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# EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES IN SUDHA MURTHY'S LITERARY WORKS

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### Abstract

The literary creations of Sudha Murthy provide a captivating examination of the complex issues faced by Indian culture. This research explores the thematic richness and social critique found in Murthy's works via an examination of her tales. The study sheds light on issues like gender inequity, intercultural tensions, and moral quandaries while highlighting Murthy's deft rendering of the intricacies of interpersonal interactions and social dynamics. The analysis also emphasizes Murthy's portrayal of strong female characters and his investigation of intergenerational interactions, which provide significant insights into the challenges and victories faced by people who are a part of Indian culture. Murthy's writings educate readers as well as amuse them with her rich characterization and compassionate narrative. This leaves a lasting impression on readers and maintains her reputation as a renowned Indian novelist and social critic.

*Keywords:* Sudha Murthy, gender inequality, cultural conflicts, societal commentary, female protagonists, multigenerational dynamics.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Computer engineer, social worker, and writer Sudha Murthy is well-known. She was born in 1950 into a Karnataka Brahmin Kulkarni family. Novels, anthologies of short tales, travelogues, technical publications, and non-fiction are among her literary works. She began her professional life as a designer and software programme. She is wed to Infosys co-founder Mr. Narayan Murthy. She now serves as "The Infosys Foundation" chairwoman.



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Her exceptional humanitarian work has had a significant influence on schooling in Karnataka's rural communities. In Karnataka, she founded libraries and orphanages. At Harvard University, she established "The Murthy Classical Library of India." She writes in both Kannada and English, as far as that goes. Indian languages have translated her writings. In 2006, she received the "Padma Shri" and the "R.K. Narayan Award" for writing. She received "The Padma Bhushan" in 2023 in recognition of her services to the social work area.



#### Figure 1: Sudha Murthy's

Her career began in software engineering and design, and she is presently the director of the Infosys Foundation in addition to being involved in the Gates Foundation's broader human services initiatives. She has started a few orphanages, contributed to efforts to better thenation, supported the effort to provide computers and libraries to all Karnataka government schools, and founded "The Murthy Classical Library of India" at Harvard University. Sudha Murthy spearheaded a major initiative to teach software engineering and provide computers and libraries in every Karnataka school.

The Bangalore Rotary Club awarded her the "Best Teacher Award" in 1995. The mainthings that make Sudha Murthy famous are her humanitarian activities and her dedication to writing in Kannada and English. Her Kannada book Dollar Sose (English: Dollar Daughter-in-Law), which she subsequently translated into English as Dollar Bahu, was turned into a seriesthat Zee TV aired in 2001. (Govind, 2019) Sudha Murthy became the first woman to work at TATA Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO), the largest automobile manufacturerin India. She began working for the company in Pune as a development engineer and eventuallyrelocated to Mumbai and Jamshedpur.



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She brought up the issue of discrimination at TELCO in a letter to the chairman of the company, pointing out that the company solely hired males. She has so agreed to an unusual meeting and immediately signed a contract. Later, she started working as a Senior Systems Analyst with the Punebased Walchand Group of Industries. She founded the Infosys Foundation in 1996, and as of right now, she serves as both a visiting professor at Bangalore University's PG Centre and a trustee of the organization. In fact, she taught at Christ University.She has contributed a great deal of literature, including travelogues, how-to books, novels, and instructional books. Additionally, the Infosys Foundation invested in and launched the two foundations of higher learning: the Narayan Rao Melgiri Memorial National Law Library at NLSIU and the H.R. KadimDiwan Building, which houses the Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) office at IIT Kanpur.

Sudha Murthy claims that meeting JRD Tata, who served as her inspiration for social work, significantly altered her life. She was inspired by his advice to "give back to society" and decided to pursue a career in social work. She keeps the picture of JRD Tata on her office wallas a reminder to give back to the community. As a writer, she encourages women to be strongin difficult situations by empowering them via her stories. The backdrop of Indian society and culture serves as the inspiration for her work.

The female protagonists in her stories are intelligent, naturally strong individuals whocan handle any challenging circumstance in life. They valiantly defend their position in the customs of traditional Indian culture. One of the most significant modern female authors, SudhaMurthy paints a realistic picture of the socio-psychological issues that Indian women encounterin her writing. Her books shed awareness on the abuse, humiliation, and exploitation that women endure.

