

Rewriting Resilience: Women's Voices, Trauma Recovery, and Leadership in Sudha Murthy's Selected Works

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to analyse the selected prose works of Sudha Murthy from a literary and interdisciplinary perspective from trauma studies and feminist leadership theory. The study engages with Murthy's focus on *Three Thousand Stitches: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives* (2017), *Wise and Otherwise* (2006), *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* (2012), and *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* (2004), unearthing how Murthy represents feminine resilience as a socially created, narratively mediated, and collectively performed ability. Based on Judith Herman's notions of trauma recovery, Cathy Caruth's theorisation of traumatic narrative and Bessel van der Kolk's somatic understandings of healing, the paper explores the particular strategies of the narrative and the rhetorical in Murthy's production of scripts of agency. The analysis also places these strategies in the context of feminist leadership, claiming that Murthy's protagonists engage in what the paper calls "recuperative leadership" one type of social power that is built on the ability to "take it on board, process it in, and transform it" taking in, struggling with, and transforming the collective trauma that the characters experience to create collective action. The paper also considers the politics of voicing in postcolonial circumstances, that is, who suffers as voiceable, whose voice is used to voice them, and at whose will for what purpose. The book's ending suggests that Murthy's writing generally is an important statement in the South Asian conversation about womanhood, labor, and civic duty that needs more attention from feminist literary critics than it has so far received.

Keywords: *Sudha Murthy, trauma recovery, resilience, women's voices, feminist leadership, narrative therapy, postcolonial feminism, South Asian women's writing, recuperative leadership, emotional intelligence*

1. Introduction

The term resilience has been one of the most deeded and fruitful in current social science, psychology, and literature. Adapted from the materials engineering field to signify the ability of a material to return to its pre-deformed state after being stressed, the term extends to psychology to refer to a person's ability to function normally in the presence of or after trauma, displacement and dispossession, and to literary studies, to examine narratives that portend recovery after trauma, displacement and dispossession. The concept is not without its critics: Bonanno (2004) warns against romanticizing resilience as an exceptional feat of heroism and suggests the reconception of it as a characteristic of every human being, and feminist scholars like Brown (2010) have doubted the value attached to resilience, questioning how it would be possible to become resilient without it being a normal condition of survival, while blaming the individuals carrying the burden of structural suffering for their lack of resilience.

Sudha Murthy is of special concern to this study as her literary and philanthropic work always highlights issues of trauma, emotional suffering, resilience and social recovery. The stories of Murthy do not fit neatly into any category of fiction, rather, these tales come from years of being in the midst of vulnerable communities as she has worked in the field of social service, particularly in the fields of education, poverty, women's welfare, and rehabilitation. This experiential basis allows her prose to serve as a literary narrative, a documentation of the social and an ethical reflection, making it particularly valuable for the understanding of the relationship between the voice of women, trauma recovery, and leadership in the present Indian society.

Sudha Murthy's edited prose pieces find themselves in this liminal space and in a peculiar sense of truth. She does not fictionalize the depictions of women's suffering nor does she romanticize the process of women's recovery. Her stories are observant of the price of resilience, the time, the support, the institutional resources and personal courage needed for recovery, yet never succumbing to the illusion that these structures are so overwhelming that there is no need for personal or collective agency. In this sense, Murthy's literary work can be seen as an argument against naive optimisms and fatalistic resignation and an ethics of engaged, relationality.

The paper evaluates Murthy's core texts in three overlapping perspectives: trauma studies, which offers the conceptual framework for conceptualizing suffering and its impact; narrative therapy, which highlights a recovery perspective of the stories that shape the lives of other protagonists in his novels; and feminist leadership theory, where Murthy's protagonists are located

in a broader conversation about the kinds of leadership that emerge from suffering experiences. The paper is divided into six main sections: examining trauma treatment, somatic, psychological and social aspects of trauma, examining the strategies she uses in her narratives to represent healing, a discussion of the political aspects of her narrative of leadership, a cross-textual discussion of resilience in the four primary texts, a summary on the political connotations of Murthy's literary project.

A note on spelling: The author's name has been written different ways in other publications as "Murty" or "Murthy", the former an anglicisation of the name and the latter representing closer to the original in Kannada. This paper follows the orthography found on the covers of the main works being treated - in each of them "Murthy" is consistently used, while it should be noted that more or less different spellings exist in the literature and in journalism.

