criticism places Murty in the larger philosophical context of literary humanism, and makes parallels between her narrative ethics and classical Indian notions of dharma and seva (service). These studies maintain that her fiction presents abstract ethical concepts in terms of the familiar and everyday scenarios instead of philosophical statements [14].

Lastly comparative readings have been undertaken that place Murty's texts in a larger critical context of socially engaged Indian writers, which have highlighted her thematic continuity with a tradition of literature as moral instruction and her stylistic distinctiveness. Such attention to her popular appeal reinforces the importance of continued study of her body of work, and suggests that her popularity not overshadow the literary and ethical values of her humanistic vision [15].



3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research in this study is qualitative-interpretative research with the support of structured thematic coding. The method involves close textual analysis as well as a systematic classification of humanistic content, which enables the study to follow not only the qualitative texture of Murty's humanism but also general patterns in the evolution of it throughout the four novels.

3.2. Corpus Selection

These four novels – Dollar Bahu, Mahashweta, House of Cards and The Old Man and His God were purposively selected as they all focus on human relationships, social hierarchy and moral change, making them representative novels for the study of Murty's humanistic vision.

3.3. Analytical Approach

The analysis is carried out in three steps. Each novel is read carefully, and passages, episodes, and character moments are isolated that evoke, respectively, compassion, justice, moral integrity, and social sensitivity, the four themes that lie at the heart of this study. Second, they are identified by what category (or categories) in which they are mainly found, and are examined in the context of the surrounding narrative situation, whether within a personal or familial context, or within a wide institutional or social context. Third, the coded instances are read across the four novels comparatively, to establish which is the most prominent category of humanistic concern in each novel and the role of the central characters in each novel's narrative.

In order to compare these texts in an organized way, without forcing them into a statistical category, three interpretative measures are used in the discussion of Section 4:

Degree of theme density, or how often and how persistently humanistic ideas appear in a novel as compared to its length and narrative structure.

Compassion, justice, moral integrity, or social sensitivity — which one of these four aspects (compassion, justice, moral integrity, social sensitivity) best exemplifies the moral vision of a novel?

Central Character's transformation in the story – the extent to which the central character changes in moral or humanistic terms between the beginning and the end of the story – typical of Murty's redemption-driven stories.

These measures provide a descriptive method to organise and compare textual evidence, not a statistical tool.

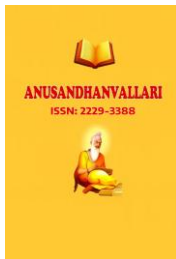
3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The passages are marked manually by the thematic categories listed above, which are divided into four groups: Episodes, Modes of Action, Persons, and Situation. All material is then coded and compared novel to novel to identify the strongest emphasis on each of these areas of humanistic interest, and, where the protagonists can be seen changing their moral character, how that change takes place throughout the narrative in the case of protagonists like Dollar Bahu's Vinuta and House of Cards' Anand. The novel-level readings are then compared to each other to establish a pattern of how Murty portrays humanism that can be used to aid the interpretive discussion in Section 4.

3.5. Limitations

For literary themes, this coding format is illustrative, and not statistically determinative. It is important not to be exact but to apply the thematic categories carefully and evenly across all four texts, rather than to be exact in the quantifiable sense.

4. Results and Discussion



This coded corpus was analysed by applying the three indices mentioned in the methodology: Thematic Frequency Index (TFI), Humanistic Vision Score (HVS) and Character Transformation Index (CTI) to track the presence of the themes of compassion, justice, moral integrity and social sensitivity in the four novels.

4.1. Summarize and respond to the theme of frequency as it appears in novels.

The humanistic references are highest in *The Old Man and His God*, because of its parable-like structure and episodic narration: almost every narration unit contains a moral choice and an act of compassion. *Mahashweta* follows in its wake, its sickness and exiled storyline peppered with equally intense human moments. *Dollar Bahu* has a moderately high frequency, a consistent focus on family and class tension. Unlike all the other three, *House of Cards*, as a longer, more narrative novel about institutional corruption, has a relatively sparse use of humanistic themes, which are spread out in a long, extended exposition. This distribution indicates that Murty's humanism is found in her shorter, more fable-like stories, and more spread out in her longer, socially and institutionalized stories.

