



Realising Oneself Amidst the Chaos: An Exploration of the Innerselves of Women Protagonists in Sudha Murty's Select Novels

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Abstract— Every individual human being possesses certain abilities which are always unique. There is no necessity to compete with anyone's ability to prove our individual uniqueness. It is important in life to sustain our uniqueness and never become dependent at any point in life. Sudha Murty, an eminent writer discloses her experiences and observations of society in the art of writing short stories and novels. Being a contemporary writer, her writings are a mere reflection of reality, and always had a vision in all her works. The purpose of this paper is to examine the striking similitude of the women protagonists Shrimati and Mridula in Sudha Murty's novels *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards*. Shrimati and Mridula are chosen for this analysis as their characters coincide at certain points and they both sail on the same boat. The common difficulties they face as a woman in the family and society are tracked down to the profound understanding of the protagonist's painful search for themselves.



Keywords— *Individuality, Uniqueness, Belonging, Women, Reality, Society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is the mirror and reflection of society and portrays women being women's enemies in many fictional and non-fictional stories. Fictions become a powerful and effective form of literary expression and have acquired a prestigious position in the Indian English realm. The rise of the novel in India is closely associated with social, political, cultural, religious, economic, and other factors. The last ten years of the twentieth century saw an unexpected spray of women activists' works in Indian English Fiction. A gathering of Indian writers in their in-betweens, the hybridity of thought and multicultural, multi-lingual, and multi-strict social aspects have conceptualized the specific. While the gynocritics imagine that an excessive number of women in an excessive number of nations communicate in a similar language of quietness, a few Indian women authors have

attempted with earnestness to manage the physical, mental, and profound pressure and condition of women.

Indian women novelists after the 1980s had shown strong consistency and stamina to locate them in different perspectives. The writers have carried mind-boggling changes to adjust a particular type to investigate the neglected exhibit of illnesses; to uncover the equivocal truth of the general public and the predicaments of Indian women in the general public. Women are not generally described to give up, submit and endure. Women authors reveal the secret insider facts and encase the conscious disavowals that are refutable in the present setting.

The entire band of women writers of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century have featured the meaning of depicting a woman as an individual opposing the customary job, breaking the shackles of double-dealing and abuse, and arousing with

the feeling of personality to state her distinction. Their depiction of women characters in the books perpetually bears credibility to their women's activist methodology and point of view. Their sharp perception of the existence of the Indian women and their advantage in the investigation of their internal brains is proven by their striking and all-encompassing depiction of their predicaments.

Among the women writers in Indian writing in English, the best and most eminent writer would be Sudha Murty. She is a person who followed a vision, not a path, and an optimistic writer too. Murty's works are a mirror of her heart and mind. She has written many short stories, travelogues, technical books, fiction, and non-fiction. Sudha Murty is an inspiration to many women in balancing the home and career in an equal equilibrium. Murty's writing reflects real-life observations, hence it is always realistic. There are many writers like Murty who concentrate on women's upliftment. For example, Ruth Praver Jabwala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and many others succeed in depicting women's frustrations and their reactions in their novels.

Ruth Praver Jhabwala, a major women novelist, is not much concerned with the personality of modernity and the liberation of women. Her women's character never crossed the patriarchal threshold and they do not go against their tradition. Sashi Despande women are educated, self-conscious, and sensitive. Her women resolve against the traditional, social, and family setups out of necessity. Nayantara Sahgal's women possess remarkable inner strength and are liberal and unconventional. Anita Desai a notable women novelist has a different dimension to women writers in English with her feminine sensibility, which attempts to open up women's issues with the right psychological and philosophical levels. Likewise, Sudha Murty holds a new dimension in bringing up the women characters in her fiction. The characters do not rise like a rebel against men or patriarchal traditions, they are entirely different and their ultimate goal would be attaining individual uniqueness.

The main objective is to trace how Mridula and Shrimati attain individual uniqueness by discovering themselves. The researcher tries to identify the similarity in their character, behaviour and attitude. The paper attempts to depict the parallel approach of women protagonists in the two novels. The research tries to expose the struggle and pain they undergo in the journey of finding out the meaning of their life.

