
CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION: AN EXPLORATION OF SUDHA MURTY'S PORTRAYAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN SELECT NON-FICTION

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ABSTRACT:

Cultural transformation refers to the process of change and evolution in a society's culture, values, practices, and beliefs. It is an ongoing process where cultural elements get adapted, merged, or sometimes clashed with new ideas or thoughts. This process of transformation is determined by factors like social movements, education, migration, technological advancement, globalization, etc., which influence modifications in societal attitudes, behaviors, and identities. Literature works as a mirror of cultural transformation. It captures the significant changes in the society's beliefs, norms, values, and practices, etc. It always enables the transfer of ideas between cultures, which would lead to new cultural forms and identities. Literature often retains the core essence of culture as it evolves, bridging the cultural gaps for positive growth and prosperity. Sudha Murty's writings explore the themes of cultural transformation, showcasing the blending of traditional Indian values with modern influences and also highlighting the interplay between tradition and modernity in Indian society. Murty in her writing captures the crux of change where tradition and culture meet progress, and humanity succeeds. Her stories aren't simply about Indian cultural transformation; they are about the universal journey of stabilizing roots and growth. Through her perspective, we see cultural transformation not as a confrontation but as a harmonious blend of old and new.

KEYWORDS:

Sudha Murty, process of change and evolution, societal attitudes,
new cultural forms, harmonious blend.

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1. Introduction:

Cultural transformation refers to the process of change and evolution in a society's culture, values, practices, and beliefs. It is an ongoing process where cultural elements get adapted, merged, or sometimes clashed with new ideas or thoughts. This process of transformation is determined by factors like social movements, education, migration, technological advancement, globalization, etc., which influence modifications in societal attitudes, behaviors, and identities.

The meaning of the word 'transformation' according to the Oxford Dictionary is – a complete change in the appearance or character of someone or something, often for the better, or the act/process of such a change. So, the term 'cultural transformation' obviously doesn't imply a blind adoption, mindless or forced acceptance, but rather the evolution of a society's values, beliefs, behaviors, and systems to match new goals and objectives in order to redesign the fundamental structure of the community and society.

Being a prolific writer, Sudha Murty uses literature as a medium to express her life-like experiences that she witnessed ranging from tradition to modernity. In her writings, especially in non-fiction, Murty captures the crux of change, where tradition and existing culture meet progress, and humanity succeeds. Her stories aren't simply about Indian cultural transformation; they are about the universal journey of stabilizing roots and growth.

2. Objectives:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyze the concept of cultural transformation.

2. To identify the real essence of cultural transformation.
3. To explore the select non-fiction of Sudha Murty with reference to cultural transformation.
4. To discuss the relevance of cultural transformation in contemporary times.

3. Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative content-analysis approach, examining the chapters of the select non-fiction of Sudha Murty that highlight the cultural transformation in Indian society. The primary texts of this study are *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* and *The Old Man and His God: Discovering the Spirit of India*. Selected chapters from each text will be analyzed to explore the portrayal of tradition and modernity and their distinctiveness. The analysis will be integrated with substantial literature to broaden the understanding of the unique transformative dimensions in Indian Culture.

4. Analysis:

The Padma Shri award winner, the chairperson of the INFOSYS Foundation who is the first woman engineer in TELCO and a master in Computer Science is the best administrative person as well as a teacher, has written heart-touching stories. Minutely observing, she has recounted and recollected memories in the form of literature. Sudha Murty says that she is very lucky because she could encounter many good experiences that she could share with people. According to Mrs. Murty, these types of common experiences are experienced and viewed by all people but it needs to serve, recount, and recollect. (Kangne, Raosaheb Vajjanathrao 2018)

Sudha Murty, as previously stated, is India's best-selling novelist of the 21st century. Her books aren't just a black-and-white production that can be read in your spare time. The topics she addresses are ones that are relevant to contemporary India. Since LPG reforms and India's accession to the global village in the last

three decades, the way of life and values of the people of India have changed dramatically. The generational divide has never been wider. Only those who are able to adapt to the changing times and try to fit in with the encroaching western lifestyle are happy, while those who refuse to accept the societal obligations and thus cannot walk hand in hand with their children or grandchildren, or who are a misfit in today's world, suffer from mental torture because they refuse to accept the societal obligations and thus cannot walk hand in hand with their children or grandchildren. (Pillai, Biji Gopakumar 2021)

