

Resilience and Resistance: Women in Sudha Murty's Select Short Stories

S. Vidhya

Research Scholar (Part-Time)

Department of English

Alagappa Government Arts College

Affiliated to Alagappa University

Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

vidhyaswaminathan61@gmail.com

Dr. V. R. Jeyasala

Associate Professor and Head

Department of English

Alagappa Government Arts College

Affiliated to Alagappa University

Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Sudha Murty is celebrated globally for her remarkable storytelling expertise, who intricately weaves poignant narratives that navigate the spectrum of human emotions and experiences. The collections of short stories *Three Thousand Stitches*, *Wise and Otherwise* and *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* written by Sudha Murty serve as a treasure trove, delving into prevalent societal issues with keen sensitivity. Through relatable characters navigating life's challenges, Sudha Murty adeptly sheds light on themes like gender equality, poverty, women empowerment, and education disparities. By interweaving such societal issues into her narratives, she not only raises awareness but also prompts for introspection among readers.

They offer a nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by women in traditional Indian society and their journey towards empowerment. Moreover, Sudha Murty's stories feature ordinary women facing extraordinary circumstances, making a lasting impact on society. Accordingly, this research paper explores the select short stories of Sudha Murty to examine the theme of women empowerment. It investigates how female characters in the select short stories of Sudha Murty assert their rights and redefine their roles in the face of patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and personal challenges. Thus, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate how contemporary literature represents women's empowerment, resilience, and resistance.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Resilience, Resistance, Treasure trove, Women Empowerment.

As a writer from Karnataka, Sudha Murty's works often reflect the state's rich culture and traditions. Many of her stories explore themes such as caste, rural life, and community dynamics, which deeply resonate with South India's socio-cultural landscape. Her writings frequently incorporate Kannada idioms and cultural practices, providing valuable insights into South Indian heritage. Given that the South India Journal likely attracts readers with a keen interest in South Indian culture, publishing a paper on Sudha Murty's short stories would enhance its literary and cultural offerings. Additionally, it would promote appreciation for a writer whose work meaningfully bridges regional and universal cultural narratives.

Introduction:

Sudha Murty, a name that resonates with millions of readers, is a renowned Indian author and philanthropist whose literary works have left an enduring effect in the world of literature. Her extensive literary collections span across genres and she emerges as a prolific and influential short story writer. Through her stories, Sudha Murty not only entertains readers but also enriches their lives by imparting profound moral lessons, celebrating human spirit, and offering valuable insights into the diverse cultural shades of India.

Sudha Murty's literary journey began in the 1980s when she published her first collection of short stories titled "How I Taught My Grandmother to Read & Other Stories." This book marked the inception of her remarkable career as a short story writer. Since then, she has authored numerous anthologies of short stories, each displaying her unique storytelling skill. One of the distinguishing features of Sudha Murty's short stories is her ability to weave narratives around everyday life, human relationships, and societal issues. Her stories often ground in the Indian context, reflecting the nuances of Indian culture, traditions, and values. Through her women characters and relatable situations, she effortlessly transports readers into the heart of Indian society, allowing them to connect emotionally with the stories.

This paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions of women empowerment, examining its significance, underlying factors, and avenues for fostering substantial progress in the select short stories *Three Thousand Stitches*, *Wise and Otherwise* and *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk*. It highlights the resilience of women focusing on the challenges they face from societal expectations, familial responsibilities, and gender discrimination. Despite these adversities, the characters exhibit extraordinary determination, relying on their inner strength to adapt to challenging situations and persevere through adversity. Throughout this exploration, they successfully navigate and overcome systemic barriers, offering a compelling narrative of empowerment and endurance.

Discussions:

According to the American Psychological Association, "Resilience is the psychological quality that allows some people to be knocked down by the adversities of life and come back at least as strong as before." This definition encapsulates the essence of Sudha Murty's characters, who demonstrate the ability to adapt and bounce back in the face of adversity, trauma, or significant stress. Resilience involves coping effectively with life's

challenges, maintaining a positive outlook, and navigating through difficult situations with determination and perseverance. Resilient individuals recover from setbacks, learn from experiences, and ultimately grow stronger which is a recurring theme in Sudha Murty's narratives.

