

**SUDHA MURTY'S VIEWS ON "STOVE BURSTS AND DOWRY DEATHS?" A SOCIAL DISEASE IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT:

The present article is an attempt to analyze Murty's narrative "Stove Bursts and Dowry Deaths?" as documentation of social stigma of dowry deaths even in modern times. Murty underlines it as a result of economic dependence of women and the lack of education. She also takes into consideration female feticide and infanticide, she delineates the true reasons behind them and the misery of women and their miserable thankless condition in the society only because they are woman. The present paper understands the agony of these women and also comments on the hypocrisies in Indian culture.

Key words: Dowry Deaths, Indian Society, Female Feticide And Infanticide, Lack Of Education, Poverty, Women Issues, Etc.

Introduction:

Indian society is hypocritical. On the one hand it praises 'naari shakti' and worships her as a goddess and on the other hand, she is killed, she is tortured at no fault of hers. She is considered 'faulty' only because she is a 'woman'. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones rightly comments,

"Feminist theory seeks to analyze the conditions which shape women's lives and to explore cultural understandings of what is to be a woman."

(Jackson and Jones 1)

It is very true that women's lives are conditioned by history, culture, and politics, so every woman's issues could be different. One cannot be judgemental about them. The problems and issues of women differ from society to society. Murty aptly brings forth the problems of women in india in following words:

*"We have a saying in Sanskrit **Ethra naryasthu pujoyanthe, ramanthethathra devatha** (God exists where women are respected). In real life it is not true. Very few women in our country have economic independence or the freedom of choosing their husband."(Murty 73)*

This double standard in Indian society is the root cause of women's misery and pitiable condition; she is victim of this cultural politics. On the one hand ancient literature portrays

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her as goddess and praises her abilities and strengths; and on the other hand she faces cruelty on every step of her life. She is tortured to death. Murty reasons:

“One of the reasons for their miser is the lack of education, which in turn leads to a lack of economic freedom. If a woman is not economically independent, then her life is quite difficult.”(Murty 73)

Economic dependence costs her freedom., she is chained everywhere. Until and unless women get educated and stand on their own feet it is impossible that they can demand any freedom. This financial dependence defines her destiny. This is the main reason behind female infanticide and feticide.

Murty delineates that stove bursts are actually dowry deaths in India. The atmosphere in society in this regard is very depressing; and has made women's life equal to hell. Once Murty visits an hospital ward with severe burns and in agony. Most of them were between eighteen to twenty years and from fairly poor background. Murty ironically satirically writes their story. Those women never blame their in-laws and husbands, in fact praise their goodheartedness as these women are more concerned with the future of their young children. Murty meditates,

“In our country, many young married women die every day because of alleged 'stove bursts'. Why is it that nobody sues the stove manufacturer? We all know the answer. These are not the stove accidents, but dowry killings. Isn't it sad that in a society where Durga is worshipped and women are called Shakti, our sisters are burned like brinjals without any mercy? It makes me cry.”(Murty 74)

Murty gathers courage to face these poor women's writhing in agony but it is impossible for her to stand it for long. Though the times have changed now, education is being spread to the grass root, there are other problems which restrict girls from attending schools and getting educated to stand on their own feet and earn their living and lead a life of dignity and freedom. Murty's words are worth to be noted as she goes to the roots of the cause. Once she talks to a victim's mother, who tells her,

“There is no stove in their house. It is all lies. We have five daughters. She is the eldest. When she was in the ninth class, we stopped her education. She was a good student, but we had no choice. I wanted someone to help me in the kitchen and look after the younger children. So she had to leave school to take care of her little sisters though she herself was a child. After a couple of years we thought of her marriage. In our neighborhood girls get married early. If we do not perform the marriage early enough, what will people say? We gave her a proper dowry and a grand marriage to the best of our ability.”(Murty 75)

The story never ends at 'And they were happily married ever after; as the real story begins at this point. her husband and in-laws started demanding more money and if the demands were not duly fulfilled, she was worsely beaten. When she was sent back to her parents, they

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forced her to cope with her in-laws' family as it was her real home, her father's home has become alien to her. Her parents were unable to provide her any money as they were also worried about the marriages of her younger sisters. And if she remained with them no one would have married the other girls at home.

This is a chain formed by society: poverty, lack of education, early marriage, male child to make life better, in order to have a male child giving birth to more girls until an 'heir' to the family is born, poverty, early marriage and lack of education. And top of this the culprits were free and her husband remarried to a girl again would be sacrificed on the altar of societies greed. Murty explains,

"If she had been educated, she could have taken up a job and left her husband. If her parents had fewer children then they could have kept and cared for her. Her parents were more worried about how people talked about the than the fate awaited their daughter."(Murty 76-77)

There is no end to these problems even today; there might be lesser stove bursts problem exists in some different form. The implementation of law too has not permanently eradicated the dowry deaths from the society. The means have changed, the demands have changed, the situations have changed but the same torture exists. Indian society, culture and history infact is totally different from what written in scriptures. As Jain and Sharma aptly states:

"Cultural and historical exigencies of a particular region and society shape and influence the nuances of gender construction."(Jain and Sharma 3)

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