

Sudha Murty's Select Fiction: A Literary Panorama of the Global Humanitarian Perspectives

ABSTRACT

The humanitarian perspective is the emblem of ethics which is studied as a fundamental doctrine in Axiology. It is one of the intrinsic values signifying the existence of human beings in the world. The present research paper ascertains the significance of the humanitarian perspectives through the textual analysis of Sudha Murty's select novels *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*. Sudha Murty being a renowned philanthropist and prolific Indian writer in Kannad and English reflects the philanthropical approach through her own real experiences about human beings in society. Humanitarian perspectives are the replica of the tendency of people behaving to one another in the form of love, affection, respect, emotion, sympathy, compassion, and humanity etc. An attempt has been made to shed light on the evaluative nature of humanitarian perspectives in Sudha Murty's aforesaid novels which are the best examples of the humanitarian approach. The characters in the novels represent such perspectives which should be achieved by every individual in the world to make human life happier and more peaceful. Ethical values are advocated through the significance of humanitarian perspectives in the light of select novels. Ethics is the principle of human life that can be cherished through such humanitarian perspectives of the people.

Keywords: Ethics, humanitarian perspective, humanism, human propensity, philanthropy

1. INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian Perspective is basically an outlook or point of view of a man to look at others with human compassion, love, respect, emotion, sympathy, cooperation etc. According to Collins Dictionary, "Humanitarianism is the doctrine that human beings must strive to promote the welfare of their fellow people" (Anonymous). It refers to the self-realization of human values. It is considered to be an eminent part of ethics, moral values which functions as doctrines in shaping human life towards a peaceful and eternal pleasure. "The Principles and Practices of Good Humanitarian Donorship ... define the objectives of humanitarian action as: to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of crises, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness" (OECD, 2012, p. 4). It consists of many innumerable abstracts which immensely affect human life. Humanitarian perspectives are the instinctive capacities that need to be achieved by every human being in the world through being's moralist. Morality is the prominent aspect of humanitarian perspectives which enables the man to act morally for the welfare of human society. "Man is a naturally moral being in the sense that every person has the natural propensity to act morally unless otherwise constrained. In fact, man's moral nature follows jointly from his being rational as well as spiritual, both of which are shown to be constitutive of moral personhood" (Mohapatra, 2008: 6).

In the contemporary era, there seems to be a lack of humanitarian perspectives amongst the people at the global level. The values are being replaced with the vicious mindsets of the human beings. The people are getting selfish and practical that they have lost human sensibility. The people are tempted by artificial material instruments. It has been a global issue of the declining humanitarian perspectives which could hold the human values together to survive the human existence on the earth planet. There are several factors responsible for the declination of such perspectives which need to be considered seriously with the remedies to revival and inculcation of humanitarian perspectives amongst people in the global world. When any natural calamity or sudden attacks occur anywhere in the world, humanity is shown through the humanitarian approach of one country for another, one state for another. One of the recent examples of global humanitarian perspectives can be taken during the period of pandemic covid-19 which has affected the whole world. During such time, the humanitarian perspectives are seen through the financial assistance of many people to the poor people and countries in the world. Therefore, humanitarian perspectives should be cultivated to survive the existence of all human beings. It is required to inculcate such perspectives at global level not state or country level. There are some international bodies like World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and NGOs which take the initiative in ensuring humanitarian actions worldwide to protect the disaster affected people. World Humanitarian Day is commemorated on 19th August by the United Nations to pay tribute to those who have initiated to give their hands in the service of mankind and whose lives are committed to helping the people affected by natural disaster, diseases, calamity, pandemics etc. throughout the globe. But each individual creature should realize his or her duty towards others. Human compassion is the only thing that can bring people close to each other and create a bond of love and humanity in the globe. The whole world is nothing but a human society that is connected to one another in the form of emotions, humanity, love, affection, duties, responsibilities etc. It is everybody's prime duty to serve and help others through the continuation of effective humanitarian perspectives.

