

The Journey to Empowerment: A study of Sudha Murthy's Protagonists (Anupama and Srimati)

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Abstract

Institutions of marriage as well as family which are essential for a community, have been situated supporting encumbrances of sui generis currently. Especially acidulous marriage related pressures are compelling women and stand as nit-picking years in their initial wedded life. Two novels of Sudha Murthy are put to test here: Sudha Murthy's Mahashweta (2007); Gently Falls the Bakula (2008). How pain in the lives of the two women-protagonists renovate their path of journey towards empowerment that sanctions them a skill-acquisition through chopping and scissoring put on by famous Portuguese professional foot-ball player Cristiano Ronaldo to fight back on wrong-doing which has been showcased here as 'Naari Sakthi'(Women-Empowerment) of both Anupama and Shrimati textually and pictorially.

"There are no more distinctions between . . . male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (St. Paul, Galatians 3:278)

1. Introduction

Institutions of marriage as well as family which are essential for a community, have been situated supporting encumbrances of sui generis currently. Marital stress, leading to breakdown of marriage, is indeed, very difficult to address but not uncommon, when one of the couples gives less priority to newly wedded life or long married life giving second fiddle to work. Surprisingly most of the males in India fall to this category. Rapid revolutionary change during last 50 years has challenged conventional, moral and religious dogmas in Indian society. Dominant ideologies, increased responsibilities and change life styles have added oil to the fuel resulting marital values destabilized. The very meaning of stability in marriage has been triggered, as life-long stability is not achieved after each dream wedding. Either mega or trivial stressors challenge couples, especially the female in the wife role, as it affects her social, financial, mental and even family life. Present day generation is individual-centric rather than community-centric focusing on personal growth, freedom and privacy. Expectations from spouse are highly elevated lining up on economic, psychological, emotional wellbeing. When self-actualization becomes a day dream, the wife responds to profound despair. Though educated women of present era exercise personal freedom, professional growth and career development their role in family is a point of discussion. The economic independence does not serve the purpose as either their earnings or their career growth do not offer any active role to play in the family. Physical hardships sans decision making power creates vacuum in marital relationship. Accordingly, the couples grow apart failing to protect their marital life from harmful effects. When adjustment is not placed by the couple as a strategy but as a mantra to wife, comfort is null in the relation. The feminist movement in India has tried to define, establish and defend women's rights within the society with a dynamic approach voicing for the identity of a woman.

Especially acidulous marriage related pressures are compelling women and stand as nit-picking years in their initial wedded life. By far, either in initial married life or very rarely at a later stage, couples face catastrophic phase of balancing family tasks. The couples find it hard sharing simple day to day activity and there by

become angry on each other. This susceptibility leads to irreconcilable incongruity. Sudha Murthy's two novels taken for study here showcase the crisis of protagonist-couple leading to separation or marriage break at a early wedlock stage (Mahaswetha) and after long years of wedded life (Gently Falls Bakula) Stressors in wedlock may occur inevitably in initial phase of life or in later years and most of the couples overcome, thanks to the compromising or sacrificing characteristic nurtured among Indian women. The traditional gender roles assigned by society in India are well preserved promoting great disparity among males and females, and the institution of marriage just vouches it. This paper captures gender inequalities in the allocation of authority as its point of departure. Given the widespread evidence of the extent to which a wife, primarily Indian wife, has been marginalised in courses of action by which societal practices are designed and implemented, it puts forward that open mind needs to be shaped to strengthening the wife's capacity for influencing at different stages of the unit of family. Above all, there are solid 'decisive moments' in the life of any individual when the ideas, values and knowledge of key decision-making impact and the individual capacity dominate the role in which s/he set into, conditioned by self and society to which s/he belongs. The present seminar paper sets out to develop a theory that addresses the issue of empowering the role of wife reflecting on factors of change. It applies theory to the 'decisive moments' framework. Finally, it draws on case studies of protagonists (Anupama and Srimati) of Sudha Murthy, to point up means for the transformative potential for empowering the role of wife.