II. **PROMINENCE TOWARDS THE FEELING OF BELONGING**

This paper analyses Sudha Murty's two fictional stories *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *House of Cards* based on Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology and feelings of belonging. It is important for women to discover and enhance their individuality to build their own identity. The concept of fighting and believing in equality has become pointless. It is the foremost factor to be considered is attaining individuality. Society sets strands based on gender and creates cultural norms and traditions according to their pliability. When men and women are expected to follow certain norms pertaining to their familial tradition there raises a problem of inequality. Indian society to date relies upon the patriarchal system it is followed since ancient times. Many women voice out their ideas and thoughts initially in the family but the response from the family members itself is against them.

The notion that women are inferior not equal to men, is something which is always there in the human mind. The fact is that men are molded by women in the family playing different roles such as grandmother, mother, sister, and wife. Alfred Adler, founder of the school of individual psychology emphasizes the importance of feelings of belonging. Adler is also remembered for his concept of inferiority, where he exhibits feelings an inferiority complex plays a major role in the formation of personality. Adler's theory suggested that every person has a sense of inferiority. From childhood, people work towards overcoming inferiority by "striving for superiority". Adler's theory can be used as he emphasizes human feelings and the sense of belonging which is highly relatable to the two stories.

Human feelings are the driving factor for mankind to run their life in this world. The behavior of a man and a woman depends on the feeling they have at that particular moment. The human mind is structured in such a way that if we are rewarded for something we do is a form of appreciation. So people do not know the fact to identify what is our duty and expect everything to be appreciated and recognized. And when they do not receive such recognition in life they feel highly depressed. Human feelings are structured depending on societal treatment. According to Adler, when we feel encouraged, we feel capable and appreciated and will generally act in a connected and cooperative way. When we are discouraged, we may act in unhealthy ways by competing, withdrawing, or giving up. It is in finding ways of expressing and accepting encouragement, respect, and social interest that help us feel fulfilled and optimistic.

This paper undertakes Sudha Murty's novel for the analysis of the woman protagonists and portrays the painful struggle they undergo to taste the fruit of uniqueness and individuality. The novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* is the story of Shrimati and Shrikanth who studied and grew up together right from childhood days. Shrikanth developed a liking for Shrimati after his higher secondary education. Both their families have an enmity between them and they don't talk with each other. These families have one thing in common which is the Bakula tree. The Bakula tree becomes a meeting point for the two of them and has a good healthy conversation for a long time. This continued for a few days as a friendship and later Shrimati also developed an interest in Shrikanth. They both fell in love with each other, even after knowing their families has various conflicts and differences of opinion. After much struggle, somehow they convinced their family members and got married. They were very happy after marriage and left the village soon in order to continue Shrikanth's job.

Shrimati being an intelligent and shrewd girl in the class scored high marks and wanted to pursue her education higher and loved to work on her own wish. Shrimati left her ambitions and didn't take up a career in order to be with Shrikanth and help him in all ways. She did the same for ten years from the time of their marriage and Shrikanth also seemed to be a more successful person in his field, achieving more and more breaking all the obstacles. Shrimati stood as a backbone for him, whenever there is a need in Shrikanth's life. Even after sharing and spending her valuable ten years at a young age developing her husband, everything went in vain. It is of no use, and no attention is given to her emotions. Later at the end of the novel, we come to know money has changed people's mental psyche and turns out to be the starting point of all the issues in the family.

House of Cards is the narration revolving around Sanjay and Mridula exploring human relationships and the novel stands as a mirror to our society. Mridula hailing from a rich family in Karnataka falls in love with the middle-class man Sanjay. For her, money and status are not a matter of concern; she wants to live the life which she loved. Sanjay is a doctor, a service-oriented person who aims to help needy people with the help of his education. He would love to serve people for free, like his father without charging anything. Even though he does it with a good heart but it does not serve the purpose. Sanjay couldn't succeed in his attempt and started feeling low about himself. Mridula started supporting Sanjay mentally and drives him to stay strong. Then he starts a small nursing home with the help of Alex, his intimate friend from his college days. Sanjay termed to be successful in treating the patients but he couldn't earn more money.

Sanjay is not a money-minded person, but along with Alex he also turned out to be the one. It started the problem and the importance switched towards money rather than showing love towards the relationship. Sanjay forgets how he has been in the initial days of his career and started craving money more.