1.1 Research Gap

While Sudha Murthy's literary creations have enjoyed great popular appeal, the academic focus on her prose is still not that well developed in the studies of trauma, feminist literary criticism, and leadership. Current research on Murthy focuses mainly on her philanthropic contributions, moral statements, or her chronicles of the ethics of the Indian middle class; comparatively, little research has been done on how Murthy's narratives address issues of trauma, resilience, women's voice, and recovery.

Specifically, *Three Thousand Stitches* has been the subject of much discussion on social reform and devadasi rehabilitation, though there is a lack of research into the ways in which Murthy represents suffering and creates a narrative of resilience. Similarly, the effect of the therapeutic aspects of the narrative and how recovery from trauma relates to feminine leadership within Murthy's broader oeuvre have been overlooked. Little work ever jumps from the context of *Three Thousand Stitches* to *Wise and Otherwise* to *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* to *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read* as a unified work of literature focusing on difficulties of emotional endurance, ethical responsibility, and social change.

This study aims to fill this void by reading Murthy's selected writing under the rubrics of interdisciplinary methodologies of trauma studies, narrative therapy, feminist leadership and postcolonial feminism. By doing so, it hopes to illustrate as a whole that Murthy's writing process is not just about how he becomes resilient as an individual, but how he is resilient in a relational and social process of healing, recovery and moral action.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The present study aims:

1. To explore trauma, resilience and emotional recovery in Sudha Murthy's chosen prose writings.
2. To examine the narrative strategies by means of which Murthy portrays narratives of suffering as ones of agency, healing and self-recovery.
3. To explore connections between women's voice, their marginalisation and representation in Murthy's literary narratives.
4. To examine how feminine leadership is developed from the process of healing from trauma and caring for relationships in Murthy's work.
5. To explore how the themes in each of the four texts are interrelated with regards to resilience, ethical responsibility and social change, in *Three Thousand Stitches*, *Wise and Otherwise*, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* and *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*.
6. To place Murthy's literary work in wider contexts of trauma studies, feminist leadership, postcolonial feminist and narrative studies.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In the works of prose that she chose to study, how is Sudha Murthy depicted as a victim, a survivor, and an emotional healer?
2. How does Murthy tell stories of suffering and then turn them into stories of agency and healing?
3. How is the voice of the woman represented, mediated and/or suppressed in Murthy's literary narratives?
4. How does the experience of trauma shape Murthy's own appearance as a leader, in his writing?

5. What is the relationship of Murthy's selected writings to one another as they address the experiences of women, social responsibility, women's resilience, and women's ethical action?
6. In what ways does Murthy's literary project help to define the debates surrounding postcolonial feminist and South Asian women's writing today?

2. Trauma, Suffering, and Its Representations in Murthy's Prose

2.1 Frameworks for Understanding Trauma

After the publication of *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), a book that drew on clinical observation with hyper-tensile experiences, from war veterans and survivors of domestic violence and political terror, the contemporary academic study of trauma was significantly inspired. In Herman's terms, there are three symptom complexes for “complex post-traumatic stress”: hyperarousal (persistent state of physiological alertness), intrusion (involuntary re-experiencing of traumatic events in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, and unbidden images), and constriction (numbing, withdrawal, and dissociation that happen when the overwhelming experience cannot be contained). These three clusters converge to create the defining fragmentation of trauma – the inability to make the experience of trauma cohere into a story of one's life.

The emphasis on the ordinary rather than the exceptional nature of trauma, most frequently associated with domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, and structural poverty that skews against women, is a distinctly feminist approach to Herman's framework. Herman's framework is explicitly feminist in that it highlights how most of the trauma experienced is everyday rather than extraordinary, such as the violence of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, and structural poverty, which disproportionately impacts women and is under-documented in clinical and cultural narratives. This feminist approach is directly relevant to Murthy's literary portrayals of trauma, because both are keen to make visible forms of suffering that have been lost in the shadows of shame, social stigma, and the gendered politics of credibility with which both are concerned.

Cathy Caruth's (1996) literary critic work on trauma, besides Herman's psychological work has been influential in the humanistic scholarship. For the reason that trauma is not representable directly: because the conditions of trauma are so traumatic that the normal instruments of memory and narration are totally overwhelmed, it can only be represented obliquely: through the gaps, repetitions, and displacements of traumatic narrative, Caruth argues. The implications for the

analysis of Murthy's prose is huge and significant because her seemingly simple stories could be read as one form of response to the representational challenge of trauma, and one that stresses accessibility and clarity over the formal disruption with which Caruth would associate true expression of trauma. This seems to be either an aesthetic constraint or an ethical decision; a decision not to aestheticise suffering in the interest of clarity will be called into question in the following consideration.

