
Rural–Urban Dynamics and the Influence of Modernisation in the Works of Sudha Murty

Dr. Poonam Ashok Patil

Assistant Professor, Department of English, MVPS' Arts, Science & Commerce College, Ozar (Mig), Niphad, Nashik, Maharashtra.

Article Received: 08/03/2026**Article Accepted:**09/04/2026**Published Online:**11/04/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.04.319

Abstract:

India's rapid urbanization has reshaped its social landscape over the last few decades. Writers like Sudha Murty capture this transformation with sensitivity and realism. Sudha Murty's writings portray the social, cultural, and moral fabric of India with remarkable simplicity and insight. A recurring theme in her works is the contrast between rural and urban life and the profound impact of modernisation on individuals and communities. This paper examines how Murty represents rural–urban dynamics, the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the transformative effects—both positive and negative—of social change. By analyzing select novels, stories, and autobiographical narratives, the study highlights Murty's balanced perspective on development, values, and human relationships. These findings are confirmed by textual evidence, theoretical support, and comparative interpretation to ensure depth, coherence, and academic reliability. In her writings, Sudha Murty frequently investigates the interplay between rural and urban environments, as well as the repercussions of modernisation, highlighting the tension between traditional Indian values and contemporary aspirations. Her stories, often set against the backdrop of both rural and urban India, portray characters grappling with the social and emotional changes brought about by modernisation, globalisation, and the growing impact of capitalism. Through her depiction of rural-urban interactions, she illustrates the intricacies of modernisation—its benefits and its drawbacks. Her narratives encourage readers to welcome progress while remaining mindful of empathy, human relationships, and moral principles. While Murty often portrays rural values in a positive light, she does not dismiss modernization. Instead, modernization is represented as intricate and nuanced, rather than merely progressive. Ultimately, Murty's works frame modernization as a journey that necessitates both reflection and equilibrium.

Key words: Culture, global dimension, village, urbanisation, modernisation, society.

Introduction:

Sudha Murty's stories often move between villages, small towns, and metropolitan settings, revealing the cultural contrasts and personal dilemmas brought about by modernisation. Murty's rural characters embody simplicity and collective values, while her urban characters navigate modern aspirations, economic growth, and moral ambiguity. This paper explores how Murty uses this rural–urban interplay to comment on societal change. Sudha Murty is known for writing about ordinary people and everyday experiences. Her language is simple, but her themes are socially relevant. Many of her works—such as *Dollar Bahu*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, *House of Cards*, *Mahashweta*, *The Old Man and His God*, *Wise and Otherwise*, and her collections of real-life anecdotes—are grounded in lived experiences from both rural and urban India.

Literature Review:

Kangne (2018) highlights that *The Old Man and His God: Discovering the Spirit of India* is a profound collection comprising twenty-five stories and snapshots that reflect various facets of human nature, acting as a mirror to the souls of the Indian populace. It masterfully portrays the rural philosophy found beneath the banyan tree, the freedom of expression of an educated woman, the moral principles surrounding family and brotherhood, as well as the bonds shared among friends, family, and relatives. Additionally, it captures the honesty and simplicity of a blind impoverished individual, alongside the ideological values that permeate the narratives. Under the title *The Old Man and His God: Discovering the Spirit of India*, this book encapsulates every dimension of human society and ideology.

Priyanka (2022) explored the difficulties faced by women in a patriarchal and tradition-bound society in her paper. The study focuses on how Sudha Murthy's female characters in *Mahashweta* and *House of Cards* struggle in a constrictive setting. Women work hard to live with dignity across the nation. Women face challenges in every aspect of life, including work, healthcare, and property rights. As a result, women's emancipation in India is still a long way off. The hardships faced by the women in Sudha Murthy's works—such as exploitation, abuse, and humiliation—are demonstrated in this review. Violence, discrimination, injustice, and poverty continue to affect women and girls worldwide. They still don't get the credit they deserve even though they created civilization from the ground up.

Methodology:

The research methodology for the present study on rural-urban dynamics and the impact of modernisation on Sudha Murty's works adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach, focusing on close textual analysis of selected Sudha Murty works. The study is based on primary sources such as her novels, short stories and essays, as well as secondary sources such as academic papers, critical essays and sociological studies of Indian modernisation and urbanization. Using theoretical frameworks such as the theory of modernisation and the theory of urbanisation, the research used thematic analysis and close reading to identify recurrent themes such as migration, education, changing family structures, gender roles and the contrast between rural and urban complexity. Contextual analysis is also used to link the literary representation to the present socio-economic reality of India.