This paper analyses the select short stories in the socio cultural context of contemporary India and explores how resilience intersects with gender and class, shaping women's experiences. It also examines how the characters often face systemic barriers rooted in traditional norms and socio economic disparities, exhibit remarkable strength and adaptability in overcoming these obstacles. By focusing on these intersections, the paper highlights the societal and cultural challenges women endure and the transformative power of resilience in their lives.

This exploration is further enriched by the author's own experience as a prosperous entrepreneur and philanthropist which influences her nuanced depiction of women empowerment. This paper explores the challenges women face and their resilience in overcoming the barriers, offering valuable insights into the interplay of gender in both Indian and global contexts.

Furthermore, the research paper illustrates how resilience enables women to inspire and uplift others within their communities. The resilient characters in the select short stories often become mentors and role models, sharing their stories of overcoming adversity and providing guidance and support to those facing similar challenges. This resonates with Mary Wollstonecraft, a pioneering advocate for women's rights, who, in her seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, emphasized the importance of resilience with her statement: "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves," underscoring the themes of self-empowerment and inner strength.

The study also emphasizes that Sudha Murty, through her narratives, frequently portrays women's resistance as their efforts to challenge and overcome societal norms, stereotypes, discrimination, and oppression. The women characters assert their rights, advocate for gender equality, and fight against systems of inequality and injustice. This resistance takes various forms, including activism, protest, education, empowerment, and the creation of supportive communities.

In her short story "The Mop Count did not Tally," the character of the nurse is depicted as diligent, honest, and meticulous. She is a dedicated professional who takes her responsibilities seriously, ensuring that every detail in her job is meticulously accounted for. Her integrity is evident in her commitment to maintaining accurate records, as seen in her insistence on the correct tally of mops, a seemingly minor but symbolically significant detail. The nurse's deep sense of responsibility and accountability highlights her unwavering ethical standards. Her meticulous nature and dedication to precision exemplify her professional integrity. Additionally, the nurse contrasts with the negligent attitudes of those around her, bringing out the themes of honesty and thoroughness in professional duties which is rightly quoted through her words as: "Sir, I merely obeyed the principle taught to me by my teacher- if the mop count is not correct, then the needle and catgut should not be given" (Murty 26). Through this portrayal, Sudha Murty emphasizes the importance of meticulous attention within the broader context of ethical work practices, illustrating the profound impact of honesty in any profession.

Similarly, "Bombay to Bangalore" demonstrates the importance of education for women empowerment through the story of a young girl, Chitra, whose life undergoes a profound transformation through the author's encouragement and support highlighting the vital role of education in liberating women from ignorance and dependence. It shows education as a driving force behind self-reliance, independence and personal development.

This fits in perfectly with her broader thematic focus on the value of education in empowering women to question social norms and claim control over their lives as rightly quoted by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer, in her book *We should all be Feminists*:

Men and women are different. We have different hormones and different sexual organs and different biological abilities – women can have babies, men cannot. Men have more testosterone and are, in general, physically stronger than women. There are slightly more women than men in the world – 52 per cent of the world's population is female but most of the positions of power and prestige are occupied by men. The late Kenyan Nobel peace laureate Wangari Maathai put it simply and well when she said, 'The higher you go, the fewer women there are.'

Moreover the story highlights the crucial aspect of women empowerment: the concept of women uplifting one another. Through the nuanced relationship between Chitra and the narrator, Sudha Murty emphasizes the transformational power of empathy and shared experiences. Sudha Murty's support not only facilitates the girl's journey towards self-reliance but also serves as an example of fellowship which is necessary to promote mutual understanding and growth.

Also the story supports Sudha Murty's comprehensive portrayal of empowerment as a cyclical process in which the supportive networks of solidarity promote resistance against systemic oppression as well as the pursuit of education and financial independence. By combining these themes together, Sudha Murty supports the notion that solidarity and education are the interconnected pillars of empowerment contributing to a largest framework for social change and gender equality which is quoted as:

"No, Chitra. I am only one step in your ladder of success," she said. "There are many steps which led you where you are today - the shelter which looked after you, the

schools which gave you good education, the company which sent you to America and above all it is you - the most determined and inspired girl who made your life yourself. One step should never take the credit for the result" (Murty 14).