2.2 Somatic Dimensions of Trauma in Murthy's Narratives

So, trauma is not so much a memory or thinking disorder as a bodily disorder, as Bessel van der Kolk (2014) pointed out in his groundbreaking book *The Body Keeps the Score: Helping the Traumatized Brain Heal*, where trauma is stored in the body as a persistent pattern of physiological reactions that linger after the trauma has concluded. Healing from trauma thus also has a somatic component: regaining the body's ability to self-regulate, feel pleasure and socialize. This somatic line of thinking introduces a fruitful new paradigm for the representation of recovery through artwork in the hands of Murthy.

The women in *Three Thousand Stitches* do not heal in a large degree by having their talk therapy sessions or cognitive restructuring sessions. They heal through the body: through the dance-like, repetitive movements of needlework; through the tactile enjoyment of handling the strands of silk and coloured cloth; through the satisfaction and joy of creating something beautiful with their own hands. Van der Kolk's framework helps to understand why this somatic aspect of the recovery process is not a by-product but a major concern: trauma to these women is inscribed in their bodies, through the felt sensations of sexual exploitation, the felt shame or dissociation that followed, and by reclaiming bodily sensations as the source of pleasure and competence, these women will be able to recover from their trauma.

This somatic reading of Murthy's embroidery programme relates to the broader work in the field of "craftivism" that recounts the mental and social healing of craft in various communities, including those that experience trauma (PTSD), domestic violence, and addiction (Sajnani and Johnson, 2014). What Murthy's story contributes to this body of literature is the careful sensitivity to the specifically South Asian cultural context: the meaning of embroidered textiles on the social scenes and in the rituals of the communities where the devadasi women come from; how exclusion from "respectable" embroidery was part of their marginalisation; and how their re-entry into the practice was symbolic of their social rehabilitation.

2.3 Collective Trauma and Community Healing

Alexander et al. (2004) have formulated the notion of 'cultural trauma' which refers to a community's sense of collective identity and its meaning-making system being disrupted by a catastrophic event, experiencing trauma on a collective level. This is why the devadasi system is a collective trauma; it is not just a sum of individual injuries which is faced collectively but a system of social institutions that has determined the collective identity, social relationships and psychological self-understanding of a community generation after generation. Individual therapy alone can no longer be the vehicle for healing from this type of collective trauma as the need to reconstruct collective identity, to re-weave the social bonds and to forge new, enabling stories of what it means to be a woman in these communities must also be addressed.

Murthy's embroidery programme is about collective trauma at the collective level as its fold is a group. The women are together, they share their experiences with each other, they meet and develop new communities of friendship and support that were non-existent prior to the programme. The collective dimension of the healing process is not given much attention in Murthy's narrative while the narrative is largely an individual one, this collective aspect is nonetheless a constant backdrop: the programme is an effective one, in part because it provides a new social world, for the women to claim their own competence, value and social connection, rather than stigma and exclusion.

The most appropriate theoretical construct which best captures this aspect of Murthy's social work is perhaps outlined by Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a "community of practice." In its framework learning is not a foremost cognitive process, but a social one; people learn by being a member of communities of practice built around communities of shared activities and shared knowledge; and being a member of such communities results in the establishment of their identity as competent practitioners. The embroidery programme is in just this way a community of practice – with the devadasi women, who participate in the programme, not only learning a new skill that is marketable but forming a community with shared values, shared knowledge, a shared social identity, more powerful than the stigmatised identity of the devadasi.

3. Narrative Strategies for Representing Recovery

3.1 Re-authoring and Unique Outcomes

According to the white and epston (1990) narrative therapy model, one's story of himself or herself is a reflection of and a part of oneself. Therapy involves assessing the problem saturated

context of the person's own story and identifying those "unique outcomes" things, moments and capacities that do not fit into the problem narrative and that can be the basis for a different, more useful story. Therapist job is to ask "thickening questions", expand these unique outcomes into a more complete "counter-narrative", one for the person to live into and engage in to guide future actions.