2. Literature Review

The prominence given to emotive bond by modern couple is shifted to individual from general wellbeing of family as observed by Lawrence Stone, an English historian in his work *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*. (1977). The interactions between couples in modern times are highly emotive and fall into inner circle, however, all other relations stand in outer circle (Burgess and Locke, 1953) resulting in lack of guidance and support during tough time faced by the couples; the bonding among nuclear family members has been intense as considered by Dizard and Gadlin (1990). The nuclear family in modern times has been dominated by three sentiments opines Elkind: passionate love between couple leading to wedlock; maternal love between mother and children; and domesticity assuring bonding love within family. Doherty (1992) rightly pin points that modern family can be labelled as the psychological family that prioritizes on individual satisfaction.

World Health Organization (WHO) suggested the nature of violent acts against women may be:

- ❖ Physical
- ❖ Psychological
- ❖ Sexual
- ❖ Involving deprivation or neglect

Any deed or slip affecting one's self-esteem, individuality or personal growth; degradation, forceful separation from kids, imposed quarantine from kith and kin, physical harm, frequent bellowing, using scary words/gestures, supervisory manners, and damaging any valuable assets comes under domestic violence and put to study through the reactions of Anupama and Srimati in the present study.

Case Study 1: Dimensions of Domestic Violence in the studied arena

Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta* (2007) revolves around Anupama, the daughter of a village school master, Shamanna. She has a step mother Sabakka and two stepsisters, Nanda and Vasudha. Anupama is very beautiful, intelligent and talented. Her parents want her to get married but she wants to complete her studies. Dr. Anand, an assistant surgeon with Dr. Desai, falls in love with Anupama when he sees her acting in a stage play, *Mahashweta*. He is introduced to her as one of the most brilliant doctors. "He had every quality that a young girl could desire in a man. He was not only handsome, but well-bred and intelligent too." Anupama is introduced to him as a superb actress, and an excellent student always getting top rank. "... with her beautiful large

eyes, exquisite complexion, and face framed by long, jet black hair, she looked like an Apsara.” He lives with his mother Radhakka and spoilt sister, Girija. Though he belongs to a very rich family, he convinces his mother, who reluctantly agrees, and gets married to Anupama, the incomparable beautiful lady. Dr. Anand plans his higher studies abroad and Anupama stays back in her in laws’ house. Anupama develops leucoderma and is sent back to her father’s house, where she is not welcomed. She writes letters to Anand pouring her pain. Anand opts not to reply thinking that she can overcome any hurdles and wants to take some time till everyone has calmed down. When his father-in-law, Shamanna writes a pleading letter, he steps into his shoes only to fear that he would be like Shamanna pleading someone for something or other if Anupama begets children in their wedded life. Even when he comes for her sister’s marriage, he does not try to meet Anupama. Knowing this, she decides to go to Mumbai to her friend, Sumitra’s house and gets a job. When she meets with an accident in Bombay, Dr. Vasant treats her. He falls in love with her and proposes marriage. Anand comes back to India, realises his mistakes, apologises to her and requests her to come back to him. She rejects both of them saying that she would rather live alone and continues her empowered journey but all alone.

