

## **Reading Sudha Murthy's *Mahaswetha* as a Mirror Literature to Current Societal Engagement**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Reading fiction is fun, entertaining, relaxing, exciting and educational, besides, allowing us to set off a life-travel through some one's experiences. Apart from learning about different locales, different cultures, and different time periods, it exposes to the variety of human emotions. It can also be comforting, something soothing tracking another mental place which raises the spirit of endurance to challenge, to look at things in a different way than we are accustomed to that perks up social perception and emotional intelligence. "Reading fiction and exposure to it always correlate positively with empathy." (Raymond Mar & Keith Oatley) My expectancy is that by working together it is possible to build a constructive and creative environment that encourages risk-taking, ambition, and self-discovery. This present paper showcases how pain leading to tender-toughness experienced by the female-protagonist, Anupama in Sudha Murthy's *Mahaswetha*, 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 through 'Verbal and Non Verbal Data, Simple TOTES, Thinking out Loud strategy and Reading times etc.'

### **KEYWORDS**

Mahaswetha; Societal Engagement; Mirror Literature.

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." (F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1936)

### **Introduction**

Literary research through recent times establishes that the students who have been exposed to classic literature respond much differently, more sympathetically, more energetically, more confronting and yet more tolerating to situational prompts. The

sympathetic arousal for the characters extends to their real-life situations. Students pursuing professional or technical courses have very limited exposure to reading fiction and it is a time consuming and painstaking task for the English teachers to put them to study a whole novel. Here comes chunk-reading approach very handy! Provide selected chunks of a classic work to the students in the way discussed in the present paper that would develop among students the capacity to activate, resist and respond cognitively

positive. Even when provided with only minimal exposure to varying scenarios, students are ready to alter their behaviors: "Literature is a necessary instrument for perceiving the disparity of a society and for developing competence" (Inger Bierschenk, 1997) How vital is appreciating fiction resulting in Societal Engagement? 'Literary fiction improves a reader's capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling.' (Alison Flood) Reading fiction is amusing, engaging, relaxing, exciting and enlightening, besides, allowing us to set off a life-travel through some one's experiences. "Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers." (Charles William Eliot) Apart from learning about different locales, different cultures, and different time periods, it exposes to the variety of human emotions. It can also be comforting, something soothing tracking another mental place which raises the spirit of endurance to challenge, to look at things in a different way than we're accustomed to that perks up social perception and emotional intelligence. 'Reading fiction and exposure to it always correlate positively with empathy.' (Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley, 2009) This paper proposes the possibility for English teachers to build a productive and a resourceful classroom environment that encourages risk-taking, ambition, and self-discovery among students of present generation who require the competence as future employers/entrepreneurs dealing with society at large. English teachers need to prepare them to be risk takers just as core subject teachers prepare them to be industry ready. "There is no progress without risk, and in an environment where change is accelerating, risks are multiplying and businesses are increasingly complex, companies need strong, innovative partners to help manage their risk... in today's market."

(Mike McGavick) This life challenging risk has to be inculcated among our present students who experience parents rushing off to work and whose work becomes their home and their home becomes work. "Teaching prosocial behavior is to build on a child's instinctive feelings of empathy." (David Popenoe)

### **Literature Review**

'People who read a lot of fiction are known to have stronger social skills.' (Ann Lukits) Exposure to literature may provide students' open-mindedness. Teachers need to try to make students realize the difference between a man of success and a man of value. "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales." (Albert Einstein) Einstein refers to both long and short memory when he refers to child's intelligence. On the other hand, according to G. Miller (1956) short-term memory, popularly known as the ability to remember 5-9 chunks of information where a chunk is any meaningful unit of numbers, expressions, chess positions, or even faces. Miller's TOTE'S (Test-Operate-Test-Exist) model takes initially some input; the input is tested based on criteria; usually, this is the chunking-text with some internal standard (T) considered by the teacher. Next, there must be some response or operational mechanism (O) from students. The present paper applies Miller's approach to a classical fictional work, here Sudha Murthy's 'Mahaswatha', and introduce selective reading-activity and expose students' respond successfully.

### **Sudha Murthy's Mahaswatha**

This present paper 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. Anupama, a very beautiful female central character, met her spouse Dr. Anand who was in love with her instantaneously and were married. Fate was the second central character that entered into their life in the form of a white patch on her leg separating them both.