This therapeutic re-authoring is accomplished as Murthy writes in prose. *Three Thousand Stitches and Wise and Otherwise* opens with a scene that describes a state of distress, restriction, degradation, and moves over a series of painstakingly detailed observations to an insight into the protagonist's abilities and potentialities. It's not just that the story follows the path of bad to good, it's that it takes an understanding that is thin, problem-charged, and made up of a single mode, and thickens it, adding, say, a few DIMs, a feeling of suffering, but one that isn't the only thing that constitutes it. This narrative journey itself is an advocacy narrative which says, not simply states, that a person is not only a social problem, a "victim of society," but eloquently is a full person.

This is very evident in the essay which is the title of *Three Thousand Stitches*. The devadasi women are not presented as helpless victims of philanthropy, but as active participants in their lives, with wit, taste and friendship. She describes how their opposition to the programme is not some barrier to be crossed, but evidence of the agency and self-possession the programme is about; how their initial doubts about the programme are met by the show's very progressive pace; how they feel confident in their own voices rather than worried by them, how they are dismayed to discover they have opinions but when they voice them the show backs up their own side of the argument. For White and Epston this resistance is a unique outcome – to imply that the women are not silent victims of a 'totally superimposing system' but that they are persons who have the ability to choose.

3.2 The Plain Style as Ethical Choice

Murthy's prose style has occasionally been dismissed by literary critics as unambitious simple in syntax, direct in address, apparently innocent of the formal complexity that characterises "literary" fiction. This

Literary critics have sometimes been able to call Murthy's prose 'unambitious simple'; it is direct, it seems innocent of literary formalism, it is so directly addressed to readers that it is supposedly lacking in the formal complexity characteristic of 'literary' fiction. This firing is tantamount to a breakdown of understanding of both the nature and the role of Murthy's style. She

does not have a lack of crafting, but a crafted lack – it is an instrument created and developed with a communicative and ethical intent.

The plain style has several abilities that cannot be carried out by a more elaborately literary style. It ensures maximum accessibility: Murthy's essays are read by a very large and socially wide audience in Indian which doesn't include those who have English as their second language, or those who are not literate in the English language and aren't familiar with stylistic complexity. Murthy's elegant writing style makes her message accessible to everyone, avoiding the moral high ground and simply stating the truth. This, itself, is a democratic act a rejection of the implicit hierarchy of thought privileged for educated readers.

The plain style also has a certain moral impact: its avoidance of the aestheticisation of suffering. In Caruth and Shoshana Felman's account of trauma as a formally innovative narrative form – one that is dislocated, broken, and fragmented – they are articulating aesthetic authenticity. Murthy's counter-thesis, however, is not directly theorised, but is asserted through her practice; one could say that this is implicit in the very structure of her text: aesthetic interest in a narrative about suffering does not necessarily lead to the reader's identification with the suffering itself. This evasion is prohibited in the plain style: It puts the reader right in the the middle of what it's describing and draws him or her into the moral appeal.

3.3 The First Person and the Ethics of Witness

One interesting aspect of Murthy's approach to a story is the use of first person point of view throughout. She's not a god-seeing god or a fly-on-the-wall researcher; rather she's present at the events she relates, subject to the same flaws, blind spots, and reactions as everyone else. This perspective from a first person witness is of ethical significance when depicting trauma and recovery.

In a discussion of Holocaust testimony, Dori Laub (1992) suggests that the witness who hears, acknowledges and validates the testimony of the survivor must be traumatised as well. Without witnessing, traumatic experience is locked within the lonely, individual lives of those who have suffered or survived it, cannot be attended to within the context of a common social life. Murthy's narration in the first person makes her just this type of witness, hearing the other women's stories, giving them a voice, and sharing them with a larger audience. Her own emotional responses – her sense of distress over what she hears, her sense of delight when the women are better –

validate her listening: She has not been emotionally absent from what she has heard but is emotionally engaged.

Simultaneously, the witness is never neutral or transparent as the witness in the post-colonial analysis above has argued. These shaping factors are her caste, class, privilege of her education and institutional power and inevitably inflect Murthy's witnessing of the women's stories. By using the first-person point of view, this mediation is not hidden away – behind the mask of objectivity – but allowed to be seen, which triggers the critical reader to question instead of taking the witness's word on board. It's a model of narration for those even more honest than an objective third-person narration would be paradoxically.