III. STRIVING FOR INDIVIDUALITY

The main objective of this paper is to depict the parallelism and showcase the importance of individual empowerment as a humanistic approach. Parallelism refers to similar elements to emphasize similar ideas in a fictional story. Here parallelism is found in both novels emphasizing a specific point or idea. The parallel concept is traced through the two characters Shrimati and Mridula. There are few instances that portray how money takes a pivotal role in destroying one's individuality and sense of happiness in these novels.

DESTRUCTION OF THE FAMILY

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, from the time of marriage Shrikanth runs behind the money and concentrates on earning money. Shrimati longs to spend quality time and make love with her husband. The love she expects is not reciprocated by Shrikanth, rather he laughs at her and says

"Shrimati, are you aware of what you just said? Think rationally, and be practical. You want me to retire at the age of thirty- three! A man is in his prime at this age. It is time for him to grow professionally. Besides I feel that I have not achieved much in life. I cannot live in Hubli. What would I do there? Hubli is my past. The past is always beautiful because we cannot get it back. Childhood looks beautiful when you are young. Youth looks romantic when you are old. Whatever we lose is always precious. Think of adjusting and looking forward to an ever-changing world. Don't get into the past". (*Gently Falls the Bakula*, 134)

Shrimati becomes speechless after hearing from Shrikanth, and there she is reminded of her school and college life. The studious student in her young days left her education and career just because of the unconditional love she had for her husband. She decides that, when her silence is unheard by Sanjay, her words will also become meaningless. Shrimati couldn't sleep and started reading letters that he sent her during the early days of their love. Her inner conscience starts taunting her about how she lost her old Sanjay and his pure love for her. The love that

Shrikanth had for her before marriage is found nowhere in her life.

Shrimati emotionally gets affected in the journey of searching for her husband's love and affection. It is meaningless and she feels that even after that, Shrikanth continued to concentrate more and more on his business to achieve greater heights.

When Shrimati feels a vacuum in her life, it becomes the turning point of her life. She starts thinking for herself and tries to gain her individualism which she lost after marriage. According to Shrimati, true love does not require beauty or intelligence. It only requires mutual love and intense faith. She took much time to think about the aftereffects in society if she moves away from her husband. Then Shrimati made up her mind and decides to leave her husband and move on with her life. Then, she came near Shrikanth and said,

"Shri, I have thought about every day calmly for the last four weeks. You can definitely live without me. You will find an excellent secretary who can do all this work for you. You may miss me for some time but you will get used to it. Shri, if you really need my help, please call me. Wherever I am, I will come and visit you. It is very difficult for me to leave you, but I have no other option. I married you because I loved you. I am not leaving you because of our quarrel. I am not going away because you are angry with me. I am not deserting you either for monetary gain or some other temptation. I am going away only because I want to be like you. You are not like a normal husband who would control his wife...." (*Gently Falls the Bakula*, 163)

The above lines convey the strong feeling of Shrimati, where she acts very sensibly to come out of the trap of marriage. She doesn't fight, argue or quarrel while leaving for the United States because she feels pointless in talking to a person who has no emotional attachment even after living together for ten years. This act of Shrimati just moved Shrikanth because the response he got from her is unexpected. He feels as if Shrimati takes away all his spirits with her and leaves him empty. Her absence showed him how painful life is going to be in the future. Shri could feel the emptiness at his house the moment she left the place. His mind didn't even work as he is in shock and hasn't stopped her from moving out of the house.

The breaking point in the novel is the self-realization of Shrimati. The point of realization doesn't drive her in an improper channel. The decision is taken only after envisioning her upcoming future. Shrimati feels,

"I cannot live in this kind of an atmosphere with these artificial values. I require to breathe fresh air. I do not want to live as your shadow. I want to find my own happiness. Shri, if I had not been sensitive and bright, I wouldn't have had to suffer such loneliness. I could have enjoyed your wealth. When I was thinking about my life so far, and what my goal has been, I have realized what I want." (*Gently Falls the Bakula*, 161)

This shows that Shrimati is not a materialistic woman as she needs everything around her to be realistic, not artistic. His money is insignificant and she is the one who needs only and demanded love from him. As life makes her understand, she will not receive love anymore her way of approach towards life is distinct in many ways. Her notion is not to disturb Shrikanth at any point before leaving him. She is so sensible in making her life beautiful.

