

Economic Empowerment and Decision-Making in the Fiction of Sudha Murty: A Business Management Perspective


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DOI: 10.54741/MJAR/6.2.2026.308

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This interdisciplinary research paper explores the themes of economic empowerment and financial decision-making in the fictional works of Sudha Murty, through the combined lenses of literary criticism and business management theory. Murty's stories often feature women who challenge social norms, assert autonomy, and navigate economic hardships with resilience and intelligence. Her background as a social worker and co-founder of Infosys provides a unique authenticity to her portrayal of financially aware and independent female protagonists. Drawing upon relevant business management concepts such as financial agency, household economics, and strategic decision-making, the paper analyzes how Murty's fiction reflects the transformation of women from passive dependents to active financial decision-makers. By connecting narrative moments to real-world management frameworks, this study highlights literature's potential to shape and reflect women's roles in economic structures, advocating for stronger recognition of women's leadership within both the domestic and public spheres.

Keywords: sudha murty, women's economic empowerment, financial decision-making, business management in literature, house hold economics, interdisciplinary literary analysis

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L. K. Singh, Director, Department of Management Studies, Kumaun University, Bhimtal, Nainital, Uttarakhand, India. Email: l_k_singh@yahoo.co.in	Singh LK, Arya BC, Arya P, Economic Empowerment and Decision-Making in the Fiction of Sudha Murty: A Business Management Perspective. Manag J Adv Res. 2026;6(2):76-80. Available From https://mjar.singhpublication.com/index.php/ojs/article/view/308	

Manuscript Received
2026-03-17

Review Round 1
2026-04-03

Review Round 2

Review Round 3

Accepted
2026-04-23

Conflict of Interest
None

Funding
Nil

Ethical Approval
Yes

Plagiarism X-checker
5.38

Note



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1. Introduction

In contemporary discourse on gender and development, the economic agency of women is increasingly seen as a cornerstone of social progress. Scholars like Aravind et al. argue that educating and economically empowering women catalyzes broader societal transformation, a view also mirrored in literary representations (Aravind et al. 2020). Literature, as a powerful cultural mirror, has long captured the nuances of women's roles within familial, social, and financial frameworks.

Sudha Murty, a celebrated Indian author, philanthropist, and co-founder of Infosys Foundation, offers a unique blend of literary sensitivity and real-world insight. Her fiction portrays ordinary women navigating complex socio-economic landscapes, often emerging as quiet but powerful agents of change within the household and community (Vispute 717). These portrayals align with contemporary feminist and managerial frameworks that recognize domestic financial decisions as key sites of empowerment.

This research paper explores economic empowerment and financial decision-making in the fiction of Sudha Murty, through the lens of business management principles. Murty's narratives show how women gain autonomy not only through employment, but by making strategic financial decisions—challenging patriarchal norms and asserting their influence in both private and public domains (Murty 2). These decisions reflect themes of ethical leadership, budgeting acumen, and personal growth.

By integrating literary analysis with principles from business and management studies, this paper argues that financial control in Murty's fiction is a metaphor for leadership, resilience, and identity formation. As demonstrated in stories like *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*, female characters engage in saving, investing, and value-based financial choices—actions echoing real-world business strategies and household economics (Vispute 718). Therefore, this interdisciplinary study bridges the gap between literature and management, revealing how fiction becomes a tool for understanding economic self-reliance and feminist agency.

2. Literature Review

Sudha Murty's fiction often centers on economically and emotionally resilient women who navigate financial decisions in both domestic and professional spaces. Aravind et al. (2019) highlight how *Three Thousand Stitches* depicts women's emancipation through education and financial literacy. Vispute (2019) analyzes *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*, emphasizing women's evolving financial roles and agency. A study titled *Empowering Narratives* discusses feminist themes in Murty's works, particularly how her characters portray realistic economic struggles and empowerment. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Murty's literary women mirror real-world shifts in economic power dynamics, aligning with household economics and business management principles.

