

## SUDHA MURTY'S FICTION: AN OVERVIEW

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Sudha Murty is an Indian writer. She is an engineering teacher, and social worker. She is the co-founder of Infosys with her husband N.R. Narayan Murty. She is a social worker too. All this speaks of Sudha Murty's multifarious role in India's public life. Indeed, she got the Padmashree award for her social service. Sudha Murty was born in Shiggaon in the old Dharwad district in 1950. She had her BE in BUB Engineering College, Hubli. She married N.R. Narayan Murty and the two worked in foreign companies until they found their own company called Infosys. Sudha Murty is a bilingual writer in Kannada and English. She also writes in Marathi. Sudha Murty is known for her short stories, novels and non-fictional works, both in Kannada and English. The following is a list of her literary output

### Novels:

*Dollar Bahu* (2006), *Gently Falls the Bakula* (2008), *House of Cards* (2013) and *The Mother I Never Knew* (Two Novellas, 2014)

### Collections of Short Stories:

*How I Taught my Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* (2004), *The Magic Drum and Other Favourite Stories* (2006), *Grandma's Bag of Stories* (2012), *Something Happened on the Way to Heaven: 20 Inspiring Real-Life Stories* (2014), *The Magic of the Lost Temple* (2015), *The Serpent's Revenge: Unusual Tales from the Mahabharata* (2016), *The Man from the Egg: Unusual Tales about the Trinity* (2017), *The Upside-Down: Unusual Tales about Rama and Krishna* (2018), *Here, There and Everywhere: Best-Loved Stories of Sudha Murty* (2018)

### Non-fictional works:

*Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life* (2002), *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* (2012), and *Three Thousand Stitches: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives* (2017).

Sudha Murty has written two travelogues and several other works. Sudha Murty's writings, and even her social work focuses on woman's issues, woman's subjugation, woman's need for higher education, social participation, and empowerment. All this is seen in her five novels as provided in the list above. A critical analysis of the same is provided in this introductory research article.

### **Dollar Bahu (2006):**

This novel deals with the theme of India's backwardness. It occupies a prominent place in Sudha Murty's novels. Critics compare it to Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The American Brat*. The plot of the novel is simple. That there is a brahmin couple by the name Shamanna and Gouramma. They have two sons Chandru and Girish and a sister Surabhi. Chandra gets good education and joins a multi-national company. He goes to America, where as a skipper, he joins an American company. Then he visits India and fails to marry his lover Vinuta from Dharwad, for his poor brother Girish has married her. The author evinces the rich irony in the circumstance. He marries Jamuna, a daughter from a rich family. All these years, his greedy mother appreciates his dollar and the dollar Bahu, Jamuna.

Meanwhile, Surabhi is married to a middle-class man from Hyderabad. By then Gouramma visits America in order to appreciate America's richness. But the shrewd bahu Jamuna cannot fulfil her expectations. So, the old woman realizes her false nature and decides to mend her nature. She decides to compromise with the good Vinuta, but by then Vinuta and husband Girish shift to Dharwad, punishing her

for her greed. The narrative is powerful and gripping.

***Gently Falls the Bakula* (2008):**

Sudha Murty's second novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* (2008) seems to be her first novel in Kannada. The novel is known for its rich symbolism "Used for signifying something else." (Abrams 393). The plot narrates Shrikant Deshpande, and his married life with Shrimati Deshpande. The first part is full of happy life, and the second, full of complexity. The two brahmin youth marry in spite of a feud between the families. The whole thing sounds like the sestet and octave in a sonnet of 14 lines. Once they settle down to Shrikant's complex life in Mumbai, the whole drama of human life is discovered and there is disillusionment. First the couple do not get a child, which upsets her. Shrikant becomes the director of a multi-national company, and he cannot have time for his personal life. So, like Linda in Ibsen's work *A Doll's House*, Shrimati leaves him. Here the bored wife Shrimati leaves for America for higher education (that is too at an advanced age). This is quite puzzling. The ending is an open ending as in postmodernist narratives. It is said, "*Gently Falls the Bakula* is the story of a marriage that loses its way as ambition and self-interest take their toll." (*Bakula* cover page)

***House of Cards* (2013):**

Sudha Murty's next novel *House of Cards* is a sort of bildungsroman, that is the story about the protagonist from her childhood to old age. The protagonist Mridula resembles Shrimati of the previous novel no doubt. Both are known for feminine grace and power. Mridula, herself a Hubli lady, marries an impoverished doctor from Mandya. He sets up a hospital in Bangalore; and he goes materialistic just as Shrikant Deshpande did. The author wonders about the men going berserk this way. Mridula thinks Sanjaya turns heartless at the end. It is said, "This intricately woven novel explores human relationships in telling detail and holds up a mirror to the contemporary society." (*House of Cards* cover page).

***The Mother I Never Knew* (2014):**

Sudha Murty's another novel *The Mother I Never Knew* has two novellas *Venkatesh* and *Mukesh*. Both novellas have each 11 chapters. These novellas are detective narratives. Both speak of identity crisis and search for peace and happiness. In that sense, they are quest narratives. *Venkatesh*, the son of Madhava Rao notices that his father married a woman from Dharwad region and he deserted her and her son Shankar Rao, who grows up in poverty. Later in his service in SBI Hubli, he learns all this. The late father's first wife Bhagirathi lives in poverty and Venkatesh helps her a large sum to live happily in old age.

The other novella *Mukesh* speaks of how his mother Nirmala begot him and sold him to a Punjabi lady Rupinder. This Rupinder gifted the unwanted child to Sumati. Sumati raises Mukesh, finally revealing this mystery. So, the London-educated Mukesh traces his real mother and helps the old Rupinder. Unfortunately, he does not know who his father has been. Sudha Murty's fiction is standard technically. She is clear about her modernist stand in the way of choosing relevant feminist themes, characterization, dialogue, description, and what more, her narrative devices. Her novels are rich in coincidences, parallelism, flashback, the use of letters, and comic-ending. A few of the drawbacks are that a novel like *House of Cards* is full of boring details. Worse than that, Sudha Murty writes only about the Brahmin community.

**Works Cited:**

1. Abrams, M. H. and G. G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Cengage, 2015.
2. Murty, Sudha. *Gently Falls the Bakula*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.
3. *House of Cards*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2013.