

Sudha Murty's Short Stories as Catalysts in Redefining Masculine Perceptions of Women's Roles, Female Identity and Social Agency in Contemporary Indian Society

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ABSTRACT:

Sudha Murty has been an influential presence in the Indian literary landscape for over a decade through her fictional narratives and socially relevant non-fictional works. The use of elementary language in dealing with intricate concepts made her a favourite among the readers across all age groups and regions. Even though most of Murty's short stories are intended as children's literature, stemming from Indian mythology and moral narratives, the implicit advocacy of social issues and gender roles are apparent for an attentive reader. This study investigates on the impact of Sudha Murty's short stories on the male perception of women's roles and female identities in contemporary Indian society. Grounded in gender discourse and literary impact analysis, the research investigates the effect of varied exposure to Murty's female characters on interpretation and acceptance of traditional and non-conventional female roles. A sample of 268 male undergraduate students across Kerala that integrates demographic diversity across age, regional backgrounds, familial dynamics and varied female peer interaction was selected based on their exposure to at least one of the four selected short stories of Sudha Murty. The short stories: Rahman's Avva, Ganga's Ghat, A Life Unwritten and Three Ponds, deliberately selected portrays different facets of women involving varied shades and manifestations in the story telling. The online and offline survey results analysed through a combination of statistical tools: One-Sample t-test, One-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and Two-Way MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) revealed significant patterns of interpretation and considerable progressive shifts in gender perception, linked to story exposure and peer interaction context. A visibly apparent positive correlation between increased literary exposure and heightened empathy, recognition of emotional strength and acknowledgment of women's

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autonomy confirmed the impact of the Sudha Murty's work on gender perception. The study unveils the transformative capacity of literature in challenging internalized gender biases and promoting gender-sensitive awareness among young men in India.

Keywords: Sudha Murty, Gender Perception, Short Stories, Female Identity, Narrative Influence, Patriarchy and Literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sudha Murty, the storyteller rooted in simplicity was born on August 19, 1950, in Shiggaon, Karnataka to a surgeon-school teacher parent. A life characterized with the multiple roles of author, philanthropist and educator was a testament for woman's right as well. Be it being topper of an Engineering batch filled with male peers, fighting with the system to become first female Engineer in Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO), or real-life intervention in the Devadasi system; Murty faced social stigma, gender bias and structural hierarchy unflinchingly [1]. As an author she became a preferred choice among literary beginners for the simple and comprehensible language and among children for the magical fiction worlds she creates [2]. Rooted in culture and observation., Murty delves into mythology, reflects on the past, engages with the present and gazes into the future; carving out a place for herself in the contemporary Indian English literature.

Sudha Murty paints a vivid range of human experiences, emotions and thought processes, especially of Indian women negotiating the complex web of familial, cultural and social structures. There is not much drama or forced chaos in the stories, they are more of a reflection of real-life experiences; filled with honesty, simplicity and wisdom. This sets apart the short stories from the contemporary literary culture, dominated by exaggeration, melodrama and emotional excess; nonfiction filled with more fiction than facts or basic philosophical debates or propagandas. Murty's realism, even in

her fictional works stands out for its authenticity and minimalism [3]. Everyday woman, domestic workers, teachers, mothers, students, all are a captured with rich colors, intense stories and layered emotions [4]. Murty's female characters are not mere passive participants in the society; they are the agents of change and the voices of resilience, strength, perseverance and hope [5]. Whether it is a grandmother nurturing generations through moral wisdom or a young woman questioning the traditions imposed upon her, her characters reflect both the conformity and resistance embedded in the lived experiences of Indian women. In her stories, the role of the female protagonist is neither ornamental nor ancillary; rather, it becomes the central pillar around which complex societal narratives unfold.

Patriarchy defined women for generations in the Indian socio-cultural ecosystem, restricting desires, denying rights, policing behavior and enforcing conformity [6]. Historically perceived through the lens of devotion, sacrifice and subservience, women have often been celebrated only within the boundaries of obedience and domesticity. Literature has long served as a tool in the societal reform and always the first effective sign of renaissance [7]. It has been an inevitable factor in the reform movements, education, social issues and political criticism. Stories especially, even in their compact format could easily capture the readers interest transporting them to an emotionally charged word and induce cultural introspection and evolution. It is in this context, Murty's stories complete the pattern, unseen by

essential, bridging tradition and process, culture and development, memory and modernist and values and vision. Her stories address the contradiction of conventional expectations and individual desires and aspirations of a woman, undermining personal autonomy in clear and apparent terms. The stories form a medium that foster gender consciousness, especially in male readers urging them to reconsider the established convictions and question and revisualize the outdated norms. The study focused on four of Sudha Murty's short stories and their extend of impact in the male readers. The works: *Rahman's Arwa*, *Ganga's Ghat*, *A Life Unwritten* and *Three Ponds* are thoughtfully curated for the thematic diversity and rich female characters representing resilience, wisdom, humility and quiet defiance. Each story presents a different dimension of femininity, wrapped in layers of dignity, boldness, strength and determination. A woman's mark on the lives around her, society and history are portrayed in an unmatched radiant simplicity. These are generally constructed through the narratives of recalling a memory, engaging in a conversation or explaining experiences, and as a result, does include Murty's outlook and commentary on the issues in them.

Rahman's Arwa expresses the belief of maternal affection and religious affiliation being mutually inclusive, where affection is not rooted in or limited by lineage. The story unfolds with the author's curiosity of her employee Rahman introducing his mother Kashibai and sister Usha to her during a house visit. A Muslim man with Hindu female kin invoked inquisitiveness, that was answered by the heartfelt tale of kindness and tenderness where a motherless infant was raised by a woman of different religion and culture. Even though Rahman was in all terms Kashibai's son, and a part of the family, his religious identity was never disrupted or questioned. The confident resolve, silent sacrifices and limitless maternal love are portrayed by the story. Murty exposes readers to a feminine figure that upholds humanity and moral values silently defying social frameworks.