Rural–Urban Dynamics in Murty’s Writings:

Rural–urban dynamics in the writings of Sudha Murty are portrayed through contrasts in values, lifestyles, opportunities, and emotional relationships between village and city spaces. Murty does not simply oppose rural and urban life; instead, she presents them as interconnected yet tension-filled spheres shaped by modernisation, migration, and economic aspiration.

In *Dollar Bahu*, the rural–urban dynamic expands into a global dimension. Though the story moves between India and the United States, the emotional core lies in the contrast between traditional Indian domestic values and the materialistic allure of Western prosperity. Vinuta, who lives in India and upholds humility and familial devotion, represents rootedness and emotional warmth often associated with traditional settings. Jamuna, the NRI daughter-in-law, symbolizes urban-global modernity, where wealth determines status. The shift in Gouramma’s attitude—valuing the “dollar” over affection—illustrates how urban/global economic forces reshape traditional family structures and moral priorities.

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, rural–urban contrast is evident in Shrimati’s intellectual sensitivity versus Shrikant’s urban corporate ambition. Shrikant’s movement into metropolitan corporate life symbolizes India’s rapid urbanization and economic liberalization. As he adapts to city culture, he becomes increasingly detached from emotional and cultural roots. The novel suggests that urban progress often distances

individuals from simplicity, introspection, and meaningful relationships—qualities metaphorically associated with quieter, traditional spaces.

In *House of Cards*, Murty explores the transformation of a small-town medical professional into an urban success-driven figure. Dr. Sanjay's migration into a competitive city environment reflects the rural-to-urban professional shift common in modern India. As he accumulates wealth and prestige, ethical considerations begin to erode. The urban setting becomes symbolic of ambition, competition, and material success, while Mridula's simpler outlook reflects the moral grounding often associated with non-urban life. The widening emotional gap between them highlights the psychological consequences of urban-driven consumerism.

In *Mahashweta*, rural–urban dynamics intersect with gender and social stigma. Although the narrative moves through semi-urban and urban settings, Anupama's rejection due to leucoderma reflects deeply rooted traditional prejudices that persist despite modernisation. Dr. Anand, despite being in the medical field, regarded the illness as a social stigma and began to neglect his wife severely. His patriarchal mindset prevented him from acknowledging the genuine love and profound emotions expressed by his wife. The ongoing coldness, unresponsiveness, and negligence exhibited by Dr. Anand posed significant challenges for Anupama. She began to experience emotional emptiness and a sense of absurdity in her life. She was unable to persuade her husband in any manner. Her journey toward independence through education and employment shows how urban spaces can provide opportunities for self-reliance and identity reconstruction, even when social attitudes remain conservative.

In *The Old Man and His God*, in a collection of twenty-five ideal stories, she narrates the integrity of common rural people who survive difficult circumstances with dignity. Sudha Murty describes her experiences working with rural villagers, slum dwellers, and common people across India. She shares the story of an old man living in a small, remote Shiva temple. Despite his poverty, he refuses financial help, demonstrating that true satisfaction comes from within, not from material wealth. She describes the concept of a horegallu (a stone bench for resting) and uses it as a metaphor for people who, like a villager sitting under a banyan tree, act as counselors, allowing others to unburden their troubles. Stories recount acts of kindness and community spirit in times of crisis, such as during the tsunami. The story highlights the strength of rural people who, despite having

little, possess a strong sense of self-respect. Her stories from North Karnataka highlight the hardships of village life, including poverty, gender discrimination, and lack of education.

In *Wise and Otherwise*, the stories consistently encompass themes including the quest for education, disadvantaged youth, humility, envy from others, and core values. Each narrative reveals a unique facet of human nature. Some are profoundly moving and illustrate the stark truths of existence. Every story within this collection is emotionally resonant, remarkable, and masterfully narrated. They impart the lesson that we can never fully comprehend the thoughts of others in our community. We remain unaware of their beliefs or their perspectives on life. In numerous ways, some individuals surpass us, and there is much we can gain from their experiences.

