



# Shades of Marriage: A Comparative Study of Sudha Murty's Mahashweta and Disney's Cinderella (1950)

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**Abstract** - This paper deals with Sudha Murty's Mahashweta and Disney's Cinderella (1950) movie with special focus on the theme of marriage. This research includes a comparison between the characters of Anupama and Cinderella. The research also examines the reality of marriage in Mahashweta and the fantasy of marriage in Cinderella (1950). Fairy tales often play an accomplice in implanting misleading notions about marriage and 'happily ever after' in the minds of young readers by portraying unrealistic standards when it comes to relationships and marriage. Sudha Murty's Mahashweta showcases the scenario after marriage while Cinderella (1950) ends with the quote "and they lived happily ever after".

**Key words:** Cinderella, Disney, Sudha Murty, Mahashweta, Anupama, marriage

Fairy tales are imaginary stories that are often didactic in nature. Statistics reveal that fairy tales play a major role in the development of a child's mind. Jane Austen popularly wrote, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1), which might still be the case in the majority of Indian households. A historical tracing of fairy tales appear to reveal a pattern of subliminally influencing impressionable young minds, primarily young girls. "Grimm's fairy tales", written by the Grimm brothers, was first published in 1812. Growing up, the majority of the children would have listened to the story of Cinderella. Prince Charming, saving her from the evil step sisters and the evil stepmother, still lives in the hearts of many people. Sudha Murty's novel Mahashweta parallels the plot of Cinderella to a wide extent. Mahashweta by Sudha Murty was published in the year 2000. The plot revolves around its protagonist Anupama whose life parallels that of Cinderella where both of them were

tormented by their step mothers. Cinderella is a 1950 Walt Disney movie based on the fairy tale by Charles Perrault. The character of Anupama and Cinderella have many parallels.

### **Shades of Marriage in "Mahashweta" and Cinderella (1950)**

The origins of children's fantasy fiction can be traced back to folk fairy tales. Children's fiction used to be entertainment for adults instead of infants' stories, in spite of the fact that they are one of the oldest forms of literature. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Folk tales were told at all levels of society, though they originated in the peasants' houses. Folk tales are usually considered as a universal tale, however, they differ when they change location from one place to another. Many Scholars recommended reading stories and singing songs to children. C. John Somerville comments that the Puritans gave a realistic portrayal of childhood and literature and that further provided the children with both religious education as well as entertaining reading. The earlier oral folk tales were not created to teach moral values but rather to entertain and horrify the audience. The written form of a folk tale was the next stage in the progress of the fairy tale. It pioneered during the seventeenth century literary salons of the French aristocracy. Before the 1690s, folk tales were thought as the representation of the peasant's vulgar culture and norms.

During the 1630's the French upper-class women started getting interested in folk tales. As the years progressed, fairy tales used to be narrated from beginning to end in social situations. The themes of fairy tales used to be connected with controversial matters. Themes such as freedom in marriage, fidelity and justice were often discussed. In Perrault's "Histoires ou contes du temps passé", the major female protagonists are expected to be submissive, modest and beautiful, unlike the male protagonists, who are witty and ambitious. The ultimate goal of Perrault's female protagonists is marriage, while the men aim at achieving both social as well as economic success. The idea of writing stories for children was not famous among storytellers until the 1700s.

Majority of the cultural historians agree that Children's literature originated during the mid eighteenth century in Britain. 'A Little Pretty Pocket-Book' published by John Newbery in 1744, is usually considered as the most significant point of origin. Numerous famous children's books have a famous origin story attached to them. Lewis Carroll created 'Alice's Adventures' while he was on a boat-trip with Alice, Lorina and Edith Liddell in 1862. Peter Pan was written because of J. M. Barrie's friendship with the five Llewelyn Davies boys. Salman Rushdie, following Ayatollah Khomeini's 1989 fatwa, wrote Haroun and the Sea of Stories for his son, Zafir.