In *Ganga's Ghat*, the eponymous character is a village coolie whose social status is undermined by her profession and gender. But her selfless act of providing water to underprivileged and fellow villagers in the water-scarce areas turns her into an unpraised humanitarian. The protagonist can be seen considering this act of service as a motivating factor in her life, but refuses to add more luxuries to it. The simple lesson is conveyed that benevolence, unchecked, becomes a cycle of want, implying that wisdom is derived from experiences and is independent of textbook education, career titles or social hierarchy. Ganga's story is of spiritual and communal significance elevating her role from an ordinary laborer to a cultural icon of devotion and altruism. Murty asserts the transformative capacity of a woman whose perseverance and compassion are beyond an easy reach and an ideology that breaks the socio-economic confines to serve society in impactful ways.

A Life Unwritten was shaped as a recounting of an event from Murty's father's professional life. Her father, a doctor encounters a delicate situation and was requested to conduct a childbirth by the villagers. Though initially reluctant owing to his inexperience in obstetric procedure, he later performs the procedure and finds out the child is born out of wedlock and the young unmarried mother fears about the future of her and the newborn daughter. The male doctor here, rises above societal stigma, judgement and chauvinism and takes the first step by helping them to weave a renewed destiny away from the blood thirsty custodians of social order and moral policing. The story draws to conclusion on the encounter of the doctor and unwed mother after years, where the mother and daughter had shaped a life of prosperity. The protagonist chooses integrity and maternal devotion over societal approval, with a defiance loud but consistent. Murty exposes the moral double standards and celebrates motherhood beyond institutional definitions of legitimacy and acts as a powerful

reminder that dignity and morality often reside in unconventional paths.

Three Ponds explores the lives of three different women and their historical and emotional association with ponds. All three stories, set in water scarce regions convey the crisis of thirst and water and women being synonyms as source of salvation. An Indian milkwoman's honest and simple request leading to the construction of ponds by British army. A pond as a wedding gift request by a bride valuing water over gold and money, advocating other's needs amidst her own bliss. A dutiful woman sacrificing herself for the well-being of others and formation of a pond that could keep the villages alive. All these stories though with varied contexts, display the essence of a woman and highlights the vision, nurturing nature and compassion, honoring humility, persistence and feminine dignity in rural life. Here Murty blurs the line between personal and the public, and suggests that history is being created not only by a magnum opus but also through everyday struggles and determination.

2. RELATED WORKS

Murari et al. [8] investigated on the portrayal of Indian middle-class lives in Sudha Murty's works and the treatment of their dreams, aspirations, struggles and cultural dilemmas in the societal framework. The study focused on the portrayal of female characters navigating rigid gender roles, generally trapped between personal ambition and familial expectation. Murty's woman cannot be plainly as conformist or rebel, but are everyday women with acts such as prioritizing marriage over education or domesticity over self-fulfillment or young woman striving for autonomy. Murari observes that while critiquing traditional gender constructs, Murty also affirms the transformative potential of education and self-belief for women seeking empowerment within patriarchal frameworks. Murty's works humanizes the moral and emotional complexity of everyday choices with highest details and addresses the implications associated with it.

The study strongly reinforces the relevance of Murty's stories for examining invisible emotional struggles beneath visible life choices.

Thakare & Bedse [9] explores Sudha Murty's dual impact as a literary voice and social reformer in women empowerment in contemporary India. Murty's stories challenge patriarchal norms with women evolving as agents of change, moving beyond outdated roles into spheres of education, leadership and independence. The study observes that Murty's literary characters often embody the transition from invisibility to agency, navigating emotional and structural constraints with subtle tenacity. The prominent advocacy for education and its liberating force merging into the vivid contexts depicts her unique ability to translate social activism into relatable fiction. The authors comment that through Murty emerges as a catalyst for feminist reflection, urging readers to question entrenched gender roles. Her portrayal of social transformation through everyday lives points to the invisible emotional and societal realms behind visible narrative plots.

Kalra and Vashist [10] examined Sudha Murty's novels for its generational perspectives on feminism and the interplay between traditional expectations and emerging ideals of autonomy. The analysis of *Dollar Babu*, *Mahashweta*, *House of Cards* and *Gently Falls the Bakula* reveals a gradual but profound evolution in the roles and self-perceptions of women across different time periods with older women internalizing patriarchal norms and younger generation challenging them. Murty's narratives depict the shift as a complex negotiation involving personal loss, emotional struggle and cultural constraints reflecting the layered nature of a woman's life. The study observes that Murty merges domestic realism and feminist thought with education, empathy and intergenerational dialogue as her tools placing women empowerment within culturally familiar settings. Her characters display the transformative potential in reframing identities even in traditional narratives.

Surendra & Thirunagari [11] examine the accessible language and vivid themes in socially grounded narratives in Sudha Murty's works and noted her influence in contemporary Indian English literature. Relevant topics such as education, domestic life, social values, religion and gender inequality are addressed and patriarchy, its insensitive authority is criticized with a subtle articulation of feminist ideals through relatable characters embedded in traditional settings. Framing Murty under the lens of postmodern feminism, the study observes that her female characters confront inherited gender norms and emotional invisibility, often within familial or economic structures. Murty's narrative strength lies in her ability to connect with readers with familiar settings, but with a thematic depth. By demystifying literary elitism and highlighting real life struggles, Murty contributes to a more inclusive, socially responsive form of feminist storytelling.

Vaswani [12] observes Sudha Murty's storytelling as a link between simplicity of expression and profound social critique. The study highlights Murty's as a grounded yet powerful female voice, offering narratives rooted in traditional life and realities, subtly exposing structural limitations placed on women. Murty's personal experiences infuse authenticity and relatability into her work with women demonstrating qualities of resilience, emotional strength and a constructive outlook toward life, even in traditional setting. Murty's women are not confined to oppression, but those embrace responsibility, labour with dignity and maintain ethical clarity in the face of adversity. Murty's feminist reflections speak to the reader's soul with its simple language and emotional connect. Mythological, historical and contemporary themes form a part of her feminine, promoting hard work, humility and social awareness through strong yet understated female voices.