Her books often centre on man-woman relationships, acceptance, and alienation in contemporary society. It has been noted that whereas the male characters in her stories are swayed by the force of luxury, comfort, and consumerism, the female characters are straightforward, industrious, and innocent. They are unaware of the importance of women andraising a family. But in the end, the female characters succeed in overcoming the obstacles byworking hard to live fulfilling lives. This essay examines the three books written by Sudha Murthy: "Mahashweta," "Gently Falls the Bakula," and "The House of Cards."

#### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Srivastava**, (2020) Since India gained its freedom, attitudes and practices about women have gradually changed. It was really acknowledged that without the empowerment of the disadvantaged gender, India would not be able to achieve its aspirational goal of achieving broad and notable advancements in a number of disciplines. Given her ability to delve into the depths of her female characters' inner landscapes and depict how their psyches change over time, Sudha Murthy is acknowledged as one of



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the most prolific and realistic writers of IndianEnglish literature. This study aims to follow the main female characters in a few of Sudha Murthy's books as they go from night to daylight. These books provide an image of a developedwoman who defies patriarchal society's conventions in an effort to claim and define her own identity.

**Priyanka (2022)** explored the issues women encounter in a patriarchal and custom-bound culture in her novels and short tales. The essay discusses how "Mahasweta" and "House of Cards" illustrate how Sudha Murthy's women suffer in a confined society. Everywherethroughout the nation, women fight to live honourably. Every aspect of life, including employment, healthcare, and property rights, presents challenges for women. Thus, women's emancipation in India is still a long way off. This review demonstrates the struggles faced by the women in Sudha Murthy's books—including abuse, insults, and being exploited. Worldwide, violence, prejudice, injustice, and poverty still affect women and girls. Despite having created civilization from the bottom up, they still do not have the status they are due. As it is, women and girls are unable to even get the most fundamental of rights. This study article would support the growth of a powerful and dynamic women's movement, comprised of women who are capable of challenging patriarchal conventions, addressing the underlying causes of inequality, and advocating for their full range of rights.

**P. Saraswat (2020).** Empowering women is crucial for sustainable development. Empoweringsomeone is giving them, particularly women, the ability to get and hold power resources so they may reject choices made by others that have an impact on them or make decisions independently. Women's education as well as economic and financial stability is seen in the perspective of sustainable development, which provides chances to end poverty, preserve human health and well-being, and safeguard people's means of subsistence and sociocultural integrity. Education plays a critical role in sustainable development. Financial stability and education are essential for reducing poverty and providing the next generation with knowledge.Prolific writer Sudha Murty is an advocate for women's rights. She has authored several tales that discuss women's freedom. She is an advocate for women's growth, which includes the advancement of the whole family as well as the woman herself. Educating women is the first step in empowering them. The second biggest population consists of women. As such, their input is critical to accomplishing objectives related to sustainable development, comprehending issues and providing solutions, and reaching overall developmental goals.

**Kauntagi & Kolekar (2022)** examined how Sudha Murthy's writings depict current and contemporary women. A new stage in the growth of women began with freedom. Previously, women were denied the ability to write books, go to school, and be treated equally in society. Men and women are treated equally in India. The simplest way to sum up this adage is to quote well-known Indian novelist of English literature Sudha Murthy, who "ruled the globe." With a focus on feminism, self-realization, hospitality,



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and compassion, she is a prolific writerof fiction and nonfiction in Kannada and English. Though she won several accolades, the Padma Shree and the R.K. Narayana Award for literature are the two that stick out. The author'sprimary themes center on women's issues, struggles, and resilience in the face of adversity. Several literary works convey this viewpoint. Her four novels are Dollar Bahu, The House of Cards, Gently Falls the Bakula, and Mahasheweta. The feelings and opinions of women are portrayed in these texts in very diverse ways. In today's society of male dominance, modern women are attempting to recover their identities. According to the report, successful women intoday's world are independent. Like a guy, she wants to achieve and satiate her intellectual desires.

