

Transformation of an Individual: A Study of Anupama in Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*

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ABSTRACT

*Everyone in life experiences failure as it is impossible to travel in life without committing mistakes. Hence it is a part of life. But people try to avoid it because of meeting unhappy, bitter, depressed and terrible situations. The fear of failure threatens all in accepting things, leaving the comfort zone, taking further steps and prevents the chances of success. An Individual may think that failures are miserable, but failures are in fact the stepping stones of success. Nothing valuable in life has ever been achieved without failures. Successful people have also come across failures, but their perseverance in doing works has made them great. Failures may not take to the goals immediately, but they teach good lessons and make people more matured to reach the destination. This paper explains this universal truth with a series of incidents that Anupama, the central character of Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*, faces throughout her life. She emerges as a powerful lady, who bricks her failures as her stair case and results in a new woman with maturity.*

KEYWORDS: Failure, individual, perseverance, Sudha Murty, *Mahashweta*

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INTRODUCTION

Sudha Murty, a leading writer in English literature, has analyzed women, transforming them from traditional, subjugated and marginalized to the extremely modern and liberated women. In the novel *Mahashweta*, she portrays the bond of love and marriage through the protagonist Anupama who liberates herself from the clutches and results as a new woman. Many comments prevail on the transformation of Anupama and her problems she faces both in her family and society because of her skin disease. About this novel in her paper, S. D. Sasi kiran, has described the efforts made to construct the voices of females with the canons of socio-religious, socio-economic, and socio-psychological dimensions of feminine oriented social practices. This paper in addition to the reviews briefs about the struggle and concludes that failure makes an individual more mature as mentioned by Michael J. in this way: "There's always failure. And there's always disappointment. And there's always loss. But the secret is learning from the loss, and realizing that none of those holes are vacuums."

It is true that failure is painful and upsets life brooding over guilt, regret and remorse. Failure stands for the state or condition of not meeting a desirable objective. Generally, when people do not succeed in their attempt they feel emotional turmoil and agonize over the past. They believe that failure is a hindrance which is to be avoided. But, truly it is an important part of everyone's life. In fact, it is life's great teacher; it is nature's chisel that stripes down the egos as it molds and shapes the person. Without failure, people may be less capable of

compassion, empathy, kindness and great achievement. Failure is a chief aspect of life because it gives an experience that is invaluable. It provides scope for transformation and improvement. That is why it has been said that failure is a stepping stone for success.

Maturity is the ability to respond to the environment in an appropriate manner i.e. it is a matter of how people treat themselves and others, and how they think and behave. From failures a person learns to act according to the situation and hence results in maturity. For all on earth things do not simply happen. All are agent in their life and their words and actions have consequences, both on themselves and on others. It is the maturity that makes them gentle, peaceful and victorious. Sudha Murty, in *Mahashweta*, has depicted the protagonist Anupama and her failures in realistic ways. The disappointments she faces pave way for her achievements and thereby portray her as a powerful and strong matured woman. S.D. Sasikaran in his writing states, “A reading of the novel shows human beings self exploration comes only after a severe suffering but not as a normal individual” (p. 155).

THE STORY OF A TEACHER

Anupama, a ‘stunning beauty’, is the eldest daughter of Shamanna, a school teacher. She studies final year of M.A., Sanskrit, with the help of a scholarship. To help her father and save money, she acts in classical plays taking the leading roles. She stays in hostel and does not disturb her father and her step-mother, who have two daughters. Her mother died in her young age and her step-mother is not kind towards her. She devotes her time in reading and directing historical plays to raise funds for various programmes. Desai, an old friend of Anupama’s father, introduces Anupama to Anand as, “Anand, you cannot imagine how versatile our Anu is. She is a superb actress and an excellent student, always getting the top rank. She even sings Hindustani classical music” (p. 10). Attracted by her talent and beauty, Anand falls in love with Anupama. He is a rich man and an obedient son to his mother Radhakka, who is proud about her pompous life. He exposes his love to his mother and she accepts his desire because Anupama’s community and horoscope match perfectly with him.

Anupama is a pragmatic who sees things in its real sense. She is afraid of getting married into a rich family because rich people expect more from their bride to equate their status. Keeping this in her mind and her family situation, when her father speaks about her marriage with Anand, she says, “Appa, these people are rich. We cannot meet their expectations. If you take a loan, who will repay it? Nanda and Vasudha are yet to be married and there are still two more months to go before I complete my MA” (p. 33). When convinced by her father, she accepts the alliance with obedience since she secretly loves Anand. Murty describes Anupama’s feeling as:

Anupama did not reply. How could she describe Anand to her father? Could she say, *I am Rohini, and he is Chandra, I am Lakshmi and he my Narayana. He is irresistible, the very picture of Manmatha, and I fell in love with him the moment I saw him ...?* (p. 33)

On the marriage day Girija, Anupama’s sister-in-law, looks at Anupama ‘enviously’. Radhakka is proud of her daughter-in-law’s beauty. Anupama feels as though she is in ‘the midst of a fairy tale’.