Nathaniel and Devi [13] observed idealism as the defining element in characterizing Indian middle-class women by Sudha Murty in her

works. On contrasting Murty's strategy with radical feminist writing, the study points out that her female characters' inner strength, compassion and ethical clarity stem from these qualities rather than a mass scale rebellion. The women reinterpret conventional norms and gender politics without explicitly rejecting tradition, not fully conforming to or deconstructing cultural and societal expectations. The study comments that Murty's narratives emphasise moral rectitude and everyday heroism, providing an alternative feminist perspective grounded on emotional genuineness. Her female characters strive for education, self-reliance and community responsibility, while also honoring familial bonds, mediating effectively between the extremes of cultural heritage and individual agency. Her literary ladies are idealistic, not in a naivete sense, but in conviction; proving that inner transformation, accountability and persistence stems from inner strength. This subtle resistance transforms into a powerful tool of identity formation and moral commentary within contemporary Indian literature.

The psychological and social maturation of woman in Sudha Murty's works was investigated in Srivastava [14], that follows their paths from internal conflict to self-realization. Murty's portrayal of Indian women's evolving psyches as they negotiate the conflicts between tradition and modernity was highlighted. Her characters, torn between inherited expectations and emerging aspirations, often experience a state of emotional and intellectual ambivalence, but cuts through the oppressive patriarchal norms asserting autonomy and are self-aware and resilient. Murty's narratives comprise of women that has a balance of personal identity and societal duty, with a raising realisation and courage to reclaim lost the agency and autonomy. They are never passive settings or victims, but are constantly emerging and empowered women, whose actions, reflections and resolve shine through in Sudha Murty's works. The study concludes that Murty's contribution to the portrayal of the modern

Indian woman, redefines her place within cultural frameworks simultaneously striving for dignity, independence and self-respect.

Saraswat [15] views that Murty's works have been instrumental in women empowerment in contemporary India through the works on education, economic independence, identity and transformation of familial structures and communities. Murty places women as the central point in a family and society and women empowerment as an epicentre of social evolution, where their decisions, self-reliance. And resistance to imposed limitations becomes essential part of the community well-being. The study analyses that Murty advocates a development model rooted in gender equity, where women education acts as a catalyst for poverty eradication and facilitating socio-cultural stability. The compassion and empathy of the female characters is deeply linked with the basic idea of communal development having roots in personal growth, one uplifting the other has been Murty's ideology. By presenting empowerment through culturally grounded narratives, her work positions women not merely as recipients of change, but as initiators of sustainable transformation within the societal fabric.

Suryawanshi [16] examined the concepts of gender inequality and social justice in Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*, *Three Thousand Stitches* and *Dollar Babu* probing into the patriarchal values of Indian society. The female characters confront and transcend societal expectations related to beauty, materialism and gendered roles, but exemplify resilience, moral clarity and the pursuit of economic and personal independence, redefining identity within traditionally restrictive environments. The study emphasizes that Murty's feminism is neither radical nor confrontational but a string of injustices embedded in the everyday struggles and the resultant ethical choices of her characters. Murty urges readers to re-investigate the outdated norms that limit a woman's dreams and desires in her thought-provoking, yet simple and familiar narratives. Her literary

voice contributes to feminist discourse by portraying empowerment as an internal awakening grounded in education, self-worth, financial independence, personal agency and cultural realism.

Lalitha Sridevi [17] compares and contrasts Sudha Murty's and Flora Nwapa's works by the influence of oral traditions, myth and cultural storytelling. The study focused on the ability of both the writers to reframe inherited narratives from a gender-conscious perspective. The evident ancestral memory in Murty's work and the critical wisdom reflected, evolves her as a writer that can engage the traditional beliefs into a reshaped contemporary framework in the socially progressive lens. Drawing on proverbs, folktales, songs and allegories, she integrates their structural elements to lend cultural depth and authenticity to her writing. The retellings connect the contemporary women with the traditional roots where dignity, autonomy, agency and justice are essential factors and are non-negotiable. The marginalized voices are projected into the literary foreground, the cultural community is reinforced and a reflective space is created for reevaluation of ideologies. The study concludes that Murty's works open up possibilities for individual self-formation and collective introspection in contemporary Indian society through cultural frameworks.

Pandey [18] deduces Sudha Murty as one of the most articulate contemporary feminist voices in the Indian English literature. Exploring *House of Cards* and *Dollar Babu*, the social and cultural positioning of woman is examined through the female characters that often endure conservative barriers, but form bonds of empathy and shared resilience that foster mutual support among women. Murty's ability to reflect on the psychological and emotional burdens of patriarchy, gender inequality and societal imbalance is highlighted in the study along with the accessible language narratives. Murty's fiction traces the shifts in female agency from historical suppression to emerging autonomy, showcasing the gradual transformation of women's roles in both traditional and modern

settings. Through depictions of struggle, solidarity and self-realization, Murty crafts narratives that serve as empowering reflections on the evolving dynamics of womanhood in Indian society.

Pillai & Dwivedi [19] investigated on the layers of historical and cultural gender oppression relating to Devadasi experience in Sudha Murty's *Three Thousand Stitches*. Murty's shock on the modern-day normalisation of the outdated Devadasi system, masked as tradition and defended through religious justification was outlined in the study. Murty's literary intervention, an extension to her lived activism, is viewed as both documentation and transformation, finding voice for the historically silenced women. The study appreciates Murty's non victimizing narrative of the women passed through systematic humiliation and violence; and empowering them with the concepts of dignity, identity and agency. Murty creates a literary model reframing traditional myths and challenging cultural stigma, creating characters with quiet defiance and sustained strength, encouraging readers to reflect on the enduring presence of gender inequality and the power of persistence in breaking social hierarchies.

Revathi [20] examines usage of food as a symbolic and narrative device in Sudha Murty's works in depicting gender politics of domestic life. Focusing on *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*, the two works with female protagonist falling into the gender role of a wife, the study observes that Murty uses food as an expression of emotional labour, gendered obligation and silent sacrifice. The patriarchal arrogance confirming female identity to the ability to cook, clean and reproduce is opened up with the deserving despise. The study observes that the unacknowledged labour, emotional trauma and secondary social status given to women could be clearly read between the lines in Murty's books as she details on the celebration of women serviced within the patriarchal expectation while denying autonomy. The construction and confinement of femininity is portrayed with hauntingly familiar

cultural settings prompting for a reframing of the concept of a woman, beyond domestic contributions.

