

FANTASY AND REALISM: EXPLORATIONS OF THE FEMALE PSYCHE IN SUDHA MURTHY'S HOUSE OF CARDS

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**Abstract:**

Sudha Murthy is one of the eminent female writers in India writing in English today, composing on the overwhelming issues related to women in modern India in the age of globalization and their struggle for space in conventional Indian society. She is a recipient of many awards and the most notable amongst them are the Padma Shri Award and the R.K Narayan's Award for her contribution to Literature. Sudha Murthy's enormity as a writer revolves around her accomplishment in exploring the mind of her characters. The protagonists in majority of her works are well educated women with inherent power who can confront the difficulties under any conditions and develop effectively creating a place for them in the society inside the parameter of the Indian custom. Her women characters are hardworking, devoted, fragile, respectable and submissive. They ordinarily go for complete surrendering but the very essence of self-respect always stays with them, ultimately, forcing them to become rebellious however in a subdued manner. Sudha Murthy's *House of Cards* is an intricately woven novel that explores human relationships in telling detail and holds up a mirror to our society with sincerity and with conviction. The present paper focuses on the inner conflicts of the female characters in *House of Cards* and how women's emotions and attitudes are delineated in Indian society. These women are real flesh and blood protagonists who make us look at them with awe with their relationships to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families, their mental make-ups and themselves.

Key words: marriage, trust, love, psyche, relationship

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Ahalya, Sita, Draupadi, Tara, Mondadori-these five names represent the ultimate woman for centuries of Indian society. These women were not goddesses but were devoted wives and mothers and that is the ideal that has been held out to generations of Indian women. As Devaki Jain writes, "These, then are the Panchakanyas. What a colorful variety of examples they represent! They are neither saints nor virgins. None of them is heavenly... and all are wives and mothers. For the ideal of Indian womanhood is the mother, the one being in creation, lowly or high-placed, poor or rich that, though rooted on earth, is godlike in her capacity for unbounded love and devotion with no thought of any return or recompense (Nityanandam and Kothari,131-132)". It was with this concept every girl child was brought up in the traditional Indian society. Earlier, women were portrayed only as patient sufferer, self-sacrificing, devoted wife or mother or daughter. They were symbols of sacrifice, love, devotion, pity etc.

As time passed many writers changed their outlook. Modern Indian women writers are able to sensitively portray a world that has in it women rich in substance. Indian women writers explore the women's life-struggle that ranges from childhood to womanhood. They assert that women should be free to define themselves instead of having their identity defined for them by their culture and their men. Sudha Murthy is the most important figure in this respect. She is a prolific writer in English and Kannada and most of her novels focuses on Karnataka villages and the people. She is an inspiration to many with multiple roles she has played over the years of an engineer, author, teacher, philanthropist and many more. She has investigated in-depth the workings of the inner mind of the women characters in her works. In a simple style, she has analyzed the significant current-day issues in her novels.

House of Cards is the story of Mridula, a bright young woman with colossal excitement for life who hails from a Karnataka village. A chance meeting with Sanjay, a skilled yet impoverished doctor, leads to love—and the couple marry and settle in Bangalore. Both of them in the underlying phase of their wedded life had generous goals of putting in some part of their pay in helping poor people and denied areas of society. Mridula took up work to enhance family pay so as to empower Sanjay to focus on his medical services in Government hospital. Sanjay started his own nursing home which brought him unanticipated accomplishment in the field. But convergence of pain free income ruined Sanjay and transformed him into unethical medical professional.

The more Mridula sees of the world, the more she understands how narrow minded and materialistic individuals can be. In any case, she doesn't take the high points and low points of life to heart, and lives every day with positive vitality. A line often repeated in the book is the means by which it appeared the sun ascended for her only and the rainbow colours were intended for her as it were. Sanjay's conduct and frame of mind changes when cash streams from the nursing home. For quite a while, Mridula has no clue that Sanjay has sold his spirit; when reality hits her, she has no recourse but to leave him.

**II. PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM**

The novel *House of Cards* was first published in Kannada language as *Paridhi* in the year 2004 and was later translated into English language in the year 2013. It is about the emotional and psychological journey pertaining to the dilemmas and the internal conflicts faced by the people of the present day society. The female protagonist, Mridula is from Aladahalli a top student, pure at heart and knowledgeable. She possesses enormous enthusiasm for life and enjoys reading, cooking and sketching. For her, 'Everyday was to

be lived to its fullest and every beautiful minute to be enjoyed' (2). Unlike many conventional Indian parents, her parents gave her freedom to take decisions regarding higher studies and marriage. This is evident from her father's words, "Times have changed. We can't tell children that you should become a lawyer or a doctor marry a person of our choice. Education and marriage should be according to our children's wishes because these are for ever. After all, it is their life and they have the right to follow their heart and make decisions by themselves (3)".

She finds a husband like herself, who has less demands and needs from life. "I don't mind marrying a man with less money. I can also work. But the boy should be good-natured (22)". An idealist as she was the materialism filled in the society irked her. However, she soon realized that her husband too was an active part of this transgression. It was the time of real conflict. She couldn't believe that her faithful husband Sanjay had cheated her. She had lived with complete belief and trusted him from the very first day of marriage. Sanjay who used to say, my goal is to get a government job and teach, that will give me more happiness than private practice grows restless when nothing works better. With the suggestion of Alex and support from Mridula he opts for private practice. Once money began to pour in, Sanjay changed a lot. Affluence spoiled innocence. Mridula was surprised to listen to Sanjay's new philosophy, "Nothing is black or white in this world. The cow gives milk for its calf. But we drink that milk. Isn't that wrong? Trees have life. But we cut them and use their wood. Isn't that wrong too? Mosquitoes and bugs are also creatures. Don't we kill them because they trouble us? Big fish always eats the small fish. Is that wrong?" Mridula was dumbstruck by Sanjay's array of arguments and was forced to revise her thinking about him.