4. Voice, Visibility, and the Politics of Representation

4.1 The Right to Speak and the Burden of Silence

As amply detailed in the literature both clinical and testimonial, one of the most long-lasting and crippling downfalls of trauma is the ruination of the victim's ability to speak. The compulsion to talk and the impossibility of talking are a part of the phenomenology of traumatic experience, which Herman (1992) calls the “dialectic of trauma”. The traumatised person is compelled to tell what has happened, but cannot find any words to convey the experience, to any listener, and speaking will cause any more damage.

In Murthy's story, this process of trauma and counter-trauma is intensified by other layers of social silencing experienced by devadasi women. They have been exploited in religious, economic, political and other systems where their voices are not heard, their words are often disregarded or not believed; the social stigma of devadasis means that they are not given a voice to communicate their experiences. The embroidery programme does not seek to address this silencing in terms of women's speaking in public forums, which would commit another offence of invasion on women's privacy, in order to make speaking a little possible in the context of a trusted community.

The challenge for Murthy as a writer is to capture these voices which have been enabled in the community of the embroidery programme and bring them to a larger audience. This is a transmission of advocacy but also appropriation and the tension in between needs to be recognized. The women who talk in the context of the programme are not all those who could be subjected to a million people reading aloud an essay by Murthy; the process of converting their private

testimony into public speech is one of power which Murthy does not completely recognize within her text. It is not an inherent barrier to her project all documentary writing entails analogous uses of representational power; however, it is a handicap that critical readers will be aware of.

4.2 Intersectionality and the Multiplicity of Women's Voices

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) argues that for anyone, social identity is formed through the intersection of multiple axes of oppression and privilege, rather than a single axis. The devadasis portrayed in Murthy's story are caste lower women, also Dalit women who are poor, illiterate, rural and victim of the patriarchy and caste oppression in the society as a whole. This feeling of being oppressed as a woman has to be understood in the context of being oppressed as a member of a particular caste, and being oppressed as a poor person in a system where caste and class and gender oppression are all interwoven.

Murthy's analysis is not explicitly intersectional, nor is it part of her intellectual lexicon, but it is implicit in her practice, which shows an awareness of the particularities of the lives of particular women. Whilst not part of Murthy's intellectual vocabulary, her analysis is implied in these demands to be intersectional for sensitivity to the particularities of the lives of particular women. She is not found to be generalising from what she has noticed about the situation of women devadasis to draw more sweeping conclusions about 'Indian women' in general; she is always sensitive to the particular and unique way in which caste, gender and class help to define the situation into which she places women devadasis. Such attentiveness in a sense amounts to a tacit recognition of the fact that there is no one universal story of women and no universal woman, and to the particular and specific nature that comes from a good social analysis.

In the totality of Murthy's texts, the female characters in her stories hold a variety of social positions, such as house wives from the upper caste, school teachers from the villages, professionals in the cities, rural labourers, old widows and young girls. What they have in common is not a social identity, but a common humanity, which transcends differences of caste, class and circumstance, and which enables them to find dignity, resourcefulness, and relationship. Murthy's literary project can thus be read as an outgrowth of intersectional humanism: a form of humanism that does not leave behind, or render less-than-fully-human, certain kinds of lives because of the divisions they are marked with.

5. Recuperative Leadership: Trauma, Recovery, and Social Authority

5.1 Defining Recuperative Leadership

This paper introduces the idea of “recuperative leadership” as a form of social leadership that arises out of the experience of trauma and recovery. It differs from transformational leadership (Bass 1985), which refers to the leader's ability to inspire followers to try to transcend self-interest for the greater good of the group; from servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977), which focuses on the leader's subordination of her wishes to the wishes of others served; and from authentic leadership (George 2003), where the source of leadership authority is that the leader's professed values and actions are congruent. Although there are some elements in all three, recuperative leadership is transformational, it is service, and it is authenticity, but it has an extra dimension: The leadership authority lies partially in the suffering and recovery of the leader, which gives them a special kind of credibility and empathy with the suffering and recovering person.

In Murthy's stories, the ability to recover from trauma and become an authority is demonstrated not only by the women who have experienced trauma and now are leading communities, but by Murthy herself, who has lived through her own trauma and whose authority as a social worker and writer is rooted in her ability to listen to the women she serves and to take up their pain without being destroyed by it. In Murthy's stories, the power to lead comes from the capacity to recover from trauma and to become an authority in the process, but it also comes from Murthy's ability to listen to the women she serves and to take them up in her emotions without being destroyed by them, and to transform her own pain into purposeful action. The leadership of the wounded healer is a very old one that can be found in mythology and psychotherapy (Nouwen 1979) – the one who has been the wounded one is the one who is qualified to lead the other, because she herself is not invulnerable and so will not separate herself from the person/people she is leading.

