

**Woman as a Sufferer and the Conventional Response to Adultery in
Sudha Murty's Novel *The Mother I Never Knew***

M. Vinodhkumar, M.A.

Abstract

Mukesh narrated a story of an outcaste who was terribly disturbed by the story of his birth. His restless striving in search of his mother changed his view of life. The story threw light on the dual yardsticks that Indians used for men and women. The prestige of the family was related to the chastity of female sex when it should be related to all culprits. Rupinder, Sumati and Nirmala represented different roles that men assigned to the women in India. Mukesh stood out as a dutiful „son” to all the three mothers in his life. In Her novel, women occupy the lowest rung of the male dominated Society. And their sexual rights are virtually nonexistent.

Keywords: Independent identity, Nirmala, Sumati, female sex right, adultery is a social issue, not a religious or moral issue.

This novella shows three different faces of mother. Nirmala had a shamelessly masked face. Rupinder possessed a fatally helpless face whereas, Sumati's face was compassionate and benevolent. Mukesh came across these faces in his journey towards finding his mother.

Mukesh is a story of a relentless search of a son for his missing mother. Mukesh was born of a premarital sex between Nirmala and Anand. Public idea of personal shame and family dignity forced her to disown him immediately after his birth. He was brought up by Rupinder as her own child. When the poverty compelled her to forsake the child in Jalana, Sumati tended him and transformed him into a renowned business.

The novel shows the repression and victimization of female sex in Indian circumstances. Girls and women in India are taken for granted. They are prevented from exercising individual freedom and keeping independent identity. They are solely blamed for the birth of a child through illicit sexual relations before marriage.

Fragile concepts of family honor are built on the chastity of women folk only.

Nirmala had secretly kept sexual contacts with her mathematics teacher Anand. It resulted into her pregnancy before her marriage. Men who had constructed the dictum of ethics declared her immoral. They tried to terminate her pregnancy. When it looked dangerous, they segregated her from public eye in an isolated place two hundred kilometers from their residence. She was also forced to do away with the child immediately after its birth. "After a few days he told his wife, "I have made all the arrangements. My cousin has isolated farm house two hundred kilometers from here. But he lives in Bombay. I have talked to him and told him that Nirmala is unwell and needs a change. So I will send her there with Dulari, but you will stay here with me. Otherwise people will start doubting our story. Please tell Dulari about my instructions. I don't care if Nirmala gives birth to a boy or girl. The child should be given away or left there. Nirmala must come back alone." Nobody thought about her desires and expectations during her pregnancy. The honor of the parents was thought to be more important than physical and psychological condition of Niramala. Real culprit Anand however escaped punishment simply because he was a man. Gudiya in Namita Gokhale's Gods, Graves and Grandmother got fell in love with Kaliki and got married with him without the prior consent of her guardian Phoolwali. She had a series of misfortunes with her husband later on. She was thrown out of house after her husband noticed her pregnancy. She had helped Kalaki to pursue his interests with the money she had saved for her child. Nothing worked in favour of cordial relations.

The same Nirmala had to keep away from openly acknowledging her son in the Minister's bungalow. Mukesh approached her in minister's house. Even when she felt sympathy for Mukesh she was helpless. She had to maintain the masked dignity of her minister husband. She had to keep the secret at the cost of her own happiness.

Rupinder is one more victim of male constructed social code of ethics. She could not conceive after the death of her first child. Though infertility was a result of deficiencies in her drunkard husband, she was held responsible for her barrenness. She brought Nirmala's child Mukesh from Amritsar to Jalana. Nobody questioned her about the child because it was a male child. Had it been a girl child, her in laws would not have accepted the child and Rupinder in their house.

Indian women are expected to submit their entire being to their men. It was not their fault that Nirmala and Rupinder had to hide reality from the world. Traditions and customs expected them to do so. Simon De Beauvoir blamed woman for her condition in the following words. "The truth is that woman's situation is out of equilibrium...that woman sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself but as man

defines her.” Novella showed a deplorable condition of an unwed mother in Indian social fabric.

There are innumerable restrictions on a female sex right from her birth to her death in India. She was not allowed any sort of freedom of expression of her feelings and emotions. Ironical part of her life was that she was not allowed to say the things about men that men said about them. Result of such discriminatory treatment given to her was that man was never punished for the same offence. He was exempted from the consequences of their daredevil attitude.