Agrawal and Dwivedi (2022) examined how domestic abuse is portrayed in a multifaceted way inside Sudha Murthy's story. The novel is emphasized in the literature review as a noteworthy literary work that uses its characters and storyline development to confront the problem of domestic abuse. Agrawal and Dwivedi provide a critical analysis of the effects of domestic abuse on women's life by delving into the ways in which Murthy's storytelling eloquently captures the sociocultural reality and individual experiences of victims. Their research places the book in the context of larger conversations about gender, power relations, and social standards, highlighting the ways in which Murthy's portrayal of domestic abuse both supports and contradicts preexisting theoretical viewpoints on the issue. By offering insights into how literary works may both reflect and critique societal concerns, the study adds to the current conversation on domestic violence in literature and advances our knowledge of domestic violence in modern Indian contexts.

**B.** Parinitha (2022), thorough examination of the moral issues in Sudha Murthy's children's books. Parinitha's assessment highlights Murthy's ability to skillfully infuse moral teachings into captivating narratives, highlighting how his children's short stories incorporate fundamental moral ideals and ethical ideas. The literature study critically analyzes the themes that appear throughout Murthy's stories, emphasizing her distinctive style of approaching difficult moral dilemmas in a way that young readers can understand. The article talks about how youngsters are given a sense of moral and ethical awareness through Murthy's storytelling, which does more than just amuse them. Parinitha's argument is based on a thorough assessment of a few chosen works, showing how these tales mirror larger social norms and aid in the moral upbringing of their readers. The assessment emphasizes how important Murthy's contributions to children's literature are and how narrative may create moral consciousness in youngsters.

**Khan** (2022), feminist topics in the body of writing of Sudha Murthy were studied. This paper, which appears on pages 145 to 157 of volume 25, issue 5, of the African Diaspora Journal of Mathematics, falls under the Multidisciplinary UGC CARE GROUP I. The examination of Murthy's works' reflections of feminist awareness is on how they explore the complex representations of women's



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empowerment, social justice, and gender roles. Khan's research explores the several ways in which Murthy's narratives subvert gender stereotypes and emphasize the challenges and achievements faced by women in modern society. The study emphasizes Murthy's importance in amplifying women's voices and promoting gender equality by critically evaluating her literary achievements via a feminist viewpoint. This assessment advances our knowledge of Murthy's influence as a feminist author and adds to a larger body of work on the depiction of gender in literature.

Thing and Girl (2022) provided critical insights into the subject growth and stylistic advancements across Divakaruni's books, placing her works within the larger frameworks of feminism and diaspora studies. Divakaruni's key contributions are methodically catalogued in this book, which highlights the ways in which her narratives tackle the intricacies of gender, identity, and cultural displacement within diasporic experiences. An understanding of how Divakaruni's literary output has connected with and reflected upon the socio-political and cultural processes shaping the South Asian diaspora is made easier by the reference, which arranges her works chronologically. This reference's critical opinions highlight the interaction between Divakaruni's feminist beliefs and her depiction of diasporic existence, adding to the continuing conversation in literary studies about how modern writers deal with gender and migration-related concerns. This thorough catalog enhances our knowledge of Divakaruni's important contribution to modern literature while highlighting the subject and stylistic development of her books.

#### **3.** THEMES OF CHALLENGES EXPLORED

A word theme is a central idea that the action of the book is centered upon. It is covered in a book. A novelist has a purpose in writing. He or she hopes to convey a message, criticize badbehavior in others or in society, instill ethical values in the readers, bring up a social issue, tellthe story of important historical events from a fresh angle, etc. In other words, a writer works with certain goals in mind. He doesn't speak in a vacuum. Every book typically has a main topic and numerous supporting, less important themes.

By presenting opposing or parallel concepts, the supporting themes might serve to highlight main topic. The subjects of castes, classes, social inequality, oppression, isolation, discrimination, unemployment, the divide between rural and urban areas, etc., have all been covered by Indian fiction authors writing in English. Novelists may talk on one or more of theaforementioned topics at the same time. In actuality, a novel's grandeur is determined by how well it handles many subjects inside the same piece.

In her articles, Sudha Murthy provides illustrations on a variety of topics; her writings are not only about challenges affecting women. Her work shows a clear shift toward writing from a feminine perspective in general. In feminine literature, it is customary to attribute women's hardships on males,



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as if marriage was a permit to carry out a male-woman oppressive agendaand men and women were inherently antagonistic. Perhaps the earliest Indian writer in English,Sudha Murthy, rationalizes the issue by attributing the misfortunes of one lady on the male in the household and one other woman. The complex connections between two women in a singlehousehold are shown in all four of her works.(Negi, 2017) The lessening influence of growingcapitalism on intimate human interactions in Indian society is a further subject that Sudha Murthy examines.