Sudha Murty has experienced such a grim reality of the human world being a part of the corporate sector. She expresses her great concerns over the declination of global humanitarian perspectives after pinpointing the changed mindsets of the individuals. She outspeaks the truth about the corporate world that "I have seen that in the corporate world, people who were so simple become so complicated. And they start thinking that money can buy everything" (Phulsunge, 2018.p.12). Unlike other eminent personalities of having philanthropical perspectives, she too serves the society due to her social commitment. She tried to reform and revive the humanitarian perspectives not only through her social works but also through her popular fictional and non-fictional works. The select novels of Sudha Murty reflect her genuine efforts towards more effective humanitarian perspectives which need to be revived and developed for the happiness and peacefulness of human beings in the global society. Her works are the finest examples of the inculcation of humanitarian perspectives which seem to have different abstract forms like humanity, emotions, love, affection, human relationship, desires, human compassion, etc.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper is aimed to project the literary panorama of the global humanitarian perspectives through the select fictions of Sudha Murty. Concerns of Sudha Murty over the loss of humanitarian perspectives in the world are highlighted with her strong suggestions for the revival of such perspectives. This study focuses on the textual and critical analysis of the select works of Sudha Murty through the characters who represent the modern and postmodern individuals. The purpose of this study is also to depict Sudha Murty as a writer of global humanitarian perspectives.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive, interpretative, analytic research methodologies are used to undertake the present research paper. Library method is also followed while collecting relevant materials concerning this paper.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a review of literature, the following works on Sudha Murty and her fictional and non-fictional works have been studied that focus on her philanthropical perspectives-

- i. A Study of Indian Values in the Works of Sudha Murty and Ruskin Bond (2015) by Pai Jyothi.
- ii. Writing as a mean of social commitment: A Study of the Works of Sudha Murty (2015) by Khaja Moinuddin
- iii. Sudha Murty (2018) by Gunjan Jain

But the present study deals with the global humanitarian perspectives of Sudha Murty through the projection of characters in the select novels which are different from the above referred works.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The cosmopolitan sensibility of Sudha Murty towards more effectiveness of global humanitarian perspectives is shown through the significance of ethical value and human values in the select novels—*Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*. Her concerns over the loss of the humanitarian approach as well as subjugation of ethical value over the vices to revive the global humanitarian perspectives are reflected through the textual analysis. Being a philanthropist, Murty's human compassion are the essence of her each piece of writing that brings forth the realization of human sensibility and approach towards the welfare of mankind. The various abstract forms of humanitarian perspectives like emotions, love, human values, ethics, spirituality, responsibilities etc. are found and discussed in the select works of Sudha Murty to manifest the global humanitarian perspectives.

5.1 *Dollar Bahu* (2007)

Dollar Bahu is the critique of materialism and hedonism which cause to the loss of humanitarian perspectives in today's postmodern world. It also explores the concerns over the changing mindsets of people through the characters in the novel. It deals with the various aspects of global humanitarian perspectives such as humanity, love, caring, helpfulness, selfless sacrifices, affection, desires, responsibility, feeling of social commitment etc. Murty has also criticized the unethical and hedonistic approach of modern men who seem to be responsible for the diminishment of human values across the globe. The true human compassions of Murty are presented with her social commitment to revive the humanitarian perspectives in the select novel. Humanitarianism is signified by the sense of realization of human values through the depiction of some characters in the *Dollar Bahu*.

Dollar Bahu is the projection of the conflicts faced by the Indian family living in Bangalore. The global humanitarian perspectives are depicted through the characters like Shamanna,

Girish and Vinuta. The family head, Shamanna is a Sanskrit teacher and a man of philanthropic perspectives. He is very simple and contented person who does for his family as possible as he could do in his modest salary. He brings up his two sons and a daughter inculcating human values. Unfortunately, his younger son, Girish could not inherit the values of life taught by his father. Shamanna's elder son, Chandra Shekhar and daughter, Surabhi follow the practical and hedonistic approach of their mother, Gouramma. Gouramma is a selfish, practical and money-minded. She always wants her sons to earn lots of money and bring luxuries to their life. Shamanna has a good experience of her indifferent nature. He advises her many times to change herself and try to be happy with what she has. But she ignores him and quarrels with him frequently. When Chandra Shekhar gets a job in America, Gouramma becomes so happy because she could fulfil her suppressed desires through her son, Chandru who will earn now dollar which is the most powerful financial instrument. She always scolds Girish, younger son for his helpful and simple nature. Shamanna knows well that his wife is running after the false mirage of money which will shatter her illusion one day. He has concerns for her that he expresses with his younger daughter-in-law, Vinuta who is the wife of Girish. Shamanna being a teacher believes in human values and advises his family to follow the humanitarian perspectives to live a happy and peaceful life. Shamanna's humanitarian perspectives are seen through his conversation with Vinuta which shows his understanding of the true values of life as well as the concerns for his wife who is ignorant about the consequences of her greedy nature.