Mukesh was born of Nirmala when she had premarital sex for amusement with her mathematics teacher, Anand. Generally, birth of a child particularly a male child is a moment for domestic celebrations. But Nirmala was segregated from the family till her delivery. She had to throw the baby on the steps of the temple secretly. Rupinder picked the baby from there and brought it to Jalana as her own child.

Social customs and traditions were said to originate and develop for the overall good of the individual in society.

Their purpose was always benevolent at the root. But when the same customs and traditions were manipulated by a handful of people with vested interests, weak persons in the system suffered. The conventions gained upper hand they transform honest people into rogues. It is noticeable that Nirmala had to disown her baby and Rupinder had to own somebody’s baby as her own in order to maintain the family customs. Simon de Beauvoir stated, “If woman appears to be inessential, which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change.”

Hypocrisy reigned in all affairs in Indian domestic life. Nirmala’s father could arrange to marry off his spoiled daughter with a minister because he had money and accompanying shamelessness whereas chaste Rupinder had to play with social sentiments by spreading the false information of a child birth. Neither Nirmala nor Rupinder wanted to do it willingly. They were rather forced to play their roles against their wishes. “Finally, Rupinder lifted her head and said, “Munna, you are my son. You are a part of my heart, even today. That’s the truth. But your father did not feel the same way and so it became easy for him to leave you.”

Anand and Surinder escaped their deeds without any social stigma. Anand was away from Amritsar after the revelation of Nirmala’s pregnancy and never was in picture again. The culprit escaped the punishment and innocent Nirmala had to keep low profile throughout her life. Rupinder’s husband Surinder was a drunkard and physically impotent

to cause her pregnancy. But sufferer of his inability was innocent Rupinder. Thus, the social practices are based on the injustice to and discrimination against women the novella portrays the tenderness of hearts of Indian mothers even in the face of globalization. Though there are three major women with three different characteristic features, they all have mother's heart. Though Nirmala was compelled to give up her newborn, she carefully handed over it to Rupinder because she was the only lady in the area who could breastfeed him. "She cried and touched his feet, "Beta, please forgive me. I didn't know how a child was born and I brought you into this world in my ignorance. I don't know what your future holds, but I just can't leave you somewhere to die of hunger or cold. Rupinder is a nice woman. At the very least, she will ensure your survival and you won't grow up as an illegitimate child. "This showed Nirmala's inner urge to safeguard the child from future troubles.

Rupinder also possessed a divine heart of mother for Mukesh. She looked after him in spite of her grinding poverty without disclosing his real identity to anybody. Rupinder handed over Mukesh to Sumati without telling her who he really was. "She said, "Sumati, this is the only gift my parents gave me when I was married. I don't have any money to give, but this must always be with Munna. Don't ever tell him about me, unless it is a matter of life and death."

Sumati was a gem of a person. She not only adopted him in her family, she helped him create a special place for himself in the world. She spent her hard-earned money for his education, marriage and business without grumbling against his real status. She accepted her husband's death will in which Mukesh was allotted an equal share in property. The will read, "The coffee plantation in Coorg, the house in Delhi, the other residence in Bangalore and the business goes to Munna". All this showed Suamti's greatness as mother.

Mukesh was grateful to all the three mothers. He came to know that his biological mother was a prey to social conspiracy against women in India. His second "mother" played a role of "Yashoda" in bringing him up. Third "mother" Sumati acquired a pious place of Goddess Mother in his heart for her compassionate considerations and willing sacrifices in life. Sumati had been a friend, philosopher and guide to him all through his life. Mukesh sympathetically understood the inevitability and significance of their roles in proper perspectives. He offered financial assistance and moral support to Rupinder.

Adultery, as evidenced by works such as Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary. Although guilty party

in these works is always a woman who meets a bad end as a result of her doing, I conclude in this article, adultery is a social issue, not a religious or moral issue.

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M. VINODHKUMAR, M.A.
Assistant Professor of English
Department of English
K.G. College of Arts and Science
Coimbatore
m.vinodhkumar@kgcas.com
Keatsvin@gmail.com