The wounded healer concept needs to be understood with sensitivity in a postcolonial context in South Asia. Murthy has not personally been the victim of the pangs of caste discrimination or sexual exploitation and her vulnerability is less than that of these other victims, it is the vulnerability of emotional openness and ethical exposure. The claim that she is the wounded healer needs to be made carefully, as it is a functional or relational one about the quality of her relationship with the women that she works with, and not a claim about her suffering being equal to theirs. This is significant in order to maintain the integrity of the concept.

5.2 The Devadasi Programme as Laboratory of Recuperative Leadership

In the devadasi rehabilitation programme recorded in Three Thousand Stitches, a few different types of recuperative leadership are all clearly present in the same lab. On a personal level, the women who advance through the programme and become skilled embroiderers, who can create their own business, are recuperative leaders in their own communities; their recovery is a proof of possibility that inspires and empowers others who are not as far along the process. At the community level, women who assume coordinating responsibilities under the programme assume roles of institutional leadership in other community arenas: in self-help groups, in village councils, in conflicts with government over land and water rights.

One of the most important lessons that can be gleaned from Murthy's story is this developmental dimension of recuperative leadership; how the process of recuperation becomes a training ground for social authority. It argues that trauma healing programmes that carefully consider the social, psychological and economic development of the participants (but do not focus exclusively on the latter) can generate a social capital that goes beyond the programme itself to a society that has been healed. The skill-set of devadasi women's leadership is not something distinct from their recovery, but rather a form and an extension of their recovery.

This theory of 'shared leadership' (Pearce and Conger, 2003) that is concerned with the sharing of leadership roles within a group as opposed to a positionalised leader could be useful in understanding the collective leadership of the embroidery programme. The programme's success seems to be greatest when the leadership is dispersed among the embroiderers themselves: when the more experienced embroiderers teach the new ones; when the women share the burden of negotiating with the buyers; when members of the community keep an eye on each other's work and encourage them.

5.3 Emotional Intelligence as Leadership Competence

This course addresses the leadership competencies of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (EI) the ability to sense, comprehend, express and manage one's emotions and those of others appropriately has been widely adopted into the field of leadership theory (Goleman, 1995); many studies have revealed that EI has a positive impact on leadership performance in a variety of organizational settings (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2002). It has been challenged as being too vague and even being complicit in the commodification of emotional life (Fineman, 2004) but has proven to be very useful as a descriptive tool when used with caution.

All of Murthy's healing leaders are described as having a high emotional intelligence. They are extremely attuned to the emotions in their environment, they have a very sophisticated emotional awareness of their own emotional reactions (such as their reactions to anger), and they use emotional attunement as one of their key leadership skills, they make emotionally safe and trusting environments where others can take risks that are necessary for recovery and change. This emotional intelligence is not described as something women naturally have, but rather learned through experience, namely that of dealing with challenges, coping with complex social situations and operating in emotionally charged environments.

Trauma recovery and the phenomenon of emotional intelligence are connected by empirical research on positive psychological outcomes after traumatic events, as described by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), who reported that people who had encountered severe trauma also experienced positive changes in their self-perception, relationships and philosophy of life. While the goal of PTG is not to imply that the trauma is a positive experience, it is a real experience and can be quite devastating, it also suggests that human beings can make sense of suffering and be better for it than they were before. The stories told by Murthy are examples of this ability, among other things, in literary form.

5.4 Interconnectedness of Murthy's Literary Vision and Society

One could read Sudha Murthy's chosen prose pieces not as individual stories but as contiguous critical comments on emotional, ethical and social concerns of Indian realities. Suffering, resilience, moral responsibility and restoration of dignity in socially marginalized people are central themes of *Three Thousand Stitches*, *Wise and Otherwise*, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* and *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*.

Throughout these essays Murthy's focus is always on "ordinary people facing extraordinary events women meeting exploitation; the elderly facing exclusion; the child facing inequality; communities recovering the bonds of social struggle. Resilience is consistently portrayed as collective and nurtured through care, education, emotional and moral responsibility and shared participation, though its social contexts vary.