Sudha Murty believes that happiness comes from simple things. Wealth and luxury are not the only ways to live well. Characters in her stories are often ordinary people. They live simple lives but are content. She teaches that satisfaction and peace come from values, not money. Hope and optimism are present in almost all her stories. Even in difficult situations, her characters do not lose hope. She believes life can improve with effort and positive thinking. Her stories inspire readers to remain hopeful. (Chopra, Heera Lal 2025)

4.1 Traits Of Cultural Transformation

India's cultural transformation is a complex yet rich, multifaceted process, marked by both progress and challenges in connection with education, urbanization, and globalization which fostered innovation, adaptability, openness, and cultural diversity. However, this transformation may also raise concern about cultural homogenization, erosion of traditional values, etc. The interplay thus between modernity and tradition underscores a nuanced understanding of India's cultural transformation acknowledging both its benefits and limitations.

Literature works as a mirror of cultural transformation. It captures the significant changes in the society's beliefs, norms, values, and practices, etc. It always enables the transfer of ideas between cultures, which would lead to new cultural forms and

identities. Literature often retains the core essence of culture as it evolves, bridging the cultural gaps for positive growth and prosperity. By sharing these ideas across cultures, it guides the generations to understand and blend traditions, for better development and harmony within communities, worldwide with shared values.

4.1.1 The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk

Sudha Murty, a keen observer of life, tries to absorb as much as possible, enriching her experiential repertoire. The non-fiction titled *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* is filled with engaging chapters that offer readers valuable guidance. Rahman's Avva, the second chapter of it, best suits highlighting Murty's observation on positive cultural transformation. The title of the chapter itself is noteworthy, as it looks a bit different because in the religious context it should have become 'Rehman's Ammi'.

As it is described in the second chapter, Rahman is a soft-spoken BPO employee and active volunteer, known for his kindness to orphanage children, making him familiar to the narrator. He invites her home for lunch, mentioning his mother and sister are visiting, and notes their shared Dharwad roots, creating a personal connection. He promises a traditional meal prepared by his mother.

During her visit, the narrator encounters Rahman's spouse Salma, mother (Avva), and sister Usha. Avva is distinguished by her traditional dress and appearance, whereas Usha presents a contrasting appearance to Rahman. Though curious, the narrator exercises restraint, avoiding inquiries into the family's dynamics. Later, Rahman recounts his family's interfaith narrative, detailing his mother Kashibai and Fatima Bi's complex history – their initial discord, and the bond cultivated through mutual experiences, particularly with the children. When Fatima Bi dies after childbirth, Kashibai's compassion being a mother of a child prompts her to nurture Rahman, showcasing her innate moral strength despite lacking formal schooling.

Kashibai cares for Rahman alongside her own daughter Usha, fostering both children in a shared environment. She plays an active role in their spiritual development, motivating Rahman to partake in both Islamic and Hindu customs, thus cultivating unity across faiths. This scenario underscores the motif of interfaith harmony symbolizing an unspoken cultural transformation.

The chapter culminates with the narrator contemplating Kashibai's progressive values and her capacity to embrace Rahman as her own, transcending religious disparities. The final imagery of Mecca and Krishna's pictures coexisting on the wall epitomizes the concord that can prevail between different faiths, profoundly impacting the narrator as a testament to cultural transformation and humanitarian openness.

4.1.2 The Old Man And His God: Discovering the Spirit of India

The second non-fiction selected for the research study is *The Old Man And His God*, which is filled with various facets of human values, like simplicity, self-contentment, resilience, and many more, based on Sudha Murty's own experience in different situations and times. The chapter selected from this work to explore tradition and transformation of Indian culture is "A Tale of Two Brothers".