3. Research Gap

While numerous studies have explored Sudha Murty's contribution to feminist literature and women's empowerment, most analysis remain within the boundaries of literary or social commentary. There is limited scholarly attention on examining economic empowerment and financial decision-making through a business management lens in her works. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary intersection between household economics and literary narrative strategies remains underexplored.

This paper addresses this gap by evaluating Murty's female characters not just as symbols of empowerment, but as financial agents, applying insights from business and management studies to enrich literary interpretation.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the portrayal of women's economic empowerment in the selected works of Sudha Murty.
- To examine how financial decision-making by female characters influences their personal identity, autonomy, and family dynamics.
- To analyze the intersection of literary narratives and business management principles, especially regarding economic roles, leadership, and decision-making.

- To investigate the role of education, employment, and self-reliance in enabling women's financial independence in Murty's fiction.
- To contribute an interdisciplinary perspective that blends English literature with business management and household economics, offering a unique academic insight.
- To identify gaps and limitations in existing feminist and literary critiques of Murty's work, especially concerning economic agency.

5. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative textual analysis of select literary works by Sudha Murty, primarily focusing on *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*. The approach blends literary interpretation with basic business management concepts, particularly those related to financial autonomy, household economics, and decision-making.

Themes such as economic independence, gender roles in financial contexts, and empowerment through education and employment are identified and analyzed. By aligning narrative elements with management perspectives, the study offers an interdisciplinary reading of women's roles as economic decision-makers in both household and broader social structures.

6. Summary of Primary Texts

Sudha Murty's fiction is rooted in simplicity but brimming with insight into the emotional, ethical, and economic lives of Indian women. This section offers a brief summary of the two primary texts selected for analysis—*Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*—with a focus on the female protagonists and their evolving relationship with financial and personal agency.

1. *Gently Falls the Bakula*

Published in 2004, *Gently Falls the Bakula* is a poignant narrative about the quiet disintegration of a marriage built on traditional gender roles and unspoken sacrifices. The novel follows Shrimati and Shrikant, childhood friends who marry young. While Shrikant climbs the corporate ladder at an IT company, Shrimati abandons her academic dreams to support his ambitions. Her life becomes increasingly defined by domestic expectations, silent service, and emotional isolation.

Over time, Shrimati realizes the cost of her self-effacement. Her intellectual hunger, emotional emptiness, and the absence of personal fulfillment lead her to a turning point. She decides to walk away—not out of rebellion, but in a quiet assertion of self-worth and intellectual independence. Her departure symbolizes a shift from passive domesticity to active self-reliance, aligning with the idea that true empowerment often begins with reclaiming one's voice and aspirations.

This story becomes a powerful example of delayed economic agency: Shrimati, after years of emotional labor, chooses autonomy and begins a new life based on self-growth, intellectual contribution, and financial independence.

2. *House of Cards*

House of Cards (2013) narrates the story of Mridula, a principled school teacher, and her husband Sanjay, who rises from a clerk to a successful doctor and hospital administrator. Their early life together reflects shared values and cooperative decision-making. However, as Sanjay accumulates wealth and status, he begins to compromise on ethics, illustrating how rapid professional advancement can foster materialism and short-term gains at the cost of integrity.

Mridula, in contrast, embodies the principles of ethical leadership, where decisions are guided by integrity, fairness, and accountability rather than expediency. Her refusal to accept unethical practices and her eventual choice to leave Sanjay reflect the core of value-based decision-making in leadership studies. This aligns with self-leadership theory (Manz, 1986), which emphasizes personal responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy in guiding one's actions.

From a business management perspective, Mridula demonstrates that sustainable leadership is grounded in ethics and credibility rather than opportunistic success. Her journey highlights the relevance of ethical governance, resilience, and independent economic agency, making her a compelling case for understanding the intersection of literature, household economics, and managerial principles.

7. Analysis and Discussion

Sudha Murty's narratives consistently center around women who evolve from passive domestic figures into empowered economic agents.