Anupama is a virtual wife that she thinks, “*To me the greatest jewel is my Anand. The rest only weigh me down*” (p. 36). She spends her days with happiness that Sudha Murty states about Anupama as:

Anupama had taken a leisurely bath and stood in the balcony, drying her long hair, enjoying the privacy and solitude. Her life seemed a perennial fountain of joy, of love and happiness. She was unable to understand how philosophers could describe such pleasures as temporary. (p. 36, 37)

Anupama senses every minute infinitely precious because Anand is supposed to go to England for further studies and she is to join him after Diwali since she has to perform

'Lakshmi Pooja'. Being a practical woman she is unable to resist her fear. She worries more because in London something may happen to him and he may forget her. She is innocent and completely believes him as he says, "Anu, don't worry. I'll count every hour, every minute and every second till you arrive" (p. 38). To eradicate her affliction, he further adds:

"What a foolish girl you are! Haven't you heard what they say in a church wedding? "Till death do us part..." And that is my promise to you. We shall always be together. Anu, how can I ever think of anybody other than you?" (p. 38)

As Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *Oleander girl* states, "Things have not gone the way we hoped" (p.218), Anupama's hopes also do not go the way she hoped. After Anand's departure to London she loses interest in her life. She dresses to please her mother-in-law and never leaves the house without her permission. Girija is also not friendly and she imprecates Anupama, who finds the whey behaviour of Girija.

Anupama has never expected this kind of life. As the days pass she gets 'bored and depressed'. She does not feel at home and suspects to be a 'stranger' in her house. Each day becomes a trial for her. Her agony increases when she burns her leg on a coal while collecting fire for the Lakshmi Pooja. She prefers to suffer in silence since there is no one to care for her. She becomes restless because of the white patch that emerges on her foot on the place she got burnt. The patch grows bigger and she doubts it to be leukoderma and begs God not to punish her. Sudha Murty explains Anupama's apprehension in the following lines:

As far as she could remember she had never hurt anybody. Then why had this curse befallen her? She prayed to God to prove her fears false. Anupama knew she had to be extremely discreet, and keep her problem a secret. But how could she visit the doctor without anyone else finding out about it? Whenever she wished to go out, the driver had been instructed to take her out in the car. And if she went to the doctor, the driver would definitely report it to her mother-in-law. Nor could she consult their family physician – that would invite an even greater disaster. (p. 47, 48)

Anupama somehow manages to visit the doctor alone and gets confirmed that the patch is leukoderma. She feels as a worm put near a fire. She has no-one to share her agony. If disclosed, she may not be sent to London and there is a chance of missing Anand. So she decides to hide the disease. She imagines "as though there is a sharp sword hanging over her head" (p. 51). She is haunted by the horror that someone would find out her secret. She feels as though "she was walking through a dark tunnel that had no end in sight" (p. 51). Anupama hides the patch, but fate opens it. Radhakka happens to see the patch and blames Anupama that she has cheated them for money. Anupama denies and no one believes her. She is treated as untouchable and is not allowed to enter the Pooja room. Sudha Murty puts Anupama's status as, "Nobody bothered even to talk to her anymore. Earlier, she had taken her meals with her mother-in-law and Girija. But now, food was sent to her room, implying that she was not welcome downstairs" (p. 55).

A FORLORN LIFE

Anupama starts facing innumerable problems as the days go. Radhakka calls her father and wishes to send her with him. She insists Anupama to return when the patches are completely cured. When Anupama's father begs to Radhakka for his daughter's life, Anupama unable to withstand the scene informs her father that they should go. She sets her mind to encounter all the failures with determination in the journey of reaching Anand. In her father's house, her step-mother treats Anupama with disdain, which is not new to her. She hears her step-mother asking her father, "Why did you bring her here? You should have left her with her in-laws. They are rich and can afford her treatment. How long will she stay with us? You could have settled everything before coming here" (p. 61) Anupama lives as an

uninvited guest in her father's house. She writes a detailed letter to Anand explaining her position and the truth. She waits patiently for his reply assuming that he needs time to come up with terms. But her trust diminishes as the days pass. She leads a forlorn life and even avoids going to her best friend Sumitra's marriage for the reason that it would give people an opportunity to talk about her. Anupama prays for Sumitra's happiness:

Let your husband be a man who will only shower happiness and love on you. It is better to have an understanding husband than one who is merely handsome and wealthy. Marriage is a gamble. The result cannot be predicted beforehand. Finding the right match is a matter of chance. I was unlucky in this. May you be more fortunate. (p. 65)

Anupama spends time in praying. Though the patch starts spreading, she hopes to meet Anand. While going to a hill temple alone in the morning she hears two ladies talking about her mother-in-law and Anand. They speak about Radhakkas's diseased daughter-in-law, and his remarriage. Anupama hates to live after hearing about Anand's remarriage. Sorrow fills her heart and she finds herself as "a lonely traveler on a long and arduous road" (p. 73). She plans to commit suicide, but some unseen power holds her back. She compares her sister-in-law with herself. Girija with surplus money and her mother's support hides her filthiness and enjoys her life.