Across Murty's works, rural spaces often symbolize emotional authenticity, community bonding, strong ethics, and moral clarity, while urban spaces represent opportunity, ambition, mobility, and sometimes alienation. Villagers tend to uphold traditional values, hospitality, and compassion. Rather than idealizing one over the other, Murty presents rural–urban dynamics as part of India's evolving social landscape, where economic growth and modernisation simultaneously create empowerment and ethical dilemmas.

Impact of modernisation in Selected Works of Sudha Murty:

Modernisation in Sudha Murty's works is depicted as a transformative force that reshapes identities, relationships, and societal norms. Through her characters, she explores the tension between tradition and modernity, showing both challenges and opportunities.

In *Dollar Bahu*, the pursuit of economic opportunities abroad strains familial relationships, with the daughter-in-law representing modernity and adaptability, while the mother-in-law embodies traditional values. Their evolving relationship reflects how modernisation challenges established norms but can also foster understanding and compromise.

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, modernisation is shown as a source of empowerment, especially for women. The protagonist, through education and social awareness, asserts her individuality, challenging societal expectations and demonstrating that modern opportunities can lead to social change.

House of Cards delves into the themes of urbanization and materialism, demonstrating how contemporary desires for wealth and social standing lead to ethical conflicts. Characters who place ambition above moral values encounter personal difficulties, whereas those who harmonize modern aspirations with human principles adapt to change more effectively.

In *Mahashweta*, modernisation presents opportunities for individual growth and societal acceptance. The main character transforms through education and exposure to progressive concepts, overcoming societal biases and reshaping her identity, while other characters illustrate the persistent impact of traditional prejudices.

Finally, in *The Old Man and His God*, modernisation, represented by economic advancement and social transformation, is portrayed alongside enduring ethical values. The old man embodies timeless wisdom, and his interactions with others reveal that contemporary progress can exist alongside virtues such as compassion and accountability.

Across these works, Murty's characterization consistently highlights that modernisation is neither inherently positive nor negative; rather, it reshapes lives in complex ways. By showing characters who embrace modernity thoughtfully while retaining core human values, Murty advocates a balanced integration of tradition and contemporary life, encouraging readers to navigate change with both awareness and ethical grounding.

Conclusion:

Sudha Murty's works offer a rich literary exploration of India's evolving socio-cultural landscape. Murty does not romanticize rural India; she acknowledges social problems while appreciating the sincerity and resilience of its people. In her literary works, Sudha Murty often examines the relationship between rural and urban settings, as well as the effects of modernisation, by emphasizing the conflict between traditional Indian values and modern ambitions. Her narratives, typically situated in both rural and urban contexts of India, depict characters who are struggling with the social and emotional transformations induced by modernisation, globalization, and the increasing influence of capitalism. Through her portrayal of rural-urban dynamics, she captures the complexities of modernisation —its promises and its pitfalls. Her stories urge readers to embrace progress without losing sight of empathy, human connection, and ethical values. Murty often shows

rural values positively but does not reject modernisation. Modernisation is depicted as complex and multi-layered rather than simply progressive. Ultimately, Murty's writings present modernisation as a journey that requires both introspection and balance.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Edited by Jane Garnett, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Kangne, R. V. "Non-Fictional Ideological Values: Sudha Murthy's *The Old Man and His God*." *Epitome: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 4, no. 2, Feb. 2018.
- Ku, Priyanka. "Women Character: A Study of Sudha Murthy's Selected Novels." *National Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2022.
- Murty, Sudha. *Dollar Bahu*. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Murty, Sudha. *Gently Falls the Bakula*. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Murty, Sudha. *House of Cards*. Penguin Books, 2013.
- Murty, Sudha. *Mahashweta*. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Murty, Sudha. *The Old Man and His God*. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Murty, Sudha. *Wise and Otherwise*. Penguin Books, 2008.
- "Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life by Sudha Murty." *The Talented Indian*, www.thetalentedindian.com/wise-and-otherwise-a-salute-to-life-by-sudha-murty/. Accessed 3 May 2026.
- "Book Review: Wise and Otherwise." *Aesthetic Blasphemy*, aestheticblasphemy.com/blog/book-reviews/non-fiction/book-review-wise-and-otherwise/460. Accessed 3 May 2026.
- "Wise and Otherwise – Summary & Themes." *BookBrief*, bookbrief.io/books/wise-and-otherwise-sudha-murty/summary. Accessed 3 May 2026.
- "Archives, Vol. 7, Issue 2." *New Research Journal*, newresearchjournal.com/archives/vol7/issue2. Accessed 3 May 2026.