Talented people like Newbery undoubtedly played a vital part in children's literature. Also there were other factors such as the technological development in book production, the growth of the middle class, the influence of new educational theories, and the changing attitudes towards childhood. The result was the expansion of children's literature in the second half of the eighteenth century and by the early 1800s the children's book business was at its peak.

Anupama is the protagonist of the novel "Mahashweta" by Sudha Murty. The title of the novel is taken from the character Mahashweta that she played in a drama. She had a personality that matched the stage and the theatre. Anupama has been described as a beautiful woman in the novel. She had a good complexion, long black hair and big eyes. She is known for her beauty. Anand was attracted to her beauty from the first sight, when he saw her at Dr. Desai's house. "Anand looked up from his notes, and was stunned to see a young girl of extraordinary beauty standing before him. He had met countless girls over the years, but never had he seen anyone so startlingly lovely. With her beautiful large eyes, exquisite complexion, and face framed by long, jet-black hair, she looked like an apsara." (Murty 8). He was headstrong about getting married to Anupama even when his mother was reluctant about this idea. Anupama is portrayed as a humble and down to earth woman and her nature is reflected in many instances.

Anupama has been portrayed as a submissive and sensitive woman. Anupama lost her mother while she was an infant. Her father Shamanna remarried a woman named Sabakka. "It was true that Shamanna could not afford to pay for his daughter's education. His wife Sabakka, Anupama's stepmother, had told her husband categorically, 'Let us not educate her further. It might become difficult to find a husband for her' (Murty 20). Sabakka and her two daughters Nanda and Vasudha were jealous of Anupama. Her step sisters felt that she was more than them. They have tormented Anupama throughout her life. After getting married to Dr. Anand the role of step mother and step sisters were taken over by her mother in law Radhakka and sister in law Girija. Anupama faced oppression at the hands of all these women. Radhakka did not like Anupama from the beginning and constantly offended her.

Anupama fell in love with Anand without realising that he loves her for the sake of her beauty. She thought that she found her prince Charming who saved her from all the torment she underwent at the hands of her stepmother and step sisters. "The wedding was a grand event. Anupama felt as though she was in the midst of a fairy tale" (Murty 35). Anupama is a strong willed woman who did not let the plight of her life lose hope. She developed Leukoderma after getting married to Anand. She was shamed by her mother-in-law because of her skin disease. "If so, call your witness to explain all that has happened. Your daughter had a white patch which you concealed so" (Murty 59). Radhakka sends her away to her father's house. "Take your daughter back with you; she need not come back until she's completely cured and my son returns and sends for her. We have been deceived, and I will inform Anand about this" (Murty 59). She prepared herself to face the world alone and even left her father's house since she did not want to burden and embarrass him. She tried to contact Anand who was in England, however it ended in vain because he lost his interest in her because of her Leukoderma. His ultimately proves that he only loved her for the sake of her beauty. Being ignored by Anand she lost hope and stopped writing to him. Anand was the one who fell in love with her first and proposed marriage and he was the one who abandoned and discarded her. Dr. Vasant came into her life while she was leading an independent life. However she refused Vasant's marriage proposal because she has the confidence and determination to take care of her own life. She is not ready to " get entangled again in the

same circle of husband and family" (Murty 155). When Anand came back into her life and begged her to take him back she declined his offer and carried on to live a respectful and independent life.

Cinderella (1950) is a Disney movie that revolves around its protagonist Cinderella, a beautiful girl who has lost her mother and father. She is now living with her stepmother, Lady Tremaine and her two stepsisters. Cinderella's stepsisters, Anastasia and Drizella will always make fun of her out of jealousy. In spite of being oppressed and tormented Cinderella has a genuine and humble heart. She obeys her stepmother and does all the household chores. She is friends with the birds and the mice that live in her house. She is forced to do all the household chores and is treated as a slave and not as a sister. The birds and the mice help her with the chores. One fine day, the King invites all the eligible women to attend a ball to find a wife for his son, the Prince. Cinderella is eager to attend the ball, however her stepmother prohibits her from attending the ball. With the help of her animal friends she fixes her mother's old dress. However, out of jealousy and fear that the prince will choose Cinderella over them, the stepsisters tear the dress and leave Cinderella in tears. She is heartbroken and starts crying in the garden. Her fairy godmother appears to help her. She turns a pumpkin into a coach, the mice into horses and her horses into coachman and footman. She then turns Cinderella's dirty dress into an exquisite blue ball gown and gives her glass footwear. However she warns Cinderella that the magic will disappear at midnight and so she must return home before midnight.