This Dollar may have transformed the lifestyles of some families, taken them from poverty to wealth, but it has also broken up some families. It has created financial and social distinctions within families and destroyed the peace of mind. Very few people have understood this. If Gouri had been more mature, she would not have been in awe of the dollar and danced to its tune. Her greed burnt the peace and harmony in our family.... Gouri is not a bad human being, but she is misguided. I am sure she will realize that the enchanted forest is a mirage, but I am afraid it might be too late by then. (Murty, 2007:139).

The above dialogues of Shamanna reveal the truth that there are many people like Gouramma, Chandru, and Jamuna in the society who give prominence to money and materialistic things rather than moral values and peace of mind. Girish and Vinuta are a nice couple who respect and follow Shamanna's humanitarian perspectives therefore they seem to live happy and content life despite having jealousy or greed for materialistic assets. Girish does not like his mother's practical and selfish attitude. Therefore, Gouramma scolds him all the time and tells him to be practical instead of being an emotional person. Here the humanitarian perspectives can be seen through Girish's reply to his mother- "Amma, I don't agree with you. What Appa says is right. As a human being it is our duty to help everyone" (Murty, 2007:20).

Vinuta is the most sympathetic girl who bears all good qualities as a good human being. She is a parentless child. She has grown up with her uncle. She is a very simple, educated and responsible girl. After marrying Girish, she has to suffer a lot due to the exploitation and taunting of Gouramma. Gouramma treats her badly and humiliates her. But she never turns back to her. She performs her responsibilities without fail. Gouramma makes the distinction between her and Chandru's wife, Jamuna who belong to rich family. She calls Vinuta as Indian rupees and Jamuna as dollar bahu. It makes Vinuta hurt yet she does her duties towards her mother-in-law. Girish and Shamanna respect Vinuta for her understandable and responsible nature. At the end of the novel, Gouramma realizes her mistakes and transforms into a good woman after being humiliated by Jamuna in America. Gouramma's transformation in the novel is the result of self-realization which gives her a golden chance to live with those who always love and look after her without any expectation and disgust. At last, she comes to know the value of human life which should be lived happily with her people. To her, human relationship is more valuable than money and other things.

Thus, Sudha Murty has tried to highlight the true and drastic picture of the global society through *Dollar Bahu* in which the people like Gouramma and Jamuna become the slaves of money and material thing. But in the same society, there are some good people like Vinuta, Girish and Shamanna who advocate to moral values and human relations rather than money.

5.2 *Gently Falls the Bakula* (2008)

Sudha Murty being a philanthropist looks at the world from the humanitarian approach and therefore her writing is the creation of her such thoughts. She has highlighted the various aspects of humanitarian perspectives such as emotions, human compassions, humanity, human relationship, selfless sacrifices, love, affection, ethical value, virtues, cooperation, and responsibilities through the textual analysis of *Gently Falls the Bakula*. Murty has exposed the grim reality of the corporate world across the globe in which the working employees are victimized due to the fascination and unending competition to rise up to the higher position. It causes to the dehumanized perspectives at the cost of humanitarian perspectives. Sudha Murty's genuine concerns and efforts to revive and advocate the global humanitarian perspectives are depicted through the portrayal of a female protagonist, Shrimati in *Gently Falls the Bakula*.

Shrimati, is a central figure who represents the humanitarian perspectives through her qualities. Shrimati is shown as a very simple, educated and responsible girl who has great human compassion. She likes to be happy with what she has. She is not interested in money, jewellery, a high lifestyle and materialistic luxuries. She believes in human values and ethics which give her eternal pleasure. She gets married to Shrikant who is her good friend since childhood. They both study in the same school. Despite belonging to different sects and familial enmity, Shrimati get married to him which is the best example of humanitarian perspectives. She believes in love and humanity not in caste and religions. She is of the view that society is formed to bring the people close irrespective of caste, creed, sects and religions. Shrimati is fond of history so she completes her post-graduation in the subject of History. She seems to have been influenced by the historical legends like Siddhartha Gautama and Samrat Ashok. She understands the true values of human life through the lives of such historical legends. Her conversation with Shrikant shows her love for the humanitarian perspectives that she cherishes throughout the life.

Shri, Siddhartha Gautama is another person I really admire. He understood the nature of sorrow and I knew the true values of life. He gave up his kingdom and his family for the sake of humanity. His message is full of love and compassion. He neither won any war nor did he establish a great empire. However, he won the empire of hearts. May be if I have one more son, I will name him Siddhartha Gautama.... (Murty, 2008:39).