Supriya & Jayakanth [21] compared Shrimati from *Gently Falls the Bakula* and Mridula from *House of Cards*, two protagonists in Sudha Murty's examining women's conflicts in patriarchal domesticity. Their individuality seems to be completely erased by marriage and the gradual realization and the acts to reclaim their autonomy and self-respect forms the central premise in both of the works. The study observes that the performative celebration of women's sacrifice and silence is exposed into critical gaze as well as the scornful gaze endured by women of character, freedom and self-respect. By integrating Alfred Adler's theory of belonging and self-realization, the authors argue that Murty's characters evolve from emotional subjugation to self-assertion not through rebellion, but through reflective decision-making. The narratives thus take up the role of a social critique and calls for the much-needed attention of women's inner life and choices in the confined family spaces.

Chacko & Sudhir [22] explored the moral core layered in Sudha Murty's stories, portraying how everyday characters navigate social and emotional complexities emotional integrity and endurance. The portrayal of compassion, honesty and empathy, the qualities often embodied by women are highlighted with unmatched intricacy and the emotional and moral labor forced upon them is discussed openly. The socio-cultural reflection, ethical clarity and traditional expectations in Murty's stories takes the shape of influential tools for personal growth and social understanding. Murty's women are subtle agents of change, exemplifying inner strength through acts of sacrifice, perseverance and quiet assertion. The study observes that Murty's works bridges the gap between generations, regions, genders and social classes. The readers are prompted for self-introspection and accept vulnerability and modesty and reimagine inherited norms. Murty's work travels ahead in its social relevance and

acts as a mirror to the society rather than as a passive entertainment source.

Despite the studies on Sudha Murty's literature and contributions to Indian literature and social reforms, scrutinizing the emotional nuances of her female characters bounded by social constraints, a few gaps still persist. Most of the research focuses on thematic analysis, feminist ideologies, or character archetypes in the fiction, rather than analyzing the impact that creates on the modern society, especially on the male perception of female identities. They tend to ignore how the male viewpoint interprets the topics of women's empowerment, resilience and ethical idealism. The conspicuous lack of empirical studies examining the influence of Murty's short stories on male perception, particularly across different academic and social contexts are absent mostly, while the intersection of literary influence and real-life peer exposure remains underexplored. This presents an opportunity to investigate how her stories shape young men's attitudes, allowing for deeper insights into literature's transformative potential on gender perception.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. How do male college students interpret the roles and identities of female characters depicted in selected short stories by Sudha Murty?
- ii. Which aspects of female characterization in these stories challenge traditional gender roles and how do male readers respond to them?
- iii. What emotional or cognitive shifts are observed in male readers after engaging with stories that portray women in unconventional or overlooked roles?
- iv. Does the level of exposure to Sudha Murty's works correlate with any shifts in perceptions of gender roles?
- v. Do differences in levels of real-life interaction with female peers relate to how male students reflect on women's roles after reading these stories?

4. OBJECTIVES

- To examine how male college students interpret female roles and identities in selected short stories by Sudha Murty, focusing on both the visible social roles and the emotional depth conveyed through the characters.
- To evaluate the influence of Sudha Murty's literary portrayals on male students' understanding and acceptance of women who conform to or challenge traditional gender expectations.
- To analyze how variations in female peer interaction and exposure to Sudha Murty's short stories influence male students' perceptions of women's roles and identities.

5. PROPOSED HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: There is no significant pattern in how male college students interpret female roles and identities in Sudha Murty's selected short stories, including both social and emotional aspects.

H₁₁: Male college students demonstrate a significant pattern in interpreting female roles and identities in Sudha Murty's selected short stories, recognizing both social roles and emotional depth.

H₀₂: Reading Sudha Murty's short stories has no significant influence on male students' understanding and acceptance of women who conform to or challenge traditional gender expectations.

H₁₂: Reading Sudha Murty's short stories significantly influences male students' understanding and acceptance of women who conform to or challenge traditional gender expectations.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between levels of female peer interaction and literary exposure to Sudha Murty's stories and the perceptions of women's roles and identities among male students.

H₁₃: There is a significant relationship between levels of female peer interaction and literary exposure to Sudha Murty's stories and the

perceptions of women's roles and identities among male students.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualizes the interpretation and acceptance of female identities among male college students as the central outcome influenced by a range of independent variables spanning cognitive, cultural, interpersonal and experiential dimensions. Core constructs such as literary exposure, specifically to Sudha Murty's narratives, cultural conditioning, age and peer disclosure are hypothesized to shape how students perceive and respond to the emotional depth and social roles of women represented in literature. These variables are nested within a broader context of gendered socialization and narrative empathy development. The first focus

is on literary interpretation, exploring how narrative elements affect students' ability to recognize women's autonomy, emotional complexity and societal roles. The second examines gender acceptance, analyzing the influence of family background, household gender roles and pre-existing attitudes in shaping receptivity to women who either adhere to or resist traditional norms. The third investigates interaction exposure dynamics, evaluating how female peer engagement, reflective thinking and openness to new perspectives intersect with story exposure to impact perception. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the proposed research that visually represents the directional relationships between hypotheses, independent variables and the central outcomes.