Case Study 2: Gender Inequalities leading to Empowerment

The story of Gently Falls the Bakula (2008) deals with a new couple Shrikant and Shrimati, and discusses how the dynamic change that happens in their wedded life when Shrikant reaches to the peak of success in corporate world affecting their family life that loses charisma and distinctiveness gradually. With a heart touching narrative style, this novel offers the traumatic events happen in the lives of a young couple and how those events quiver their relationship. Shrikant and Shrimati are school companions and were in deep love and against their parents’ wish both get wedded. Shrikant joins an IT enterprise and becomes focused on rising in profession. Shrimati attenuates her personal aspiration confining to home and extending her support to the core to her husband who has shaped himself as a prosperous corporate lead person while Shrimati has placed a shadow march with him. Their wedded life has been fine but a day dawns for Shrimati to realize that her whole hearted sacrifice has gone just into ashes and she has missed a lot in her life including her fascination for history. In modern family life, all amenities are there for her to lead a luxurious life but the company of her husband is never granted. A kind of void hits her as no child is yet begotten. And then she receives a letter from her guide, an American professor of History projecting her transformation before and after marriage and she realises the need to renovate her identity: her professor says: “I have noticed that you have not lost your love for history. I have been observing you ever since I have known you. I remember how you described Badami and Sravanabelagola and Ajanta and Ellora many years ago. How you approached the monuments and places of historical significance on this trip was commendable. You have become more mature. You are no longer as emotional about history, you have developed a critical and analytical approach. I had thought that marriage, this kind of wealth, family responsibilities would have made you dull, lazy and arrogant. But you are still very sensible, your attitude to life has not changed. If anything, your thoughts seem to go deeper and have become clearer.” Durga Sasi Kiran Saripalli observes in her paper: "After almost half a decade of marriage, she realizes that her husband has become too focused on his career and has no place for family matters or to think about her. Eventually, she takes a decision that leaves their family life shattered. The turning point of the otherwise settled life and easy going is when Shrimati realises, how easily she has made her husband’s ambition as her ambition and in the process has lost not only her identity but herself respect too. An attempt has been made to test a hybrid notion that both gender norms and societal norms may partially account for the behavior of female at middle and elite levels." This tale of Shrimati confessing her inner vacuum and presenting the gloomy side of their life-style is the central focus. Shrikant is shocked at her decision to leave him. “He regretted his action now, after losing the fortune he had forgotten he possessed. He experienced the same shock, the same disappointment and the same agony that he had felt when he had lost his first rank, seventeen years ago. After all these years Shrikant felt that he had then lost a meaningless rank, but today, he had lost his most precious Shrimati.” Readers would undergo a deep-thinking on a simple theme that would relate to many of their lives exist around who started their journey of empowerment lately.

3. Redefining Marriage

Redefining marriage does not basically offer any immediate benefits to all women, however, it offer considerable changes to the spirit of marriage and to its setting. It does not expand its arena; it may alter its essential meaning including inner and outer people unified. By expanding marriage more and more inclusiveness beyond an agreement between two individuals to live together, is potential. For that, basic social customs followed in Indian marriage system needs to be truly deliberated revisiting time testing traditions. It is not an attempt to change the definition or scope of marriage but an attempt is made to expand the very nature and scope of marriage safeguarding its uniqueness and status identified in society. Sudha Murthy attempts to widen the rung for a married woman to locate herself in the role of wife especially minus sacrifice where marriage is not just a commitment to a male who do not capture his role as a husband and makes the lines blurred.

Longevity has increased and naturally couples stay together for long years leading to economic or social or psychological stresses. Domestic peace is a challenge to be attained. Indeed, financial freedom, education, amenities and nucleus family add to the marital stress in the present Indian society. On the other hand, the whole social and cultural practices fashion marital strain. Most of the cases presented in media news or shows establish that the modern couples lack family skills. Lack of communication skills, negotiation skills, listening skills become problematic among couples. Lack of understanding, care giving, mutual trust can lead to an unbearable traumatic situation and thereby marriage as a prison like institution. Joy, affection and mutual concern are the healing mantras to handle the wounded soul of the spouse. To see trapped in marriage is the ultimate suffering one may experience after an initial romantic expedition and courtship, of which Shrimati longs to run away. After their wedlock, Shrikanth stops showering any concern for her by spending time with her, listening to her and sharing a dialogue. When he is at home, he never exchanges any sweet words; she only hears his anger, nagging or demand. As a result of which she has concluded that Shrikant approaches her only for sexual pleasure. She develops a feeling that she is taken for granted, unappreciated and neglected. Shrikanth becomes unmindful of the subtle desires of his spouse; similarly Shrimati pushes herself to be insensitive to his desires. None of them really place a hard effort to reach the other person in order to make their marital life blissful. Moreover, Shrikanth mutates to the practice of spending much of his time outside well, on office purposes only. Shrikanth who neglects his wife initially due to work pressure, uses the same excuse to get away from marital responsibilities. What he fails to understand is that work cannot be made an excuse on long run basis and luxury life he procured cannot serve as a substitute for love. He thinks that he is a good husband because he works long hours and makes good financial provision for his wife and home depriving her of something she does need, namely, love, affection and time. The occurrence of latchkey child has been a painful experience offered to many modern married women.