Shrimati wins the hearts of the readers due to her human values that she inherits from the lives of great historian legends. She has great compassion for mankind. Therefore, she helps everybody out. Her simplicity and kind nature are the commendable traits in her character. After her marriage to Shrikant, she lives with him in Bombay. He works in an IIT company as a trainee engineer. Shrikant receives a letter from his selfish mother in which she has informed him about the loan of one lack. She had written in the letter that she had borrowed one lack loan for his education. Now is time to repay the loan soon. Shrikant is shocked and disturbed. Then Shrimati tells him not to worry. She ensures him that she will help him to repay his loan as early as possible. She tells him that she will work in Bombay and send money to his mother. Shrikant feels happy that Shrimati is really a good and responsible woman. But Shrikant does not think it good to seek his wife's help in repaying his loan. He Shrikant asks her why she should repay his loan while his mother has taken it for his education, her reply to his questions shows her humanitarian perspectives. "When you are mine, your loan is also mine. It comes as a package. I cannot say I want only my husband. His joys and difficulties are also acceptable to me" (Murty, 2008:77). It is to be noted that Shrimati initially had fear of the lifestyle and the crowd of Bombay. She is from a small village and loves the village life. Yet she compromises to live with her husband in Bombay. Now she gets ready to work in the administrative section to repay the loan of Shrikant. It seems to be really praiseworthy.

When Shrikant climbs the ladder of success in the corporate world, he falls victim to the hedonistic perspectives of the materialistic world. His transformation becomes the sufferings for Shrimati who always accompanies him in every critical situation scarifying her own career

for his better career. When he does not realize her sacrifices, she feels very disappointed. But she has a great influence of the human values that she cherishes throughout her life. Her last conversation with Shrikant at the end of the novel shows her commitment and love for her humanitarian perspectives that she cannot sacrifice for a person who never had its value. As she says,

I cannot live in this kind of an atmosphere with these artificial values. I require to breathe fresh air. I do not want to live as your shadow. I want to find my own happiness. Shri, if I had not been sensitive and bright, I wouldn't have had to suffer such loneliness. I could have enjoyed your wealth. When I was thinking about my life so far, what my goal has been, I have realized what I want. (Murty, 2008:161)

In order to cherish her humanitarian perspective, she decides to leave Shrikant who has remained no human compassion. He never tried to think of Shrimati's aspirations, desires and self-respects. He wants her as an uncomplaining housewife. Ultimately, she has to take decision of leaving him for fulfilling her lost things.

Thus, the humanitarian perspectives of Shrimati enables her to empower herself in the patriarchal and materialistic world. Her decision of leaving her husband for cherishing the true values of life is the result of her strong belief in humanitarian perspectives that is the essence of *Gently Falls the Bakula*.

5.3 House of Cards (2013)

House of Cards is one of the best philanthropical novels of Sudha Murty which encapsulates the importance of humanitarian perspectives through the characters. It portrays the realistic picture of the contemporary era in which people become immoral, selfish and practical. This novel sets one of the finest examples of the inculcation of ethical values and humanitarian perspectives. It is the critique of the transformation of human beings from simplicity to practicality, selflessness to selfishness, virtuous to vicious and spiritual values to material values.

Humanitarian perspectives are basically reflected through the characters of Mridula, female protagonist, Bheemanna, her father and Narasinga Rao and Jaya. *House of Cards* is a beautiful story of a couple—Sanjay and Mridula. They have different perspectives on life. Mridula belongs to a small village, Aladahalli where she is grown up in natural and spiritual atmosphere. She inherits spiritual values from her father, Bheemanna who is an old man of humanitarian approach. He teaches Mridula to cherish such values throughout the life in any difficult situation. She likes to serve the poor people in her village like her father. Mridula is depicted a strong and determined character who have the great human compassion for mankind only due to the influence of her father's humanitarianism. Bheemanna's humanitarian perspectives can be best seen through his hospitalities to the friends, relatives and the people in the village. He tells his daughter to express and share her emotions instead of hiding them. It shows his realization of human life-

Do you know why God has given the power of speech to humans and not to animals?

Mridula would childishly reply, 'To talk.'

No, child. Not just to talk. It is also to share. So, whenever you face difficulty or you receive joy, you must share it with others. But think of all the animals—those poor things can't even share their difficulty with anyone. They have to bear it alone. Mridula, remember—you must always be open. Don't hide. Hiding is a sin. (Murty, 2013:4)

Mridula follows such perspectives throughout her life that she has inherited from her father. She gets married to Sanjay accepting his marriage proposal despite knowing his physical deformity. It shows her human compassion. She knows that he is an impoverished doctor and therefore she marries him. Sanjay is also born in a small village but he takes his education at various places out of his village. He is grown up by his mother after his father's death. His mother is money lender in the village who likes to make money only. Hence, she

teaches him the value of money and be practical in life. He works as a doctor at govt. hospital in Bombay on less salary. He is immensely influenced by urban life.