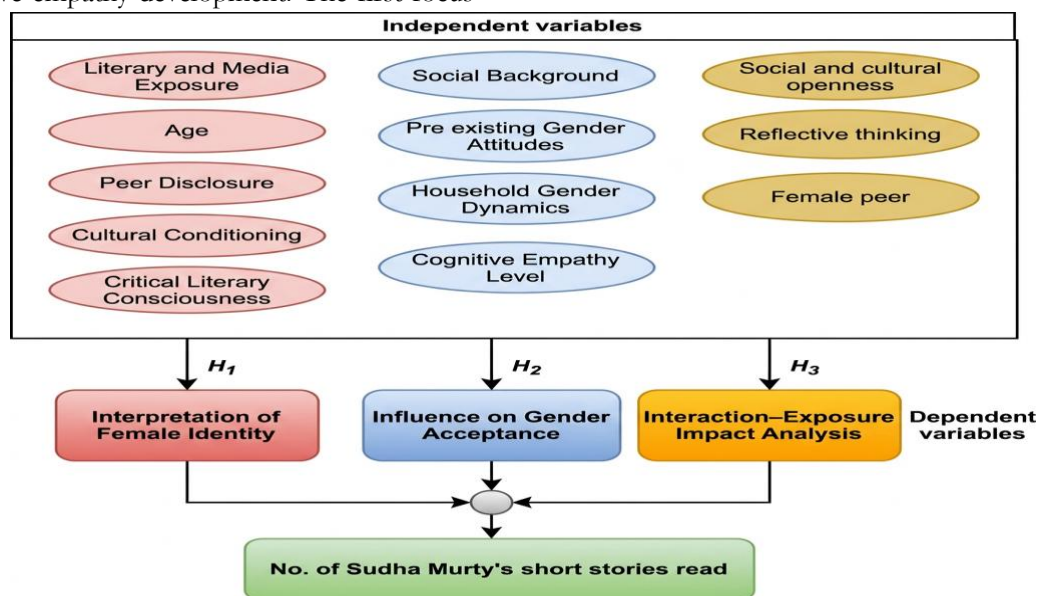


Fig.1. Conceptual framework of the proposed research

At the heart of the model lies the number of Sudha Murty's short stories read, functioning as a pivotal moderator that influences and potentially amplifies changes across all dimensions. By mapping how various independent factors converge through the mediating role of literary exposure, the framework offers a holistic lens into how young male readers form nuanced understandings of gender. This conceptual model not only guides the research design and analytical methods but

also serves as the theoretical base for interpreting the sociocultural shifts stimulated through literary engagement.

6.2 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional research design to explore how exposure to Sudha Murty's short stories influences male college students' perceptions of women's roles and identities. The quantitative approach allows for measurable assessment of

attitudinal and interpretive shifts using structured instruments, while the descriptive design captures patterns, relationships and group differences without manipulating variables. Data were collected at a single point in time to ensure consistency and feasibility across a diverse student sample. The study employed a structured questionnaire featuring Likert-scale items, which assessed dimensions such as emotional interpretation, gender role acceptance and narrative comprehension. Based on theoretical grounding and the conceptual framework, three statistical techniques were used, One-Sample t-test, One-Way ANOVA and Two-Way MANOVA. This systematic design enables a nuanced understanding of how literature shapes gender perception through personal, cultural and interpersonal lenses.

6.3 Population and Sample

The target population for this study consists of male undergraduate students enrolled in different colleges across Kerala. This group is chosen for their formative cognitive and social development stage, where media and literary exposure can significantly influence attitudes and perspectives. The research sample is drawn from three different academic streams: Mechanical Engineering, Commerce and Social Sciences, solely selected for their varying levels of female peer interaction with women. To ensure relevant exposure, only students who have read at least one of the selected four short stories by Sudha Murty were included, with efforts to capture variability in both literary engagement and interpersonal experience. The sampling strategy emphasizes diversity in reading and real-life interaction, providing a meaningful basis for analysing perception shifts. The sample size was determined based on Cochran's formula for an ideal sample from a large population, assuming a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, as given in Eq. (1).

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16$$

Even though the proposed sample size is 384, owing to the practical considerations and availability, the sample size obtained for the study is 268 participants that suited well considering the response availability, non-response attrition and institutional access.

6.4 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire designed to assess male college students' perceptions of female roles and identities after reading selected short stories by Sudha Murty. The instrument included both closed-ended and scaled items, with Likert-type responses to measure changes in perceptions, emotional responses and reflections on gender stereotypes. It also captured demographic details, level of exposure to the selected stories and self-reported levels of real-life interaction with female peers. To ensure clarity and reliability, a small pilot survey was conducted among a group of students outside the main sample. Data were collected in both digital (Google Forms) and printed formats to accommodate varying access preferences across student groups. Ethical procedures such as informed consent, voluntary participation and anonymity of responses were strictly observed. The structured design of the questionnaire enabled systematic coding and quantifiable analysis to examine correlations and interpretive patterns across the chosen variables.

6.5 Data Analysis

Data collected from the 268 male college students were analysed using a structured quantitative framework. Preliminary analysis involved descriptive statistics to map the distribution of demographic variables such as age, female peer interaction, regional background, number of selected stories read and levels of female family interaction. These summaries provided insight into the characteristics of the sample and supported interpretation of subsequent analytical results. Inferential statistical techniques were then employed to test relationships between variables

and evaluate patterns in the respondents' interpretation of female roles and their attitudes toward gender norms. A One-Sample t-test was applied to assess whether male students' interpretations significantly deviated from a neutral baseline on key perception indicators. A One-Way ANOVA was used to compare gender acceptance scores across groups based on literary exposure levels. Additionally, a Two-Way MANOVA was conducted to examine the interaction between female peer interaction and literary exposure in shaping gender-related perceptions

7. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

7.1 Analysis of demographic profile

The demographic profile of the study sample as shown in Table 1 and Figure 2 reveals a diverse and balanced representation across multiple variables. Among the 268 male college students surveyed, the majority (48.14%) fall within the 20–22 age group, followed by 18–19 years (30.59%) and those above 22 years (21.27%), ensuring perspectives from both late adolescence and early adulthood. Academic stream distribution is nearly even, with Mechanical Engineering (35.07%), Commerce (32.09%) and Social Sciences (32.84%) offering varied contexts of female peer interaction.