Cinderella then goes to the ball and is unrecognisable to her step sisters. The prince takes a liking towards her and dances with her. They fall in love and wander the palace. The clock strikes midnight and she starts running away realising that the magic will disappear. She leaves her glass shoes on the steps of the palace. The prince does not even know her name but is sure about the fact that she is the one who he is going to marry. He sends out his servants with the glass shoe that Cinderella left behind and asks the servants to make it try on all the women that went to the ball. After losing her glass shoes everything goes back to the way it was and Cinderella returns to her regular life. Lady Tremaine learns of the fact that Cinderella went to the ball and locks her in the attic. The prince is determined to find the girl, whose feet will fit the glass slippers. The mice and the birds help Cinderella to get out of the locked room while the servants and the grand duke are at her house. Despite Lady Tremaine's efforts to ruin Cinderella's marriage with the prince by breaking the glass slipper, she fails. Cinderella had the other glass slipper and it fits her foot perfectly. The grand duke is elated and takes her to the palace. Cinderella and the prince are married and the movie ends with the quote, "and they lived happily ever after".

Anupama and Cinderella have lots of similarities when it comes to characterization. The character of the stepmother in both Cinderella as well as Mahashweta portrays evil. Sabakka went to the extent of sabotaging Anupama's wedding with Dr. Anand in order to ruin her life. Similarly Lady Tremaine, Cinderella's step mother, goes to the extent of breaking the glass slippers in order to prevent Cinderella from getting married to the prince. Anupama has been tormented by her step mother throughout her life. That is the case with Cinderella as well. Sabakka, Anupama's step mother has two daughters, Vasudha and Nanda. Cinderella has

two step sisters namely, Anastasia and Drizella. The common parallel is that both the step sisters were jealous of Anupama as well as Cinderella. The lead protagonists were known for their beauty and this ultimately triggered the jealousy in the step sisters.

Cinderella and Anupama were married to their dream men. But Anupama did not get the happy ending that Cinderella was portrayed to have gotten. Anand is a doctor and Anupama thinks that he is her prince Charming and they fall in love. He married her despite the disapproval of his mother. After their marriage Dr. Anand had to move abroad because of his career. During this time Anupama develops Leukoderma and her life changes completely because of the white spots. Anand's mother convinces him to abandon Anupama because of her skin disease. What she believed to be her "happily ever after" ended up as her plight. She decided to leave Anand's house and became independent. Marriage was not a bed of roses for her like she imagined. The same man who loved her discards her as soon as her beauty is threatened. The sheer will power of Anupama helps her create a life for herself and she chooses herself and her passion at the end of the novel. The notion that women are objectified and valued for their beauty by their own husbands is showcased through the character of Anupama. However the movie released in 1950 failed to showcase the aftermath of, "and they lived happily ever after". Sudha Murty's Mahashweta gives a glimpse of what happens after "happily ever after". After marriage the couple has to make an effort to make their relationship work and they should not rely on "magic" and "happily ever after".

The paper proves that "and they lived happily ever after" is a myth and that marriage takes two people to work on their relationship. There should be freedom, trust, kindness, understanding, forgiveness and love in a married life. The paper compared the characters of Anupama from Sudha Murty's "Mahashweta" and Cinderella from the 1950 movie "Cinderella". In Spite of the hurdles faced by Anupama, after marriage, she stands tall and lives an independent life. This portrays the reality of marriage and the movie Cinderella ending with the quote "and they lived happily ever after" represents the fantasy of marriage.

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