The Indian economic system was liberalized, giving the people hundreds of chances to savemoney. Young boys and girls had the opportunity to visit first-world nations and had easy access to contemporary amenities. On the one hand, it changed their financial and social status.Conversely, it caused conflict in the family's normally tight connections. All of Sudha Murthy's works dealt artistically with the dissolution of home bonds. Several minor themes may be found in her works. In general, Indians have strong superstitions. They adhere to the caste system, especially with regard to marriage's importance. The daily lives of Indians are influenced by horoscopes, religious beliefs, rituals, traditions, norms, and auspicious dark periods. In every piece that Sudha Murthy creates, she flawlessly highlights the contradictions in Indian people'slives.

#### • Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a complicated topic overall. The term "gender inequality" may evoke thoughts of discrimination against women alone, although it is untrue. It affects both men and women equally. Gender inequality is defined by Wikipedia as "the idea and situationthat women and men are not equal." The term "gender inequality" describes how people are seen or treated differently depending entirely or partially on their gender. According to the English Encyclopedia, "Gender inequality is the difference between men's and women's status, power, and prestige in groups, collectivises, and societies."

Thus, the idea of gender inequity applies to both men and women. Gender and sex aretwo distinct notions that must be understood when attempting to determine the root cause of gender disparity. Gender is defined as "Social expectations about behavior regarded as appropriate for the member of each sex" by the English Encyclopaedia. Gender refers to socially constructed characteristics of masculinity and femineity rather than the physical characteristics that distinguish men and women. In summary, gender is a construct created byhumans, while sex is an inherent human feature.



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**Figure 2: Gender Inequality** 

However, if we examine the numerous facts that are available on discrimination and gender equality, we will see that women lag significantly behind males in a number of areas of life. However, in both their homes and the outside world, women experience discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and denigration. In Indian society, it is easy to see this kind of prejudice. There are many instances of gender discrimination in our culture. The patriarchal structure that is ingrained in Indian culture is the primary source of gender disparity. This is a legitimate and lawful system because of our religious convictions. According to Manu, the creator of Hindu law, "Women should be under the guardianship of their father when they are children, their husband when they are married, and their son when they are elderly or widowed." She shouldn'tbe let to independently assert herself under any circumstances. Regardless of their religious affiliation—Hindu, Muslim, or otherwise—this is the actual position of women in India. There are some problems where gender inequity is pervasive in our culture. These include severe poverty, a lack of education, inadequate nutrition for females, a lack of work opportunities, a lack of knowledge, a societal attitude, and social norms. Other components of this inequity include physical harassment, dowries, marriage and divorce, pre-marital and extramarital affairs, and the alienation that exists between women and other male family members. These are a few significant examples of genderbased inequality.

#### • Cultural Conflicts

Cultural conflicts serve as a key issue in Sudha Murthy's literary works, presenting a nuanced analysis of the struggle between traditional values and contemporary ideals within the Indian environment. Murthy expertly shows individuals coping with the complexity of navigating numerous cultural identities and resolving the conflicts emerging from opposing cultural norms and expectations.

One facet of cultural conflict shown in Murthy's paintings is the contrast between urban andrural cultures. Characters typically find themselves divided between the pull of metropolitan riches and the rootedness of rural customs. This contradiction is powerfully represented in works like "Wise and Otherwise," where protagonists from rural origins are faced with the fastspeed of urbanization and the disintegration of traditional ways of life. Through these accounts, Murthy illustrates the difficulty experienced by people in adapting to changing socio-cultural environments and the dilemmas they



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confront in preserving their traditional heritage while embracing modernity.

Additionally, Sudha Murthy's writings generally address the contradiction between old practices and modern ideals, notably in the context of gender roles and relationships. Characters battle with cultural expectations and conventions that promote gender inequity and limit individual liberty. Murthy's presentation of these cultural tensions gives insight on the problems experienced by women in confronting patriarchal norms and demanding their rights to autonomy and self-determination. Stories like "Dollar Bahu" and "Gently Falls the Bakula" diginto the complexity of marital relationships and the conflict of traditional and modern norms, delivering painful insights into the developing dynamics of female roles within Indian culture.