In the early days, both Sanjay and Mridula discussed all matters and took decisions together. She mortgaged her jewellery to start the nursing home and supported him mentally and financially at difficult times. When money began to flow Sanjay's behaviour and attitude too changed. He made fun of Mridula's monthly salary forgetting its crucial role in shaping his life in the past. He helps his sister to buy an apartment, gifts a car to Anil, sends his mother ten lakh rupees, manages to make his black money white and many more. He keeps all these things secret from Mridula as she is an idealist and feels that she won't accept these. When she realised the truth she was shocked and became annoyed. She could not tolerate the humiliating responses from Sanjay. The trust between Mridula and Sanjay was shattered. She says. "Anita, it is not about money. Money can be earned and lost. It is about faith that a wife has in her husband. That's more valuable than money and gold. Faith sustains a marriage and brings joy to the family. Without it we have nothing. How can Sanjay destroy the faith and trust I had in him?" (186). Mridula was completely broken when her trust in Sanjay was thwarted by himself. Every husband takes their wife as granted and nobody tries to respect her sensitive feelings. In the words of Sanjay, "She has a good house, servants, plenty of money, a great son and a famous husband". But still Mridula is not happy. Neither the society nor her husband understands why she is unhappy. Dr. Rao rightly points out the reason for her depression, "... in a male dominated society like ours; all the important decisions are made by man, including choices about her wants. Every woman values her freedom to choose much more than her husband's money or position(212)". Women are often regarded as being naturally subordinated to the public sphere of male transcendence. This power dynamic sees men as 'the provider' operating in the public sphere and women as 'the caregiver or nurturer' operating in the private space.

Sudha Murthy's *House of Cards* is a reflection of many Indian women who yearn for affection and love from their family. Money is essential in life, but it often brings unhappiness in relationships. Alex and Anita had immense love for each other till Alex began to amass money through unfair means. He forgot sincere love of Anita and had illicit relationships which led Anita to lose her interest on life. In the words of Anita, "When men get more money than they need, their wife starts looking ugly to them, they think they could have done better, they forget that they were nothing when their wife married them and that she has stayed loyal to them through their ups and downs (p.148)". The innermost psyche of the protagonists is revealed through their interaction with those who are emotionally related to them.

Most of her heroines have the idea of a blissful, happy conjugal life, but the idea seems to remain only a rainbow dream. Women's individual identity has not been openly realised in Indian social life. She is taken for granted and this casual attitude is the cause of her suffering and miserable life. Neeraja fell in love with her classmate and even after repeated warnings from her parents she married him. But life after marriage was really miserable. Her husband was nice to everyone outside the home but he dominated every aspect of her life- choosing a job, buying a house, having a baby etc. She could never be herself. Sudha Murthy points out how human relationships changes according to the conditions and how a woman feels alienated in a male-dominated society. Life is not easy for a woman in a patriarchal world. Another wife character, in the novel, Kantamma, wife of a Principal in a conversation expresses her dissatisfaction on her marriage, "He was the Principal for a long time and was strict at home too. My children never care, but I had to obey him (188)".

The writer shares her wisdom about marriages and what men and women expect in a marriage. These themes are brought out well through Sishir and Neha. Sishir, son of Mridula and Sanjay shares his concept of wife, "I want a girl who won't argue with me and who'll adjust to any situation. A woman defines the culture and environment at home. But she should be modern outside the house (p.224)". Even the younger generation expect the women to adjust with the changing family ways and surroundings. In a marriage adjustment for the woman only means deleting her individuality, herself and her conscience. It affects her entire psyche and behaviour which destroys her sensibility and her very self. The idea of an ordinary girl about her better half is clearly elucidated through the words of Neha, the girl with whom Sishir tries to date. "I want a man who respects me as a woman. We must give each other the freedom to grow together and individually, as people. Money doesn't matter to me. His job doesn't matter either. (225)". She needs a man who treat his lady as true and equal partner in life and walk side by side with them. Earlier only the woman was expected to adjust and change. But the modern world demands that boys change too.

### III. CONCLUSION

Sudha Murthy belongs to the group of Indo-English writers who studied in detail the actual problems faced by women in the domestic, political and cultural spheres. She has explained the effects of emotions and sentiments on the behavior of men and women and how they react to different situations. She has explained in detail the inner disturbance of her characters especially the female characters in a very superior manner. In one of the interviews she said, "Today's women are more assertive, have lot more economic power and more vocal". They have suffered silently under patriarchal domination for a long time. But with time they have started asserting their rights and protect their own dignity in a relationship. The changed perspective of new women is portrayed in two female characters, Mridula and Neha. They proved that new women know how to maintain calm and pleasant familial atmosphere but not at the cost of their self-respect. Idealism faced modernism, generosity was contradicted with ravenousness and love battled with truth. Sudha Murthy exemplified all of this enthusiastic strain in her work that drives you into a universe of societal dilemmas and inward clashes.

The author believed in the ancient values like love, affection, sacrifice, reverence, compassion, empathy etc. Naturally she incorporated all these principles in her composition. Good fought its battle with the bad and ultimately wins it. Villains had to repent and sinners were punished in her works. Wrongdoers rectified their errors. She had faith in the benefit of everybody and gives a message to that effect. Literature entertains but also instructs. She has taken up the second function of literature more seriously.

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