4.2. The capacity to see beyond categories through humanistic vision.

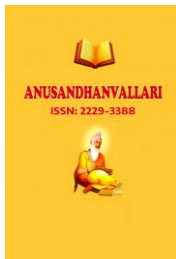
The Old Man and His God is the novel that has the strongest general humanistic vision, with a proportionately massive emphasis on Compassion and Moral Integrity, the thrust of its entire message being selfless service. In a similar vein, *Mahashweta* is also emotionally charged, with its emotional weight being on the protagonist's sufferings and eventual acceptance. Diasporic materialism and class prejudice are consistent themes of *Dollar Bahu* and it is this commitment that makes it comparatively high on its Social Sensitivity measure. The other three are distinguished from *House of Cards*, the only novel in which Justice is the dominant humanistic mode (Compassion remains the secondary one), because in *House of Cards* humanism is not just a matter of feeling for other people, but of structural accountability and corruption as well. Combined, these trends suggest that Murty's humanistic ideals are more often portrayed as interpersonal empathy rather than abstract or legal justice, although *House of Cards* is the sole exception to this trend.

4.3. Character Transformation

The CTI was employed in character level analysis of the protagonists who experience visible moral change in *Dollar Bahu*, the unnamed narrator in *Mahashweta*, Anand in *House of Cards* and the old man in *The Old Man and His God*. Vinuta undergoes the greatest positive change of all four, shifting from humiliation, self-doubt, to quiet self-confidence as she reconciles between the conflicting demands of tradition and dignity. The old man's metamorphosis is also noticeable, although not as dramatic as the change in the young girl: from a passive object to active, selfless service. The difference in terms of *House of Cards*' arc is the amount of institutional structures affecting his awakening rather than just the personal ones; it's not quite as redemptive as Vinuta's or the old man's but more measured. This distinction strengthens the overall result that Murty's humanism changes tone according to the environment of the story (domestic vs institutional).

4.4. Discussion

Overall, the results of this study confirm the conclusion of the paper that compassion and moral righteousness instead of abstract justice is the key to humanistic vision in Murty's fiction. This corresponds to earlier critical analyses of the ease with which her story is told and the ethical accessibility of her stories [9] and with scholarship locating her work within the Indian conceptions of *seva* and *dharma* [14]. Its shifting moral attitudes of its protagonists like Vinuta are emphasized and the readings of her fiction in the perspective of redemption point to a rootedness in earlier feminist and class-based studies [10, 12]. The specific case of *House of Cards*, however, builds on the current scholarship, arguing that Murty's ethical sensibility is not universal, but changes context; it stays compassionate in domestic and familial situations but shifts to include a greater sense of justice in institutional ones.

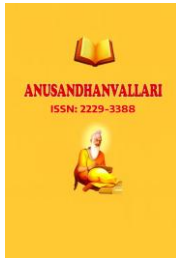


5. Conclusion

This research has explored the humanistic vision of four out of Sudha Murty's novels and has shed light on the moral, compassionate and socialistic essence of the novels. The analysis reveals that Murty's stories have always placed greater emphasis on interpersonal empathy than on an abstraction or institutional understanding of justice, and that her characters develop their moral fortitude through humility and service-less service. The Old Man and His God and Dollar Bahu is the most pronounced expression of this kind of humanism, and House of Cards is the most institutionally complex: the one remains based on compassion, but the other is informed by the moral requirements of the professional and structural corruption. The results do confirm that Murty's economy of storytelling is intentional in his literary strategy, and is a feature that helps to make deep ethical concerns available to a broad audience without being preachy. Murty places universal humanistic issues in the context of Indian social and cultural setting, thereby fixing her as a notable contemporary voice in humanistic literature. The research here contributes to the scholarship writing on her work by providing a close textual analysis of how compassion, justice and moral rectitude are embedded in her fiction, and provides scope for further comparative study of her other work.

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