Furthermore, Sudha Murthy's novels dig into the generational split and the difficulties that develop between older and younger generations. Characters frequently find themselves split between respecting age-old customs and adopting new views. Through pieces like "The Day IStopped Drinking Milk" and "Grandma's Bag of Stories," Murthy explores the difficulties thatemerge between grandparents, parents, and children as they negotiate various cultural attitudesand generational expectations. These tensions serve as a prism through which Murthy studies the shifting structure of family interactions and the interplay between tradition and change among Indian households.

#### • Ethical Dilemmas

A moral philosophy that upholds the spiritual qualities of human existence is known asethics. As a subfield of philosophy, it has greatly impacted human existence by providing the ultimate guidelines required for a happy and tranquil existence. The term "ethics" describes thetraditions and routines that people have developed throughout time and that are the foundation of their contented and tranquil existence. The most valuable moral principles that all people must uphold in order to be decent people are revealed by spiritual phenomena. The study of ethics examines how people behave according to their habits and conventions, or how their characters act, and evaluates what makes these behaviours good or bad. (Mackenzie 1).

Rather than valuing money and material possessions, moral principles must be upheld and shared with others to create a variety of human values. Everyone should respect and love one another as fellow beings. Humanity, love, compassion, empathy, and spirituality are the ethical qualities that bind individuals together. Because ethics still exist and are practiced in every aspect of life, the globe is still connected to others.



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#### 4. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

#### • Representation of Female Characters

The literary works of Sudha Murthy are renowned for their depiction of powerful, complex female characters who overcome adversity with tenacity and will. Murthy's female heroes often question conventional gender roles and stereotypes by defying society expectations and conventions. Murthy addresses the intricacies of women's life in Indian culture by means of characters like Anasuya in "Dollar Bahu" and Chitra in "The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk." These characters tackle topics including marital strife, job goals, and household duties. These individuals are shown as having agency and autonomy, actively directing their own lives in spite of the limitations placed on them by patriarchal systems. Murthy's depiction of female characters shows a profound comprehension of the challenges and victories faced by women in their quest for empowerment and self-fulfilment.

#### • Multigenerational Dynamics

Character identities and experiences in Sudha Murthy's literary works are significantlyshaped by intergenerational relationships. Murthy depicts the conflict between ancient traditions and contemporary beliefs while deftly capturing the nuances of family interactions across generations. Characters often find themselves torn between the need for personal libertyand self-expression and the expectations of more senior generations. Murthy examines the tensions and disputes that develop between parents and children as well as between grandparents and grandchildren in stories like "Gently Falls the Bakula" and "Mahashweta." These dynamics are laced with subtleties derived from generational expectations, cultural traditions, and the changing socioeconomic environment of modernday India. Murthy'sexamination of the interactions between generations gives her stories more depth and complexity while also shedding light on the intricacies of family life and the tensions between tradition and modernity.

Sudha Murthy's literary works demonstrate her acute insight into social dynamics and the human condition via the portrayal of female characters and intergenerational interactions. She explores the difficulties women have in negotiating prevailing gender stereotypes and the intricacies of intergenerational family dynamics via these portraits. Murthy's stories strike a chord with readers due to their relatability and sincerity, providing insightful perspectives on the hardships and victories faced by people within the context of Indian culture.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Sudha Murthy's literary works are a rich tapestry of diverse themes, revealing profound insightsinto the human condition. She explores themes such as gender inequality, cultural conflicts, and ethical dilemmas, highlighting the struggles and triumphs of women in asserting their rights to autonomy and



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self-determination. Murthy also delves into the intricacies of cultural conflicts, examining the clash between traditional values and modern ideologies. Her narrativesreveal the evolving dynamics of Indian society and the challenges faced by individuals in preserving their cultural heritage while embracing change. Ethical dilemmas are another layerof complexity, as characters grapple with moral quandaries and decisions. Murthy's works resonate with readers across generations, fostering reflection, empathy, and understanding. Hercontributions to literature not only entertain but also enlighten, leaving an indelible mark on readers' hearts and minds, reinforcing her status as one of India's most beloved storytellers.

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