“How to beat the boys” is another story that focuses empowering women through education which is the life of the author herself. Sudha Murty’s journey as the first woman in the male dominated engineering college demonstrates the transformational potential of education in empowering women. She dispels myths about women’s roles and capabilities by going against family resistance and social conventions. Her tenacity in pursuing engineering- a profession which was deemed inappropriate for women at that time – is a potent illustration of how education breaks barriers and reshapes social norms.

Sudha Murty’s steadfast dedication to academic success serves as her reaction to harassment and seclusion, she endures from her male classmates. Through hard work and resilience she succeeds and gains respect of her peers. This journey of her own life demonstrates how education equips women with confidence and skills to negotiate and overcome discriminatory surroundings. Her father’s support is crucial as it demonstrates how family support help women reach their goals even in the face of social rejection as quoted in the words of Dr. Sundaram M, Shunmuga, Dr. Sekar M, Subburaj A in their article entitled Women empowerment: role of education as:

Education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known..... In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, women have to swim against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education.

Sudha Murty’s success story goes beyond her own accomplishments to include creating opportunities for others. Building a lecture hall in her father’s honor allows her to

acknowledge his support while contributing to the advancement of education. This deed represents the wider impact of women's empowerment through education which is advantageous to both individuals and communities. Her story is an example of how education encourages self-reliance, challenges societal norms and motivates people to pursue their goals, ultimately driving social transformation, which is quoted as:

Over the course of my studies, I realized that the belief 'engineering is a man's domain' is a complete myth. Not only was I just as capable as them, I also scored higher than all my classmates. This gave me additional confidence and I continued to not miss a single day or a single class. I persisted in studying hard, determined to top the subsequent examinations (Murty 28).

In "Three Thousand Stitches" Sudha Murty poignantly demonstrates the profound impact of economic independence in empowering women, focusing on the life of former Devadasis in Karnataka. The story deals with the fundamental challenges they faced because of the socio economic weakness as the women were traditionally entrenched in the sex trade. By giving them an access to financial opportunities, healthcare and education, Sudha Murty emphasizes the vital role of economic autonomy in overcoming the cycles of exploitation and dependency.

The story portrays the achievement of economic independence as a multifaceted process that starts with meeting fundamental requirements like healthcare and education. Sudha Murty's attempts to provide technical training and alternative livelihoods to these women illustrate how financial resources help women restore the dignity and assert their autonomy. It also emphasizes how economic empowerment enable women like Devadasis to regain control over their life, challenging the social stigmas and accomplish personal and social integration.

Thus the journey of Devadasis towards financial independence in “Three Thousand stitches” reflects Sudha Murty’s larger thematic concern in the relationship between education opportunity and empowerment. Also, it emphasizes that promoting collaborative advancement and challenging traditional norms through economic autonomy lead to self-reliance and the ability to envision a world free from exploitation. Thus, this narrative highlights the necessity for empowering women economically in order to promote social justice, equality and more hospitable society, as rightly quoted by Mahesh Nath in his article *Women Rights are Human Rights: A Legal Study in Indian Perspective*,

“Helmer tells Nora—“First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.” Nora replied—
“That I don't believe any more. I believe that first and foremost, I am an individual, just as much as you are.” This dialogue carries a forceful message. A woman today expects herself—and rightly so—to be treated as an individual, a living human being, entitled to the same dignity and status, as her male counterparts.

Similarly, in the story, “Stove bursts or Dowry deaths” Sudha Murty effectively illustrates women's social empowerment as a response to the deeply ingrained patriarchal practices that support discrimination and gender based violence. Sudha Murty not only reveals the terrible effects of this firmly rooted practice but also emphasizes the transformative power of resistance and advocate for social change by focusing on the tragic death of Meera as a result of dowry harassment

Meera’s mother, who transforms her grief and rage into a resolute struggle against the oppressive systems that killed her daughter, serves as an example of social empowerment in the narrative. Her determination to oppose a dowry system in spite of the social pressure and stigma shows the bravery needed to stand up to injustice and seek responsibility. This act of defiance is a significant step towards breaking the silence that surrounds gender based violence inspiring the women to speak out against similar injustices.

Thus, the story brings attention to Meera's predicament and urges for a wider social reckoning with the damaging customs and also highlights the significance of education and legislative changes in eradicating the discriminative behavior. By addressing such an issue in the story, Sudha Murty emphasizes the value of feminism in enabling women to confront injustice. Her mother's fight for justice symbolizes women's resilience and strength even in the face of extreme suffering.