Table.1. Demographic distribution of the sample

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18-19 years	82	30.59
	20-22 years	129	48.14
	Above 22 years	57	21.27
Academic Stream	Mechanical Engineering	94	35.07
	Commerce	86	32.09
	Social Sciences	88	32.84
Number of Female Family Members (Regular Interactions)	0-1	58	21.64
	2 or 3	159	59.33
	Above 3	51	19.03
Region	Urban	98	36.57
	Semi-Urban	88	32.84
	Rural	82	30.59
No. of selected Sudha Murty short stories read	1	60	22.39
	2 or 3	122	45.52
	4	86	32.09

Regarding family dynamics, most participants (59.33%) reported regular interaction with 2–3 female family members, while 21.64% interacted with none or one female family member and 19.03% had more than three female family

members, allowing insights into differing degrees of domestic gender exposure. Regional representation shows a fair spread, with urban (36.57%), semi-urban (32.84%) and rural (30.59%) respondents, capturing a range of

cultural and societal influences. In terms of literary exposure, 45.52% had read 2 or 3 of the four selected Sudha Murty short stories, 32.09% had read all four and 22.39% had read only one, providing a gradient of engagement levels for

measuring narrative impact. This diverse demographic composition strengthens the study's analytical depth by enabling cross-sectional comparisons across key socio-cultural dimensions.

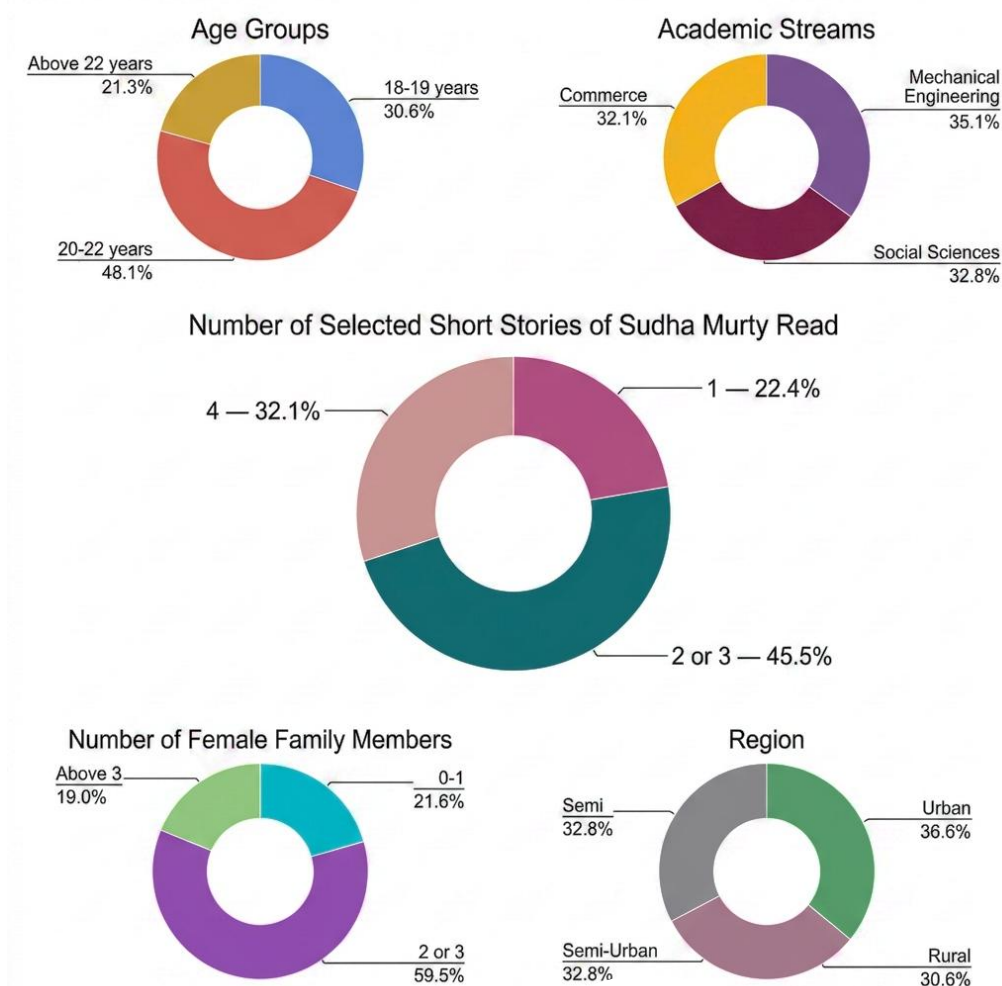


Fig.2. Demographic distribution of the sample

7.2 Interpretation of Female Roles and Identities in Sudha Murty's Short Stories by Male College Students

To analyze the interpretation patterns of female roles and identities among male college students, a one-sample t-test was employed using responses collected on a 5-point Likert scale. The test aimed to determine whether students' perceptions significantly diverged from a neutral stance (mean = 3.0), particularly

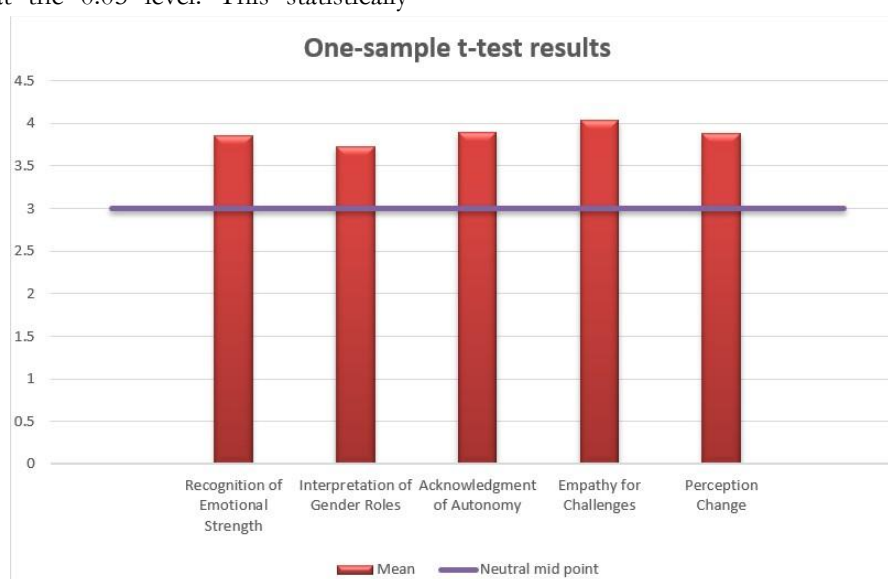
regarding women's emotional complexity, social agency and defiance of traditional norms. By assessing key statements aligned with the thematic elements of Sudha Murty's short stories, the test provides insights into how literary exposure shapes gender-related perspectives. This method offers a statistically grounded approach to evaluating the presence of consistent interpretive patterns across the sample. Table 2 represents the results of the one-sample t-test.