4. Deprivation/ Neglect

Neglecting or ignoring one's spouse is found very deep rooted in the two selected novels highlighting the point that once the wedding is over, girl-parents responsibility is over and become passive to her marital issues encountered in her wedded life.

Anupama's father, Shamanna does not feel any responsibility to take care of his disturbed daughter by providing a chance to build herself her future when her marriage is in a challenge. Neither he has exchanged a word with Anand's mother nor has counseled Anand. He is a typical Indian father, poor and conventional mind set and never extends any support to Anupama. Her step mother and her neighborhood add only some obnoxious commentary resulting into her tough decision to leave for Mumbai and start her life.

Similarly, Shrimati does not turn for parental-support but takes life into her hands and starts her journey from where it is stopped some years ago. The typical parental attitude in India has been confronted in both the novels. However, it is quite remarkable that loss in the lives of these two women renovate their path of journey towards empowerment.

5. Masculine Convention

Married women in India experience male dogmatism. Most of the women are treated as second citizens in their own homes. Husbands take the whole financial plan and remain key decision makers and in turn authoritative. Woman in the role of wife becomes just a robot following the orders issued in day to day life. Number of incidents projected in media showcase the disparity.

Durga Sasi Kiran Saripalli's paper Reading Sudha Murthy's Mahaswatha as a 'Mirror Literature' to Current Societal Engagement, showcases "how ache leading to tender- toughness experienced by the female-protagonist, Anupama in Sudha Murthy's 'Mahaswatha', opens the mind's eye allowing better understanding of how societies operate, why people are living in picky ways, and why to maintain good relationships; helping to relate emotionally with other people, to recognize the difficult struggles of our fellow men and women; making personalities built by genuine tenderness. The novel deals with competence and self-transformation of a troubled human being especially of a female."

Widespread and persistent examples of high mobility, a degree of openness, remarkable knack campaigning a different viewpoint that can be employed by close supporters for proclaiming societal supremacy of female over male. Male employs a new basis for resentment over female who advances as the savior of Indian female beliefs. It is not my duty here to organize a systematic evidence to upkeep the view that there has been social mobility through literary texts. The positional change from daughter to wife does not lead, however, to structural change and the idea of equality hence is unchallenged in spite of lower gendered group, here female, claiming eventually equality with higher gendered group, here male. Though a few rights are given to educated woman, evidences from day to day life, media and literature show that she is always suppressed. At the base of pyramid family structure, a female is positioned and at top of the pyramid, a male is positioned and resulted into balanced oppositions, in competition with the other and each dependent on the other. The mobility, vibrancy, maturity stability and adventure elements present in female by nature gradually carved out roles for themselves in the public domain and the cult of true womanhood has been modified. The distinct roles of female are acknowledged and at the same time the bond between male and female is strengthened. Sudha Murthy speaks as clearly to female's own social and economic concerns as to her familial position for obtaining a larger role by any female in her personal and professional frontiers. The domesticity rendered as a universal ideal in practice has narrowed down the outlook of not only male but female also. When transferring domestic culture from household to public arena the differences between Srimathi and Sreekanth are more sharply drawn. For her transference of familial values and the conversion of individual roles and marital cooperation are put repeatedly to question than the transference of material goods who takes a decision to be more productive to advance the cause of change. The patterns that arose in their wedlock are crystalised in the heat of rapid economic and cultural change and her second innings are on the verge providing a very lucid alternative. Both of them have served as both agents and objects of social change, as reproducers and reshapers of social order and social value. Their internal dynamics are responded, elaborated and molded in the context of a female world of work providing relatively an autonomous framework within which they could