In conduct, looks, and disposition, Anupama is better than Girija. She contemplates the future that even if she died no one would care and society at large would take Anand's side and sympathize with him. She further questions why she should die for a husband who didn't care even about her. She analyzes and becomes calm as a matured one who believes in self confidence. She thinks that her life has just begun to have a new meaning. Murty explains Anupama's mind as:

Whatever the circumstances she found herself in, she would meet the challenge head-on, and win. She was now ready to face the world, determined to stand on her own feet and build a new life for herself. She looked back and prayed to the goddess. *Give me the courage to live no matter what happens!* (p. 79)

As a complete person, Anupama decides to face the challenges and leaves her father's house. She goes to her dearest friend Sumitra, who lives in Bombay. At Bombay, Sumitra helps her and acts as a supporter. Although it is difficult, Anupama withstands the new language, the people, the sultriness air and everything. She plans for her future and says to Sumitra, "I have my education, and it will serve to feed me" (p. 81). She sees her life with optimism and proclaims, "I want to look ahead rather than remain stuck in the past" (p. 81). She gets a job as a clerk. But, time never leaves anyone to live in peace. Sumitra's husband tries to misbehave with her and she slaps him. It is true that matured ones live on the very edge of their comfort zone and take frequent trips into the wilderness that lies beyond the edge.

Anupama without informing Sumitra about her husband's action, behaves decently and moves out from Sumitra's house and stays with her colleague Dolly. She tells Sumitra that Dolly's house is near to her office and it is easy for her to go to the office. With the help of Dolly, she gets a lecturer job in a college. Anupama relaxes and gets peace of mind teaching her students. She stops thinking of Anand and she has learnt to accept the realities. When one of her friends Sathya is diseased and worries for his love failure, she consoles him saying:

Who says life is fair? It is better to understand the vicissitudes of life and solve our own problems in the manner we find appropriate. I have learnt that repeated success makes a person arrogant, while occasional failure makes an individual more mature. (p. 116)

It is true that her challenges have made Anupama as a grown up person to face the selfish world. She understands her life thoroughly and that is why when Vasanth proposes to marry

her for her inner qualities, she rejects the idea and states that her life is different from his. It demands more maturity to act perfectly in emotional times. She declares, “We have become good friends. Let us remain so, and not complicate our relationship by getting married” (p. 150). She refuses to rejoin Anand, as well when he approaches her.

Anupama has devoted her mind, body and soul to Anand, loved him without reservation and in return he has hurt her deeply. She whips him with her questions as:

Suppose you had got leukoderma, do you think I would have left you for some other man? A marriage is a lifelong commitment; *for better or for worse, till death do us part*. Wasn't that what you'd said to me before you left for England? Even though you are a doctor, you only know how to treat a disease, not tend a patient's emotional needs. (p. 147)

Anupama has reached the top in her career by piling her failures as her steps. Her students love her for her knowledge, affection and care. She announces, “My past has taught me a very valuable lesson” (p. 150). A truly matured person is a strong and confident individual, diligent provider, passionate, caring lover, brave protector, problem solver and careful listener, who resemble a safe port in a storm. Anupama matches with all these qualities and proves to be a matured lady. S. Parvati and S.K. Pushpalatha acknowledge the fact in their article ““Quest Self” in the Select Novels of Sudha Murty” about Anupama as:

Murty portrayed in the first half of the novel her protagonist as meek, submissive, enduring and condemning her fate and expecting help from her husband. But in the second half of the novel she emerges as a confident, self-sufficient, guiding and a respectable person. (p. 538)

CONCLUSION

To sum up, through Anupama's life, it is clear that failure prepares a person to go for the next endeavour with a better chance of success. The optimistic attitude gives courage to go ahead with life living well with all the hope and vigor. Living well is the revenge for the failure. And the brave is one who gets ahead, overcomes his failures and achieves the goal. The brave has the confidence to welcome challenges in life. Also, failures should not result in pessimism. Pessimism acts as a stumbling block in one's way to success. The optimist sees opportunities in every difficulty. Failures, thus, act as a ray of hope. Matured person, having experienced the failure, prepares to avoid it or if at the very least minimizes one's chances of failing again. Success – in whatever form – is not an easy thing to come about, to find.

Rather, success is created from lots of hard work, preparation, persistence and unrelenting confidence. Failure results from a lack of these features. Everybody fails at some point in their lives and what matters most is moving forward and never giving up on success. One can feel that the more is failed in life, the better chances to learn from the mistakes and become successful. Failure leads to a greater understanding and wisdom to overcome the obstacles and have a better and brighter future. Failure is a better teacher than success as early success can easily get into the head and cause arrogance, whereas failure leads one to become humble, compassionate, and understanding. Troubles and failures make people appreciate what they have, remain content, and stay motivated. Failure helps one to understand their capabilities and can very often bring out the best in a person. So to conclude matured people know that failure is a delay and not a defeat and hence they work towards the goal like Anupama.

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