Table.2. Results of one-sample t-test

Dimension	Mean	Std Dev	t-Statistic	p-Value	Significant (p<0.05)
Recognition of Emotional Strength	3.85	0.65	21.31	0	Yes
Interpretation of Gender Roles	3.72	0.74	17.92	0	Yes
Acknowledgment of Autonomy	3.9	0.69	21.61	0	Yes
Empathy for Challenges	4.03	0.7	24.44	0	Yes
Perception Change	3.88	0.68	22.22	0	Yes

The results are strikingly consistent; the mean scores for all dimensions were significantly above the neutral midpoint of 3, indicating positive engagement with the subject matter. The highest mean was observed for Empathy for Challenges ($M = 4.03$), followed closely by Acknowledgment of Autonomy ($M = 3.90$) and Perception Change ($M = 3.88$). These results suggest a notable shift in awareness and perception. The dimensions Recognition of Emotional Strength ($M = 3.85$) and Interpretation of Gender Roles ($M = 3.72$) also recorded strong agreement levels. All p-values were < 0.001 , making the results highly significant at the 0.05 level. This statistically

affirms that the participants do not simply remain neutral in their interpretations; instead, they actively recognize emotional resilience, evolving gender roles and women's autonomy as conveyed through the stories. These outcomes underscore that the literary exposure to Sudha Murty's characters has led to a conscious and thoughtful engagement with women's social identities and emotional narratives among the male students surveyed. This suggests a developing awareness and appreciation of multifaceted female roles. Figure 3 illustrates the graphical representation of the one-sample t-test

**Fig.3.** Graphical representation of the one-sample t-test

Since all mean values significantly differ from the neutral point and p-values are < 0.05 , the hypothesis H_{01} and accept hypothesis H_{11} . This confirms that male college students demonstrate a significant pattern in interpreting female roles and identities, acknowledging both social dimensions and emotional depth in Sudha Murty's stories.

7.3 Influence of Sudha Murty's Literary Portrayals on Perceptions of Gender Roles

To evaluate the influence of Sudha Murty's short stories on male students' acceptance of women who either conform to or challenge traditional gender roles, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted: a statistical method suitable for comparing the means across multiple independent groups. For the proposed research, they are categorized by the number of stories read (1, 2–3 and 4), to identify any significant variance in perception. Table 3 illustrates the results of the one-way ANOVA test

Table.3. Results of one-way ANOVA test

Stories Read	Mean Acceptance Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (n)	F-Statistic	p-Value
1 Story	3.12	0.45	60	54.62	0.00000028
2–3 Stories	3.62	0.48	122	54.62	0.00000062
4 Stories	4.02	0.55	86	54.62	0.00000053

The results indicate a strong and statistically significant relationship between literary exposure and gender role acceptance. Participants who had read only one story had the lowest mean acceptance score ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.45$), while those who had read 2–3 stories showed a noticeable improvement ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.48$). The highest levels of understanding and acceptance were recorded

among students who had read all four stories ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.55$). The ANOVA yielded an F-statistic of 54.62 with p-values well below the 0.05 threshold ($p < 0.000001$ for all group comparisons), confirming that these observed differences are highly significant. Figure 4 illustrates graphical representation of the one-way ANOVA test.

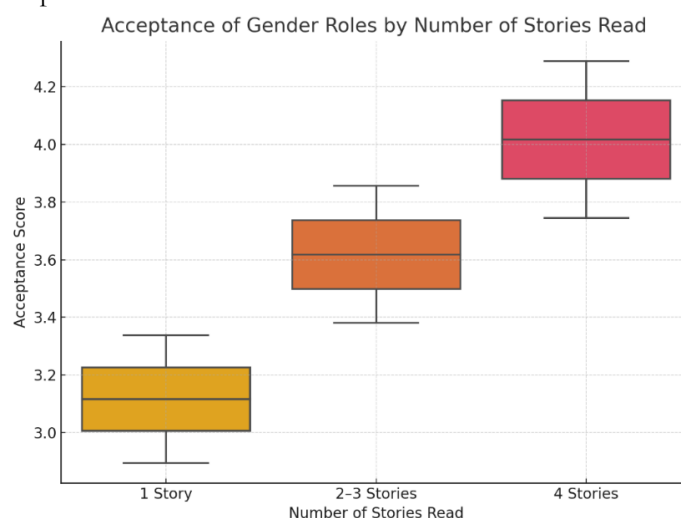


Fig.4. Results of one-way ANOVA test

Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test, the hypothesis H_{02} is rejected and the hypothesis H_{12} confirming that the exposure to Sudha Murty's short stories significantly influences male students' understanding and acceptance of women who challenge conventional gender expectations. Greater exposure clearly correlates with more empathetic and progressive viewpoints.

7.4 Influence of Sudha Murty's stories and Female Peer Interaction on Male Students' Perception of Women's Roles and Identities

To investigate how variations in female peer interaction and exposure to Sudha Murty's short stories shape male college students' perceptions

of women's roles and identities, the dimensions of encompassing emotional strength, autonomy, empathy and role interpretation were considered reflecting both visible and nuanced portrayals of female identity. The study utilizes a Two-Way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to examine the combined influence of two independent variables, levels of real-life interaction with female peers and number of stories read, on multiple perception-based dependent variables. This method is chosen for its strength in identifying not only the individual effects of each variable but also any interaction effect between literary exposure and real-life social context. Table 4 illustrates the results of the Two-Way MANOVA Test.