Her characters reflect the changing dynamics of financial decision-making within Indian households, particularly when viewed through a business management lens. These stories not only critique traditional expectations but also offer actionable insights relevant to financial autonomy and household leadership (Vispute, 2019; Aravind et al., 2020).

In “*Gently Falls the Bakula*” the protagonist Shrimati symbolizes the traditional Indian woman who sacrifices her career aspirations to support her husband’s corporate success. Her unacknowledged intellectual capacity and economic potential remain dormant within the patriarchal setup. However, her eventual decision to leave the marriage and reclaim her personal and professional life signifies a profound shift. This transformation mirrors modern business concepts such as self-leadership, delayed empowerment, and career reinvention, showcasing how women can assert control even after prolonged dependency (Joshi, 2019; Kamble & Mahajan, 2022).

Likewise, “*House of Cards*” introduces Mridula, who’s emotional and financial trajectory evolves as she confronts her husband’s moral compromises and financial mismanagement. Mridula’s refusal to tolerate unethical practices and her decision to become self-reliant underline core principles of ethical leadership, crisis resilience, and value-based decision-making integral pillars in management training programs (Vispute, 2019; Ghosh, 2021).

8. Textual Case Studies

Sudha Murty’s fiction portrays ordinary women navigating financial and emotional boundaries with courage and clarity. Three characters—Shrimati (*Gently Falls the Bakula*) and Mridula (*House of Cards*) serve as strong case studies of women asserting economic and personal agency. Shrimati, initially a silent supporter of her husband’s corporate ambitions, eventually reclaims her independence by choosing self-growth over domestic stagnation. Her transformation reflects the principle of *delayed leadership* (Manz 588), highlighting how emotional clarity can drive later-stage financial autonomy, especially in women whose potential remains dormant within patriarchal systems (Bhattacharya 74). Mridula challenges her husband’s unethical behavior and chooses self-respect over security.

Her choices align with *ethical leadership* and *value-based decision-making* (Fairholm 41), both core concerns in literature and management studies. These women embody more than personal strength—they reflect how financial control becomes a tool for identity, leadership, and resistance in patriarchal settings (Kabeer 437). Murty’s characters bridge the literary with the practical, offering lessons that resonate across both domestic and business spaces. These case studies collectively highlight a broader thematic concern in Murty’s work—the intersection of emotional intelligence and economic participation. Both Shrimati and Mridula transition from roles of dependence to self-sufficiency, reflecting not only personal growth but also systemic shifts in Indian socio-economic realities. Through such representations, Murty’s fiction contributes to interdisciplinary dialogues that connect literature, household economics, and corporate ethics (Kaur & Singh, 2020; Arora, 2018).

Moreover, her simple yet emotionally resonant storytelling style ensures that these themes are accessible and impactful, extending beyond feminist literary analysis into the realm of business education and gender-sensitive policymaking. Murty’s fiction reinforces the idea that women’s financial empowerment catalyzes not only personal transformation but also collective social progress—a notion increasingly recognized in gender economics and inclusive leadership discourse (Sen, 2020; Duflo, 2012; Viswanathan, 2021).

9. Conclusion

Sudha Murty’s fiction offers a compelling intersection between literature and business management by portraying women’s journey from silence to self-reliance. Through characters like Shrimati and Mridula, Murty illustrates how financial autonomy and ethical decision-making emerge not only as personal victories but as broader cultural shifts. These narratives underline the importance of women as economic agents within households, capable of challenging traditional norms and influencing social transformation.

By integrating literary analysis with management principles such as self-leadership, ethical governance, and resilience, this study demonstrates the relevance of fiction in understanding real-world financial behaviors and household economics.

Murty's works thus serve as both cultural reflections and practical case studies, bridging emotional storytelling with strategic empowerment. Her writing encourages a rethinking of domestic roles, emphasizing that empowering women economically is key not just for individual growth but for building more equitable families and societies.

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