locate themselves either as new members of the society or as members of new economic or social groups of society symbolizing a certain social and economic standing. The five concepts of societal change, 1. Evolutionary; 2. Cynical; 3. Economic 4. Conflict; 5. Technological Theory may relate to the path of societal change; when attempts are made to identify the causation of change with an explanation on the basis of endogamous aspects or procedures; and accentuating exogamous aspects like economic, cultural or historical. It is maintained that change is dynamic and yet constant that stages a central role in order to provide remedial to social inequalities. Karl marx’s viewpoint of change in society has been defensive and tactical; the theory does not include inactive responses or exploitations or other problems exist in marital culture. However, it projects a tool-kit for victims striving to regain their lost freedom. Marx emphasizes that running against tide is quite a good strategy and hence it is desirable that would initiate societal change and eliminate social inequality.

6. Perceived Pictorial projection

Perceived value, that has potential influence on the reader, is reader’s evaluation and the ability to meet their expectations. Concept is evaluated basing on the expected outcomes of the each action. Reader’s idea on how actions gain reactions. As the reader is connected emotionally, he can connect, identify and perceive the response to each action. Values are standard ideals with which the actions of the major characters are evaluated through deep insight and the perceived values are considered. Thus perception occurs through critical evaluation. Out of the four value-types - functional, monetary, social and psychological – the last two respond in the best interest of an individual to keep him happy. The first two add up to the last two.

Women empowerment (1) does not look at roles like wife, daughter, sister or mother and depends on economic development, education and strategies applied (2) to create the value of empowerment using effectively integrating drivers (3) to implement a mechanism (4) to attain contextual forces (5) stabilised.