Another story that illustrates social empowerment is "No place like home" in which Sudha Murty poignantly depicts the resilience of women trapped in exploitative situations. The story highlights the harrowing incidences that happened in the life of Nazneem, Gracy, Roja and Nema who are enticed overseas under false promises of better opportunities. Despite facing extreme mistreatment, seclusion and exploitation these women find courage and strength in each other and the refugee provided a compassionate shelter. This shelter becomes a vital location for restoring their self-esteem and sense of independency highlighting the positive effects of compassion and social support.

The resilience of women is the central theme of the story which illustrates the determination to overcome their hardships in spite of the obstacles. The women characters endure unimaginable sufferings like threats to their safety, emotional trauma and physical abuse. Their courage to seek help from friends like Maruti or from their own resources highlights the significance of personal strength in attaining empowerment. The story also highlights the value of external support systems such as Shelters and empathetic people in helping them escape from exploitation and giving them opportunities to take back their lives

Thus, Sudha Murty utilizes this story to emphasize the enforcement of legal protections to address gender-based exploitation and violence. She argues for a collective responsibility to confront social norms that sustain inequality. Also, it highlights that social empowerment necessitates a deliberate effort to create inclusive environments that help

vulnerable women protect their rights and provide access to opportunities. By doing this “No place like home” turns into a powerful testament to the role of solidarity, empathy and advocacy in fostering gender equality and empowering women to achieve their greatest potential.

Conclusion

The resilience and resistance shown by women in Sudha Murty’s stories serve as an example of the transformational power of courage and determination in the face of difficulty. The women characters are strong enough to challenge social conventions, systemic barriers and deeply ingrained gender- biases. These stories serve as potent reminders of the women who display their quest for liberation from grassroots initiatives to remove restrictive customs like child marriage and dowry to individual victories in obtaining education and financial independence.

In order to address the challenges of women's empowerment effectively solutions must go beyond individual acts of resistance and focus on collective actions and systemic reforms. It is essential to create environments that enable women to prioritize access to economic opportunities, legal protection and education. Governments, organizations and individuals establish inclusive frameworks that empower women including the Policies that address wage gaps, gender based violence and discrimination providing the foundation for sustainable change.

Ultimately, to achieve lasting empowerment for women, resilience and resistance must be met with actionable support. Society endeavors to create a world free from discrimination oppression and inequality for women by promoting solidarity and utilizing diverse strengths. The narratives of Sudha Murty emphasize the value of tenacity, community and systemic advocacy providing inspiration and a path to success. Together, by elevating the

voice of women and promoting their rights, society can build a future where every woman has the opportunity to reach her full potential and contribute to a more just and equitable world

Conflict of Interests: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2026 by S. Vidhya and Dr. V. R. Jeyasala retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms

Works Cited

- Barooah, Romy. 'Capturing complexity in research on women', in Romy Barooah, Kathleen Cloud, Subadra Seshadri, T.S Saraswathi, Jean T. Peterson and Amita Verma(eds.): Capturing complexity: an interdisciplinary look at women, households and development. New Delhi: Sage, pp. 25-59.
- Chimamanda. (n.d.). We should all be feminists. <https://ameforeignpolicy.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/we-should-all-be-feminists.pdf>
- Murty, Sudha. *Wise and otherwise a salute to life*. Penguin Books. 2006.
- Murty, Sudha. *Three thousand stitches: Ordinary people, extraordinary lives*. Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House. 2017.
- Murty, Sudha. *The day I stopped drinking milk: Life stories from here and there*. Penguin Books. 2012.
- Nath, G. V. "Women Rights Are Human Rights: A Legal Study in Indian Perspective." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3635613>.
- Women empowerment: role of education*. 2014. <https://www.indianjournals.com/ijor.aspx?target=ijor:ijmss&volume=2&issue=12&article=008>.
- "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman." Goodreads. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/224387.A_Vindication_of_the_Rights_of_Woman. Accessed May 21, 2024.
- 'Resilient Women in the Select Novels of Anita Desai and Nathaniel Hawthorne'. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/541914>
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/070674371105600504>.