. . . a red-hot piece of coal fell on Anupama's foot, severely burning it. She quietly poured some cold water on her foot... she noticed the burn had bubbled into a large blister... A couple of days later, she noticed something very odd. There was a small white patch on her foot where she had got burnt. (45).

She began to suspect that it could be leukoderma, and became numb with fear. She was too shocked even to cry... why had this curse befallen her? She prayed God to prove her fears false... the patch continued to grow, making her terrified of what the future held in store for her. (47)

She knew pretty well that a black mole on white skin is appreciated by all but not vice versa. The protagonist who was victimised for no wrong of her own experiencing *mi figue, mi raisin*, was able to influence the lives of many student batches as a lecturer working in Mumbai in her later part of her life. The gender discrimination showcased against her by her husband, her in-laws and her step mother never blocked her to be a marginalized married woman with leukoderma. Though Leukoderma is not contagious, it causes a lot of embarrassment, particularly in females, who regard it as a social stigma. It is, indeed

very difficult to undergo the social stigma and still retain one's personality. Thus, the novel furnishes on different walks of life including psychotherapy, wedding agency, beauty camouflage, vitiligo alertness and communal programmes.

Anupama, who rose like a shooting star exemplifying her life, will be a fictional role-model to develop an attitude among young students to look beauty beyond skin deep. The incidents in Anupama's life – her study, her interest in stage performance, her marriage with Anand, Anand's decision to study abroad, her stay at in – law's house awaiting for her joining Anand, the fatal incidents are considered and only some selected chunks are to be presented in the classroom. (a) the vitiligo patient, (b) her suicide thought, (c) leaving for Bombay, (4) facing her friend's husband Hari, (5) being firm to the proposal of marriage by Dr Vasant, (6) exhibiting high levels of maturity while turning down the proposal of reunion by her husband, Dr. Anand – were critically analyzed how the protagonist raised at every bitter situation that caused so much pain only to gather her composure and live. In the model recommended by Goffman, students were told that the stigmatized is Anupama; the normals are all other characters except Anupama; the wise is Dr Vasant. The selected textual chunks were accessible to students.

### **Verbal and Non-Verbal Data**

**Verbal Data:** The whole gamut of 'verbal data in the form of linguistic expressions from the novel through TOTES; TOL (Thinking Out Loud) of the student-readers; and reading time measurements of the duration of the readers' selected chunks of text' are used.

#### **1. Simple TOTES**

*Appendix I* is an example of a simple TOTE done in the classroom of biotechnology

students studying I year B.Tech programme. When reading the selected crucial incidents: (a) Anupama as a vitiligo patient, (b) Anupama's suicide attempt, (c) leaving for Bombay, (4) facing her friend's husband Hari, (5) being firm to the proposal of marriage by Dr Vasant, (6) exhibiting high levels of maturity while turning down the proposal of reunion by her husband, Dr. Anand, students were asked to consider the actions done by Anupama and others looking for their positive and negative outlook through a series of simple TOTEs. They have to consider at every stage whether the action was right or not and why? Students would bring lot of opinions floated in the classroom and teacher has to sieve them all.

## **2. An F Scale test**

This was conducted on the selected 4 chunks. Students were asked to discuss and scale on 1-6 on the statements under *Appendix 2* in relation to the four chunks they read. The wrong inferences were eliminated by students with the intervention of the teacher and this test facilitated students the ability to settle on right vs. wrong, besides language learning. Their speaking performance expressing positive perceptions were quite impressive.

## **3. Thinking out Loud strategy**

Open-Ended Questions on chunk I (Anupama as a vitiligo patient) develop their ability to generalize that demands students to say out loud what they are thinking about while or after reading each chunk. It worked excellently well with B.Tech students and it was effective to monitor their comprehension through open-ended questions as the majority of biotech students were girls who connected to the story immediately. They started interpreting what they had read associating it with their past experiences. By verbalizing their inner speech, the student groups from G1 to M6 learn to think as Sudha Murthy, the

writer/Anupama, the protagonist and develop insightful, metacognitive, or self-sufficient learnership through making predictions, creating mind mapping, connecting chunks with previous information, monitoring comprehension, and even overcoming troubles with word recognition/comprehension.