Murthy's stories are also fundamentally connected to social realities in India. Some of the themes that run through her works – caste inequality, differential vulnerability of women, poverty, educational marginalisation, bureaucratic apathy and institutional inequalities – are not seen as academic problems, but as personal experiences that form the lives of individuals. In this way

Murthy's literary oeuvre is both a narrative of survival and a witness to social injustice, revealing a kind of durational survivability amidst, and yet beyond, existing social arrangements, in a space for agency and recovery as much as for potential transformation and change.

In the process, the present study reads Murthy's selected works as elements of a wider literary and ethical endeavor that seeks to reveal women's suffering and, in parallel, to project a route toward recovery, to envision women's leadership, and to envision women's social participation.

6. Cross-Textual Analysis: Resilience Across the Corpus

6.1 Wise and Otherwise: The Social Ecology of Resilience

Whereas *Three Thousand Stitches* speaks of resilience in a formal intervention, *Wise and Otherwise* speaks about resilience as a social phenomenon that takes place everywhere, in day-to-day lives around the social circuits of India's great social diversity, without organised philanthropy. Of the fifty essays in this collection, each represents a snapshot of the shared wisdom of everyday people the wisdom demonstrated through their own practical, ethical, and emotional sense in dealing with the particular challenges of their social situations what Murthy refers to as the “wisdom of ordinary people.”

Some of the essays are specific to the resilience of women in disadvantaged or difficult situations. The *Ninety-Sixth Boyfriend* is a humorous yet poignant account of a young woman's journey out of a series of failed relationships, while *'Gently Falls the Bakula'* (from her novel of the same name) tells of the quiet tragedy of a couple who continually put their man's career before the woman's intellect and feelings. In both situations what is remarkable is that Murthy does not give the melodramatic answer: her characters don't rage, don't 'collapse': they readjust, rethink, and figure out how to go on in some other way... and yes, not without suffering at all, but without letting themselves lose.

Wise and Otherwise also brings the sociological viewpoint where Murthy can illustrate how resilience can manifest differently by gender, caste, and class: some women have more access and connection to the social networks, economic resources, and cultural scripts of self-worth that sustain them against adversity; others do not; nor are they disadvantaged in relation to economic or self-worth resources, and have social networks that are not particularly strong. Instead, Murthy is not the type to solve this inequality with a pep talk, she admits that the inequality is what it is, and individual will is not enough. Yet she argues that despite the conditions of their structure,

people have the ability to make significant decisions and act a power which social interventions can enhance and or weaken.

6.2 How I Taught My Grandmother to Read: Intergenerational Transmission of Resilience

How I Taught My Grandmother to Read's eponymous story models resilience as "infused through a relationship of mutual care and teaching" that is passed down through the generations. I am interested in the way the grandmother's decision to learn to read – her resilience against her age and her social class perhaps – is enabled by the relationship between grandmother and granddaughter but this relationship is also brought into the narrative. The granddaughter gives the grandmother both help and encouragement to persevere in the face of the challenges in learning; the grandmother gives the granddaughter a pattern of lifelong learning and intellectual bravery.

What resonates with this intergenerational dynamic is Bourdieu's (1986) notion of "social capital" systems of social connections that allow individuals to gain access to resources such as emotional, informational, and economic resources that could not be obtained without the help of those resources. A relationship with the grandchild represents a form of social capital for the grandmother and a kind of investment in social capital for the community because of the intergenerational transfer of resilience.

Murthy's preoccupation with the intergenerational transmission of women's capabilities relates to that of Nussbaum (2001) who concludes that the development of human capabilities can only be regarded a social achievement and will rely on a supportive institutional and relational context. The knowing how to read is not just a personal achievement; it has been created within a relationship that she had deliberately nurtured and cultivated, and this relationship has exemplified for her, the values she wishes to impart to other people, namely, patience, respect, mutual support and support in general that Murthy describes in her text as the foundation stones of good social life.

6.3 The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk: Memory, Conscience, and the Formation of Leadership

The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk is the most personal of Murthy's stories on developing her own social conscience and leadership posit. Drawing on a wide variety of themes, readings, and events collected over the years, the collection follows the evolution of a "moral resilience" defined as the power to make ethical choices amidst pressure from peers, discomfort at their

personal level, and the pressure to tune out inconvenient truths. The young Murthy's response to discovering that the milk her family is drinking is helping to support a famished buffalo and in turn, a famished family is a parable of the relationship of witness and responsibility.