Table.4. Results of two-way MANOVA test

Stories Read	Peer Interaction	Emotional Strength	Autonomy Recognition	Gender Role Interpretation	Empathy for Challenges	Overall Perception Score
1	Low	3.1	3	3.2	3.1	3.1
	Medium	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.275
	High	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.375
2- 3	Low	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.5
	Medium	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.675
	High	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.8
4	Low	3.9	3.8	3.9	4	3.9
	Medium	4.1	4	4	4.2	4.075
	High	4.2	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.2

The primary focus of the study remained on literary exposure (number of stories read), with female peer interaction as a secondary contextual factor. The results revealed a clear and statistically significant main effect of the number of stories read on gender perception scores. Participants who read more stories consistently showed higher mean perception

scores ($M = 3.12$ for 1 story, 3.63 for 2–3 stories and 3.98 for 4 stories). A modest but significant interaction effect was observed with peer interaction levels, particularly amplifying perceptions at the higher end of literary exposure. Figure 5 shows the graphical representation of the results of the Two-way MANOVA test.

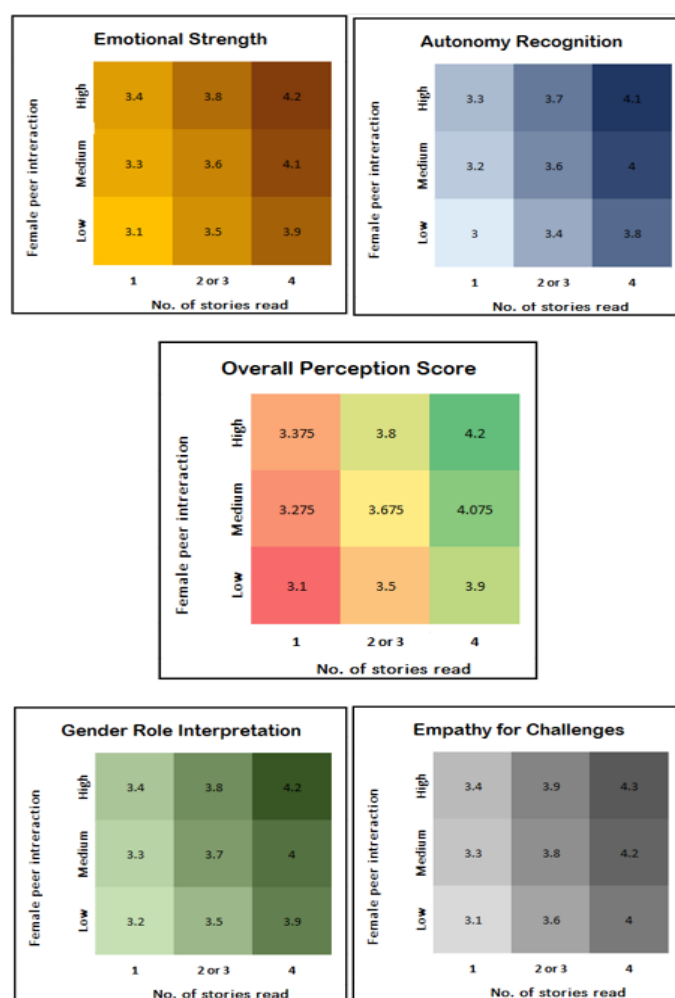


Fig.5. Heatmap of Results of two-way MANOVA test

The statistical findings support the hypothesis H_{13} , affirming that both the number of stories read and the level of female peer interaction significantly influence male students' understanding and perception of women's roles and identities. The hypothesis H_{03} is thus rejected. The results further underscore a clear positive relationship between literary exposure and perception scores, with particularly strong effects observed in students who reported high levels of female peer interaction. This suggests that Sudha Murty's stories not only shape attitudes in isolation but also become more impactful when reinforced by meaningful real-life social contexts. These insights validate the importance of integrating literary narratives and everyday interpersonal experiences in fostering more inclusive gender perceptions among young men.

8. DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to explore how Sudha Murty's short stories influence male college students' perceptions of female identity and gender roles, especially in a cultural setting where gender norms are often deeply ingrained. The analysis demonstrated that literary exposure to relatable, strong, nuanced female characters significantly affected the way male students interpreted gender roles. Through appropriate statistical tests on the survey data, this research provides substantial evidence that literature can serve as a transformative medium for reshaping gendered thinking among young men.

The one-sample t-test conducted for Objective 1, revealing that male students, on average, responded positively to the emotional strength, autonomy and challenges of the women

portrayed in Sudha Murty's stories. These stories allowed the young male readers to move beyond stereotypical perceptions and recognize complex emotional realities of female characters, thereby affirming the relevance of literary narratives in developing empathy and progressive attitudes. For Objective 2, one-way ANOVA was employed to examine the correlation of different levels of literary exposure with varying degrees of acceptance toward non-traditional gender roles. The findings showed a clear upward trend in acceptance with increased exposure to Murty's works. Students who read more stories were more likely to reflect positively on female characters that defied societal expectations, suggesting that repeated engagement with feminist literary themes reinforces acceptance of non-conforming female identities. Finally, the two-way MANOVA test for Objective 3 explored the combined effects of female peer interaction and story exposure. The results confirmed a significant interaction, while story exposure alone had a strong impact, its effects were magnified when students also reported regular interaction with female peers. This underlines the importance of both narrative and real-life experiences in shaping perceptions. Together, these results demonstrate that literature, especially stories rooted in realistic Indian settings, can act as a powerful pedagogical and social tool in sensitizing male youth to women's struggles, resilience and individuality.

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9. CONCLUSION

This research underscores the critical role of literary engagement in influencing male perceptions of women's identities and societal roles. By focusing on four short stories of Sudha Murty, the study demonstrates that exposure to empathetic and empowering female narratives can reshape how young men interpret, respect and accept diverse aspects of womanhood. The findings affirm that increased literary exposure, particularly to stories featuring women who challenge norms, positively correlates with broader acceptance of gender role fluidity. The interplay between real-life female interaction and literary experience further strengthens this transformation, emphasizing that awareness and acceptance are cultivated both cognitively and socially. The use of quantitative tools, such as one sample t-test, one way ANOVA and two-way MANOVA, allowed for rigorous validation of these psychological and social shifts across multiple demographic groups. The study has both academic and societal implications: integrating such literary works into educational curricula and discussion forums could foster a more equitable gender mindset in male youth. While the scope of this research is focused and culturally situated, its outcomes suggest universal relevance for literature's ability to inform gender consciousness. Future research could expand this model across diverse authors, genres and age groups to broaden the narrative of gender awareness and allyship through literature.

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