While applying Reciprocal Think-Aloud strategy, students were paired. Students took turns thinking aloud as they had read Chunk 2, (Anupama's suicide attempt) form a hypothesis. While the first student was thinking aloud, the second student listened and recorded. Then students changed roles so that each partner had a chance to think aloud and to add new dimensions to the thinking process. Next, students were grouped and each group reflected on the process together, sharing the discussion and explaining what worked well for them and what didn't. As they had jotted down about their findings, they could start a mutual learning log and refer back to it. Majority of the students constructed meaning from the chunk and offered answers. Informal Interviews and Role plays for chunks 3, 4 help them to ponder over the issues faced and challenged by Anupama and facilitate them to grow matured.

## **4. Capacity Building and Self-Transformation**

- a. Data collection took place under pre, peri and pro stages while reading process was under investigation. The vertical ordering of the techniques from top to bottom put forward another criterion for classification. The alternative division of techniques presented was based on three levels of control- Maximal, Medium and Minimal to make an additional distinction of the data available. The goal was to enable students' progress in their reading of all chunks and in their comprehension.

The teacher should see that students would jot down, plan their talk, enact the roles as required and announce the observations from time to time groupwise / pairwise. All should equally utilize the chance to write and speak and exhibit high levels of interest to speak their mind.

- b. **Non-Verbal:** 'Reading times' as a measure of cognitive ability has been hypnotized i.e. reading ability in the late teenage years might contribute to changes. The class was divided into 6 groups and each group consisting of 10 students: four groups consist of girl students exclusively; one group consists of boys exclusively, and one group consists of boys and girls. They are labelled: 'G1; G2; G3; G4; B5; M6.' For each selected textual chunk 10 minute time is allocated and how many reading times required were noted after each group reading. If one reading was sufficient for them, they used to move to the next part of the textual chunk.

##### **5. Method applied to chunks of text: Reading times**

Students were able to come to conclusion in TOTEs either after first reading or second reading. The Chunk1 consists of a major catharsis on which the entire novel builds on. It took time to the young readers more time to experience and to come out of the pangs of suffering, insult, injustice and tragedy with which Anupama enveloped. At Chunk2, they reading time is less than the allocated time. The students were much exposed to a suicidal element in real life with the attempts of their peer mates and deep thinking would go towards such incidents. Effortlessly they understood the wrongness of making suicide as a choice of action and also realized that once the pangs of pain were released, one did not favour the wrong choice. Chunk 3 allowed them to think on rape cases. Rape is a crime that is often

misunderstood and surrounded by myths. Students thought over questions like 'how the public mindset is structured through the apprenticeship of masculinity?' They further explored on the enunciation between female bonds and femininity. While exploring, girl students felt that their voices were heard; their experiences were recognized; their feelings were understood.

##### **Method applied to chunks of text:: Reaction Times (RT)**

Chunk 3 was labelled with 'Go/No-Go reaction time' engaging a stimulus that was withheld when another stimulus appeared.

Chunk 4 involved comparing Dr Vasanth and Dr Anand simultaneously and it was 'Discrimination reaction time'.

Due to momentary attention lapses, there was a considerable amount of variability in each student's response time, which did not tend to follow a normal distribution. However, time was a constraint to perform multiple trials and run alternative approaches.

##### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study is to investigate how reading experiences intertwine fiction and life and how such experiences change over time. Four chunks of Sudha Murthy's 'Mahaswetha' were analyzed using Verbal and non-verbal data. The theoretical framework that served as the point of departure for the content categories was a model of Capacity Building and Self Transformation in which different types of TOTEs; TOL (Thinking Out Loud); reading time measurements and Reaction time measurements were distinguished. Other content categories were derived from different objects of F scale and from different kinds of cognitive and emotional effects. Three major results were presented and discussed. One outcome was the difference in male and female outlook regarding the institution of marriage. The

student-readers described their reading experiences in the latter period in a more general way. The second result was a difference in reported reading behaviour and reading experience between female and male student-readers. Male student-readers tended to remarriage, whereas female student-readers felt more about their changing lifestyle of career building. Sudha Murthy's *Mahashweta* enabled young students to observe all aspects of societal practices and the chunk-reading offered a viewpoint and a context providing contradictions and limitations. Reading Sudha Murthy is always simple but comprehending her is just fascinating.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