The meaning of the essay for the study of recuperative leadership is that it describes the psychological processes that lead to the formation of a social conscience. Murthy isn't a woman with any unusual moral susceptibilities; rather she depicts her moral growth as a consequence of particular experiences of pain to which she couldn't turn a blind eye or close her mind. Her development of leadership is, in this sense, a practice of "caring-for" other people -- she looks after the concrete requirements of specific others until the caring spirit extends to all.

In the collection, there are several essays about Murthy's interactions with administrative strangulation by government officials who lack the interest of providing services, community and NGO leaders who fear change's impact on their power bases, and NGOs that focus on earning a living rather than helping their customers. The meetings and Murthy's reaction to these meetings record his "bureaucratic resilience" – his ability to keep the purpose and momentum going despite institutional resistance, his finding creative ways around a hurdle that can't be knocked over directly, and his maintaining his own moral tastes and sense of adventure in the midst of feelings of frustration and disappointment.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, it has been suggested that the chosen pieces of prose by Sudha Murthy represent a meaningful literary effort and a literary project under three thematic strands trauma healing; the voice of the woman and feminine leadership. The paper has sought, from this idea of "recuperative leadership", to offer a theoretical framework sufficient to the unique genre of social leadership that Murthy details in her subjects and demonstrates in her social practice.

The analysis has been informed by several theories: trauma theory, narrative therapy, feminist leadership theory, postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, and the capabilities approach in order to highlight various aspects of Murthy's project. No single approach is enough; the great strength of her work is its being 'beyond' any single discipline, exactly through that. The best reading is the one that is multi-level and when reading one level, each reading draws light from the others and vice versa, and thus illuminates parts of the text which other levels cannot reach.

Representations are always problematic when representing colonialism in Murthy's oeuvre. In the mediated voice of a privileged narrator, the voice of the marginalised women can't be completely unmediated through ethical, conscientious awareness or rhetorical self-awareness. Its job is not to solve this tension that cannot be solved, but to use it as a tool of critical investigation to pose more important questions of who speaks in Indian public space and who speaks with whose work of representation? This analysis isn't only applicable to the case of Murthy's writing. The practice of recuperative leadership pioneered here has the potential to be expanded to other contexts where the challenge is how to turn challenges into capacities in organisational leadership development, social work education, community development practice and the development of trauma recovery programmes. Theoretical reflection needs to be accompanied by a rich documentation of the actual lives lived and stories told, as Murthy's literary archive as such offers a rich resource for thinking about these questions within the very South Asian context. That, after all, is literature's purpose: to conjure in our minds the presence of other lives and to elicit new seriousness for asking what we owe them.

The broader implications of this analysis extend beyond the specific case of Murthy's writing. The concept of recuperative leadership developed here has potential applications in diverse contexts organisational leadership development, social work education, community development practice, and the design of trauma recovery programmes wherever the question arises of how experiences of adversity can be transformed into capacities for social agency. Murthy's literary archive provides a rich documentary resource for thinking about these questions in the specifically South Asian context, grounding theoretical reflection in the concrete textures of lives lived and stories told. That is, finally, what literature is for: to make us present to lives other than our own and to ask, with renewed seriousness, what we owe to those lives.

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Challenges

Inasmuch as "Western" trauma models such as Herman's, Caruth's, and van der Kolk's were translated to the South Asian literary context, they always posed a methodological impasse. Such frameworks are mostly shaped by clinical experiences with Western populations, and need

constant attention when used in postcolonial Indian settings, in terms of the assumption about the nature of self, suffering, and manifestation of recovery, which may not be shared by other populations.

Limitations

It is not an attempt to present all of Murthy's prose works, only four are examined in this study. Because "recuperative leadership" is a new idea here, it must be examined in relation to a larger audience of narratives about leadership as well as leadership field data in contexts of community leadership before it becomes a completely realized and proven theoretical paradigm. The paper has also neglected to consider the reader-response data and is unable to address what varied Indian audiences do and could do with these narratives.

Future Research

The idea of recuperative leadership needs to be studied in a qualitative approach, using women leaders in South American countries who have faced some sort of disaster. The frame developed here would get much richer and more complicated if the field of trauma narratives by Dalit women writers such as the work of Bama's *Karukku* and *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble were extended to the analysis.

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