"A Tale of Two Brothers" is a poignant story about identical twins, Ram and Shyam, who were the narrator's students for seven years. The brothers were inseparable, sharing everything from homework to clothes. After completing their MCA degree, they married twin sisters Smita and Savita, fulfilling a unique destiny. However, their lives took a dramatic turn when they fought over property and separated, dividing their large house with a brick wall.

The narrator, their former teacher, visits their mother, who is distressed by the brothers' quarrel. The mother reveals that the brothers' desire for the same house and farmhouse led to the separation. The materialistic bent of mind made the twin brothers

quarrel with each other, who lost the innocence of their young age and became sworn enemies. The narrator tries to reason with Ram and Shyam, reminding them of their childhood bond and the importance of compromise. But it was of no use, as she was aware of an old saying which she quoted “money is one thing which rarely unites and mostly divides people”, realizing that the quarrel was due to greed over the inherited property.

The chapter takes a contrasting turn when the narrator attends a dinner at a village home with an old friend. The friend reveals that he was saved by their servant, Seetakka, who breastfed him alongside her own son, Hanuma, making them brothers. He proudly says “Seetakka poured her love on us in equal measure without expecting anything in return. We shared the love of the same mother, and that makes us brothers.’ He even gave Hanuma a part of his share of the property, considering him as his own brother, even though his relatives opposed his idea because for them Seetakka was just a servant. But he was very clear in his mind as he says “For them Seetakka was just a servant, but for me she was a largehearted, simple woman, whose love knew no bounds”.

The story concludes with the narrator reflecting on the quirks of destiny, where biological brothers become strangers or sworn enemies, and the son of master and servant become brothers.

5. Findings:

The study reveals Sudha Murty’s non-fiction works as a reflection of India’s complex cultural transformation, highlighting the interplay between tradition and modernity. Through her narratives, Murty showcases the evolution of Indian society, emphasizing values like simplicity, compassion, and harmony amidst diversity.

The analysis of selected chapters from “The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk” and “The Old Man And His God” illustrates Murty’s portrayal of cultural transformation, where characters

navigate interfaith dynamics, social change, and human relationships. Notably, Kashibai's story in "Rahman's Avva" exemplifies interfaith harmony. "A Tale of Two Brothers" highlights the destructive nature of greed and materialism on the one hand, and on the other, it highlights the true compassion without blood relationship. And also contrasts the power of love and kindness, highlighting the twin brothers' unfortunate separation.

Tagore envisions and expresses in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech emphasizing the collaboration of Western and Eastern culture to build up a new civilization and great culture of the future, "We must discover the most profound unity, the spiritual unity between the different races. We must go deeper down to the spirit of man and find out the great bond of unity, which is to be found in all human races. ... He who sees all beings as himself, who realizes all beings as himself, knows Truth."

"The spirit of India has always proclaimed the ideal of unity. This ideal of unity never rejects anything, any race or any culture. ... India is there to unite all human races."

In the same way, Murty's narratives showcase this spirit of unity and inclusivity. Through her stories, Murty emphasizes values like simplicity, compassion, and harmony amidst diversity. It underscores the significance of empathy, love, and shared humanity in bridging cultural gaps, inspiring readers to remain hopeful and optimistic, emphasizing that satisfaction and peace come from values, not material wealth.

6. Conclusion:

Sudha Murty's non-fiction works reflect India's complex cultural transformation, highlighting the interplay between tradition and modernity. Through her narratives, Murty highlights the evolution of Indian society, emphasizing values like simplicity, compassion, and harmony amidst diversity. The analysis of selected chapters from "The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk" and "The Old

Man And His God” illustrates Murty’s portrayal of cultural transformation, where characters navigate interfaith dynamics, social change, and human relationships. Murty’s literature serves as a testament to India’s cultural transformation, showcasing the country’s rich cultural heritage and its ability to adapt and evolve while retaining its core essence. As Tagore envisioned, Murty’s narratives promote unity, inclusivity, and shared humanity, inspiring readers to remain hopeful and optimistic, emphasizing that satisfaction and peace come from values, not material wealth.

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