Mridula too works as a teacher at govt. school in her own village. She gets transferred from her village to Bangalore for Sanjay who has left Bombay and joined govt. hospital in Bangalore. Later Sanjay wishes to open his own hospital like his other friends to grow up in life. Mridula does not agree with his decision initially but she becomes ready to support him in starting his nursing home. She comes to know that now Sanjay too wants to make money and have everything as his friends. When Sanjay gets busy with his work, he forgets the real purpose and duties of his profession. He runs after money and material luxuries that create a difference between Mridula and him. She always tries to uplift him and help him in all difficult conditions due to her humanitarian perspectives. But Sanjay is earning money unethically and illegally which is against her doctrine of humanitarian approach. As a result of it she decides to go away from his house of artificial value where love and human compassion have no place. Her dialogues reveal her empowerment which is the result of her humanitarian perspectives-

No, I've spent twenty-five of my most important years with you and yet, I never felt like I belonged to you or your family. I'm still an outsider... My duty towards both of you is over. I've fulfilled all my duties as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Now, I want to live for myself. I have my job, my school and my village. You don't have to worry about me any longer. You and Sishir can visit me whenever you want. (Murty, 2013:218)

She has to take the decision of leaving him to survive her from being destructed by the impact of artificial values in Sanjay's house. She gets ready to sacrifice her conjugal relationship to cherish her humanitarian perspective which is the most significant aspect of *House of Cards*.

Narasinga Rao is the father of the male protagonist, Sanjay. He is introduced through the memories of Sanjay but plays a very significant role. He is shown dead but remains alive through his advice to his son which reveals his humanitarian perspectives towards life. He was a good human being who taught his son and wife to cherish human values forever. A humanitarian perspective of Sanjay's father is shown through his advice to Sanjay- "Every person is an island. You need a bridge to connect two islands. That bridge is called a relationship. In life, real affection comes not through hiding but through expressing your true feelings" (Murty, 2013:38). But Sanjay never follows what his father advised him. He followed the practical and hedonistic approach told by his mother which makes him completely alone at the end of the novel. His money and fame remain of no value when his lovable wife is not with him. At last humanitarian perspectives prevail over the anti-humanitarian ideologies of the modern and postmodern world through *House of Cards*.

There is another character of Neha who too plays a short role but signifies the humanitarian perspectives breaking the hedonistic attitude of Sishir, son of Mridula who follows his father's practical and egoistic approach. Neha neither accepts Sishir's friendship nor love proposal due to his egoistic and inhuman attitude. The influence of humanitarian perspectives on Neha can be understood through her conversation with Sishir. "The attitude that money can buy everything may be appropriate in today's society. But the fact is that money can't really buy everything. Life is more than money. It's about having concern for one another. That gives a person more satisfaction and happiness" (Murty, 2013:227). Sishir realizes his false illusion of the life that he is living with. He seems to be greatly influenced by Neha's understanding of true values of human life. He is completely changed at last and advises his father to be changed as well and respects his mother. It is the result of the humanitarian perspectives that prevails over the anti-humanitarian approach which in a real sense are the obstacles in the ways of humanity. Sanjay too realizes that whatever he has achieved is material.

Thus, *House of Cards* is the literary panorama of global humanitarian perspectives which is significantly projected with the sense of cosmopolitan sensibilities.

6. CONCLUSION

Thus, the global humanitarian perspectives of Sudha Murty are delineated with her cosmopolitan sensibility and subjugating views of human values over the anti-humanitarian ideology through textual analysis of her select novels— *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*. Murty's select works can be regarded as the literary landmarks of her philanthropical perspectives about the human world. Human values are the real sources of a peaceful and happy life that need to be cherished from one generation to another. The world needs such values and perspectives to explore human life for spiritual development. Ethics is the ornament of human life which seems to be declining in the contemporary world. Human life is being dispirited due to the enormous impact of hedonism and materialism. So, the people are living in various conflicts. The author tried to depict the serious concerns over the changing perspectives of human beings through her select novels. Sudha Murty's select novels are the literary panorama of the global humanitarian perspectives which can show the world significant ways of reviving moral values and make us realize about making our life happier, peaceful and content.

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