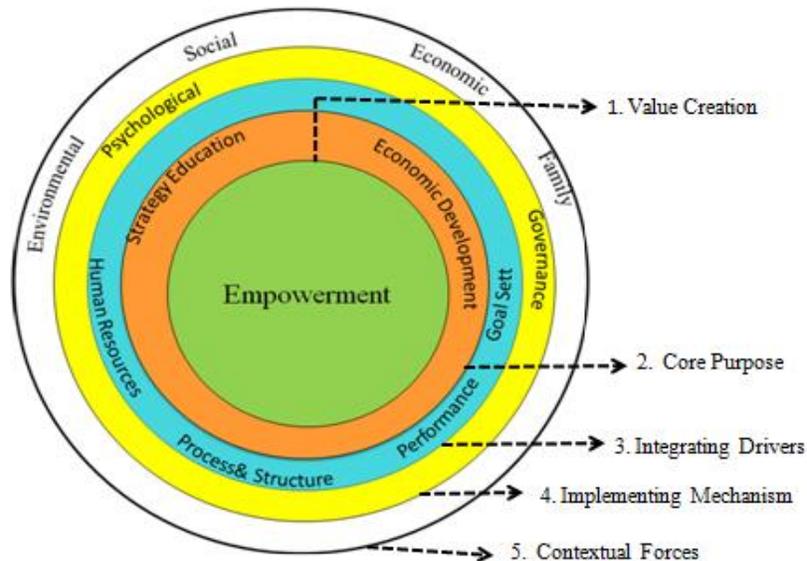


Fig.1 Empowerment as Value Creation

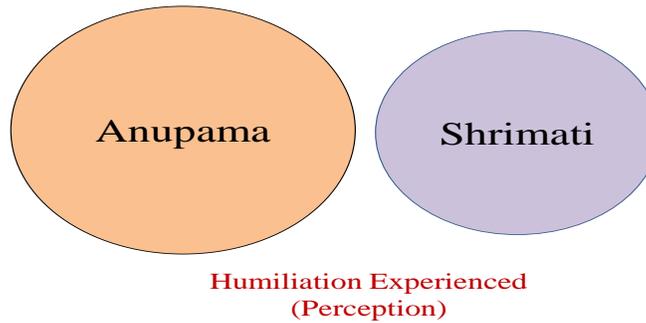


Fig.2. Humiliation Experienced

The concept of perceived value implies here as an interaction between female-protagonists and family/community/society where value can be understood as an action or behavior. This phenomenon does not offer any harm to be done to a person under the name of value.

When humiliation experienced by Anupama, the given preferential treatment by Anand grants favoring his mother, his sister and even society with an advantage over Anupama who cannot take in the humiliation observed by her mother-in-law towards her father and towards her. Also Shrimati is ignored by Shrikant and their union in marriage helps him to grow but she remains deprived of pursuing her Ph.D or planning for a child-adoption. Even her office skills and other extended service go unnoticed.

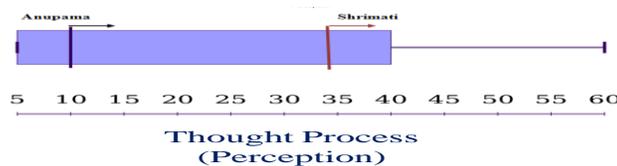


Fig. 3. Thought Process

Marriage as an institution keeps the relationship together, and values like beauty, perfection and social approval should not break the relation so that the victimized life-partner starts thinking of married relationship. Thought-process of female-protagonists is arranged on a scale to differentiate transactions after marriage. Anupama, who is met with a trauma almost immediately after her marriage, starts processing her thoughts, takes stock of things, pulls the strings and achieves what she can and satiates with it. She becomes a rounded personality with a balanced disposition that she talks to her husband pinpointing his gaffe very cool when he approaches her proposing reunion. Shrimati understands that their marriage is floundering and cannot do anything to retrieve and just sick and tired of their relation after waiting too long and Shrikant's

stonewalling is an ultimate emotional shut that provokes her thought process leading her to initiate her once forgotten research activity sponsored by a History professor in abroad.

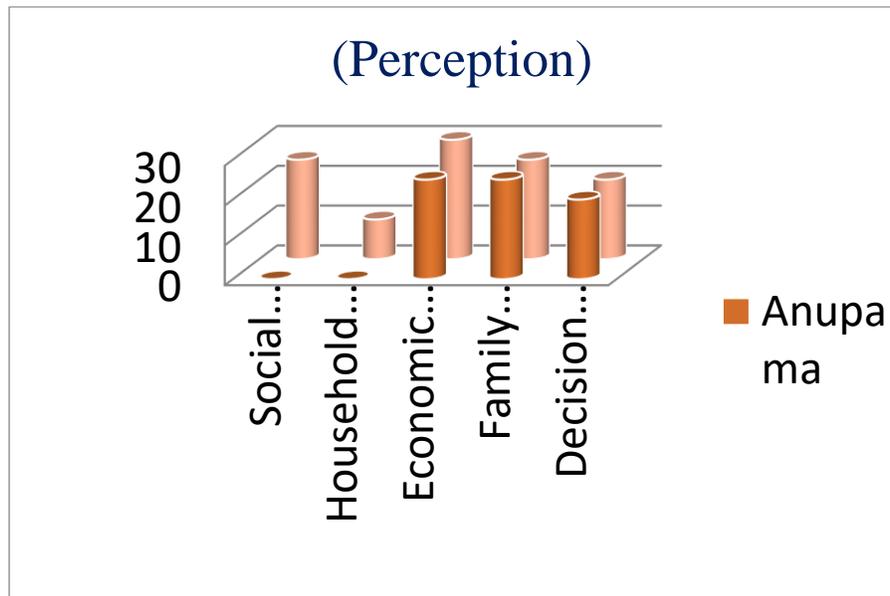


Fig 4 Family Matters

Both protagonists face issues related to decision making, household matters and the same components are projected in fig 4.