- 1) When Anupama's white patch is observed: (Chunk 1)
  - a) Test - Is this right action done by the normal - No
  - b) Operate - Consider the 3 actions of Anupama's mother-in-law, sister-in-law; her husband
  - c) Test - Is this right action done by them? - No
  - d) Operate - Keep reading
  - e) Test - Are there any alternative right actions possible - Yes
  - f) Exit
- 2) When Anupama attempted suicide: (Chunk 2)
  - a) Test - Is this right action done by the stigmatized - No
  - b) Operate - Underline her troubles while reading
  - c) Test - Is this right action done by her? - No
  - d) Operate - Keep discussing
  - e) Test - Are there any alternative right actions possible - Yes
  - f) Exit

- 3) While leaving for Bombay, and facing Hari's seduction her friend's husband: (Chunk 3)
- Test - Is leaving for Bombay a right action done by the stigmatized - Yes
  - Operate - Discuss pairwise
  - Test - Not telling about Hari's seduction to her friend is an appropriate action done by her? - Yes/No
  - Operate - Keep discussing
  - Test - Are there any alternative right actions possible - No
  - Exit
- 4) Being firm to the proposal of marriage by Dr Vasant and exhibiting high levels of maturity while turning down the proposal of reunion by her husband, Dr. Anand (Chunk 4)
- Test - Is turning down Dr Vasant's proposal a right action done by Anupama? - Yes
  - Operate - Keep reading
  - Test - Is turning down Dr Anand's proposal a right action done by Anupama? - Yes/No
  - Operate - Keep reading
  - Test - Are there any alternative right actions possible - No
  - Exit

## Appendix 2

Statements	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Mostly	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree Mostly	Agree Strongly
1. Leave the spouse, if the person you marry is suddenly no longer attractive.						
2. True love never perishes.						
3. Being rich and good looking is not enough to guarantee the survival of marriage.						
4. Life is not a bed of Roses.						
5. Nobody chooses to be 'diseased.'						
6. It's Ok to be imperfect.						
7. You never lose or gain in life. You only become 'wise'.						

## Appendix 3

Activity: Thinking out Loud	
<b>Chunk 1 Open-Ended Questions</b>	1. Has a vitiligo patient Melanin? 2. Does a virus cause vitiligo? 3. Can vitiligo affect anybody? 4. Can vitiligo develop on any part of the body, at any age and in anyone? 5. Does the vitiligo patient suffer from psychological distress?
<b>Chunk 2 Reciprocal Think-Alouds</b>	1. What do I know about suicidal attempt? 2. Do I understand what Anupama desire to do? 3. Do I have a clear picture of Anupama's state of mind?

	4. What were the most important hints in this chunk 2? 5. How does it blend in with what I already make out?
<b>Chunk 3 &amp; 4 Informal Interviews</b>	Students may be asked to conduct interviews – one as Anupama and the other as a journalist.
<b>Chunk 5 GD</b>	'Marriage is a social trap' as the topic
<b>Chunk 6 Role Play</b>	Students can enact as Dr Anand proposing reunion and Anupama turning down the proposal.

#### Appendix 4

<b>Pre</b>	<b>Peri</b>	<b>Pro</b>
Listing of thoughts Reflection in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Natural Context</li> <li>· GD</li> <li>· Planning</li> <li>· Discussion</li> <li>· Diary entry</li> </ul>	TOL upon interruption Reflection in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Natural Context</li> <li>· GD</li> <li>· Note taking</li> <li>· Self Discussion</li> </ul>	Retrospective TOL Reflection in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· reports</li> <li>· pers. discussion</li> </ul>

<b>Control</b>	<b>Written</b>	<b>Spoken</b>
Maximal	Closed question	Reading out loud
Medium	underlining	Thinking out Loud Closed question answering
Minimal	Open questions Free writing	GD

#### Appendix 5

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Selected textual parts</b>			
	<b>Chunk 1</b>	<b>Chunk 2</b>	<b>Chunk 3</b>	<b>Chunk 4</b>
<b>G1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>G2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>G3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>G4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>B5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>M6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>b</b>	<b>Chunk 1</b>	<b>Chunk 2</b>	<b>Chunk 3</b>	<b>Chunk 4</b>
<b>G1- M6</b>	Simple RT	Choice RT	Go/No-Go RT	Discrimination RT