Empower to empower others

The key underlying concepts that relate to women empowerment are: 1. Choices; 2. Control; 3. Power. Choices like pursuing education, participating in community activity, associating with organizations, volunteering services, expressing ideas not only boosts self-esteem; but provides access to the knowledge resources encouraging to carve her authentic self; she may reach to the top level run with knowledge dissemination and thereby controls the process of decision making in home affairs, career and its progress, financial matters, freedom of expression, mobility, and thereby achieve power over tangible and intangible frames. In a way all this helps to minimize the negative portrayal of woman as timid, beauty-conscious, ornament-lovers, an epitome of divinity, an epitome of motherhood, or goddess of home. The positive portrayal of a woman with all her positive and negative attributes provide a better life in parents'/in-laws' home and in community. She has to be treated naturally and with a sense of recognition. In a wider sense Anupama in Mahashwetha has been spotted as empowering women who augments her capacity to influence the society in general and woman in particular by undertaking and reshaping resource allocation and altering her choices and thus acquiring entree to the power house of decision making process in personal, professional, social frames. When Anupama reaches a secured position financially, socially and psychologically after her transformational journey taking up challenges and turning them into opportunities, announces:

"I know what my goals are and where I am heading, and I don't need anyone's help to reach my destination. God has been very kind to me. I have been fortunate enough to live in a place like Bombay where even this mad rush has a humane side to it. I have excellent friends who trust me and will not hesitate to help me' if I am in trouble. All my students are as dear to me as my own children would have been. Their unconditional love has never made me think of myself as blemished. I cannot help feeling sad for those women who are still at the mercy of their husbands and in-laws, and are emotionally and economically dependent on them. What will their fate be if they are unfortunate enough

to get this kind of a disease? I am not dependent on anyone for emotional or financial support and that has given me enormous strength. I thank God for having been so fortunate."

Similarly when Shrimati finds her husband chases material prosperity like Pahom in Leo Tolstoy's 'How much Land does a man require?' She has become her personal secretary at home and she is pleased to do it unless and until she realises that he is not even appreciating her but taking the relation for granted. She ruminated:

"What had happened to Shrikant now?"

The love, affection and sharing of ideas and dreams had disappeared. He hardly talked to her about the company or other business matters. The only time he talked to her was to assign a list of chores for her to do. For him she had undergone so much opposition, criticism and nastiness from her in laws. She had even given up her career, only because she really loved him. But Shrikant was not the same person she knew before marriage.

This Shrikant Deshpande was only interested in name, fame, position and status. In building up his business, he had forgotten his dear wife. This Shrikant appeared a stranger to her.

Where could she find her old Shri?"

Even in modern society, women have been facing gender discrimination excluding them to participate in any decision making process. Emerging new women of modern India can be observed in both the themes. Empowered women should exercise their ability to participate in decision making process that would grant them control over the process of decision making at home, office, or social levels and promote empowerment to other women and Sudha murthy's classic female protagonists, Anupama and Shrimati stand as supreme fictional models.

7. Conclusion

The capacity built through empowerment grant key underlying concepts that relate to women empowerment are: 1. Choices; 2. Control; 3. Power. The selected two novels of Sudha Murthy – Mahashweta and Gently Falls the Bakula -. Showcase how pain in the lives of these two women renovate their path of journey towards empowerment and thereby establish their journey that sanctions both female-protagonists to acquire a skill-set used by the famous Portuguese professional foot-ball player Cristiano Ronaldo known as chopping and scissoring required to fight back on wrong doing which has been showcased here as the 'Naari Sakthi'(Women-Empowerment) of both Anupama and Shrimati.

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