IV. MRIDULA'S UNFLINCHING EFFORT

In *House of Cards*, the protagonist Mridula faces certain humiliations inside the house. Sanjay, a doctor by profession achieves greater height with the help of his wife. Unlike Shrimati in *Gently Falls the bakula*, Mridula on the whole is a full support system for Sanjay in maintaining the financial side of their nursing home. Initially, Mridula out of sheer love doesn't bother anything about her individuality and always thinks about Sanjay's growth. Once Sanjay started growing in his field, Mridula is the one feels so happy for him. She thought that Sanjay might be relieved from all stress as he started earning as much as he expected. Sanjay earned much but he started hiding many things from his wife. He doesn't find time for his wife to sit and talk for a while at home.

Mridula came to know at one point that Sanjay has cheated her financially and her mind is not ready to take it up. After this, she went into high depression and was in treatment for several days. It is all due to Sanjay's change of attitude which destroyed the loving relationship and had nothing to do with Mridula's character. She asks the doctor,

"With everything that happened, I don't know how to behave with Sanjay. What should I do?"

In return doctor replies,

"Mridula, your husband is a nice man. But he has a big ego because of his success. Money makes him feel powerful. He has an inferiority complex and an old value system where men are supposed to be the dominating partner. Unlike you, he is a

complicated person. That's why he's never established good communication with you...." (*House of Cards*, 214)

In doctor's perception, Mridula is perfectly all right and is gaining the courage and confidence to move on with her life. The change and the willingness to change have to come from Sanjay and Mridula cannot help it out. The doctor even asks Mridula not to expect anything from her husband. Above all, Mridula tried to talk with Sanjay, but he doesn't find time in his busy schedule. This makes her feel that there is no point in living with Sanjay. One day, When Mridula overhears Sanjay and Alex's conversation about her, she felt odd about staying with Sanjay under the same roof.

She decides to move to Alhadalli her native, getting transferred from the school where she is working presently. Mridula looks at Sanjay and informs about her egress saying,

"I have spent twenty- five of my most important years with you and yet, I never felt like I belonged to you and your family. I am still an outsider, Sishir is independent and you can take care of him better than I can. My duty towards both of you is over. I've fulfilled all my duties as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Now I want to live for myself. You don't have to worry about me any longer. You and Sishir can visit me whenever you want" (*House of Cards*, 218)

The deep-rooted pain of Mridula is portrayed in the above lines, how she feels the void in her house even after twenty-five years of marriage. Mridula totally lived life according to Sanjay's wish to see him happy always. Mridula never thought for herself after marriage and not showed any kind of superiority in twenty-five years. On the verge of self-realisation Mridula understands the real position of her in Sanjay's life. The feeling of being an outsider inside the family is extremely painful for an individual. Mridula's assertion is to start a new life independently and live for herself not depending on Sanjay's love and care.

V. PARALLEL FACTORS IN THE LIFE OF TWO WOMEN

The two characters live through a sense of isolation, and loneliness and move into depression. Even after years Shrimati and Mridula feels like an outsider in the family. It is important to note that, as Adler's theory points out if the sense of belonging is lost in a family then the individual loses her significance. As a human, we need our place in society to sustain and establish ourselves in this fast-moving world. The home should always be set

right as that gives us the comfort zone for our mind to work peacefully. But here in the story, self-realization takes place after ten years and twenty-five years of their marital life. It is easy for an individual to find out what is happening around them, here it has taken a longer time.

The quest for their individualism haunted them to find meaning in their life which is been lost for so long. It is evident that Mridula and Shrimati do not rebel against the family. Even in the twenty-first century, Murty's women characters rely on the customs and traditions of the family. Unlike Jaya in Deshpande's *That long silence*, who moves out of the family leaving everything for pursuing her passion for writing. Here, Murty's women protagonists are not likely to move away from their family leaving their familial responsibility. They haven't tried to establish feministic thoughts in the family. They move out of the family only when their emotions are not valued in the materialistic world.

From the beginning of the story, the characters are affectionate towards everyone in the family and none of the problems arise because of them. Shrimati and Mridula's journey is similar in many aspects and we could relate to many incidents in these two novels. As Adler says, everything goes in vain when the sense of belonging is lost. The statement is true, as the sense of belonging is lost; there is no purpose in having a loving relationship. His concept is apt in finding out the parallel factors in the fiction of Sudha Murty.

VI. CONCLUSION

Shrimati and Mridula raised on love see things differently from Sanjay and Shrikanth who are raised on survival. The two women thought much about the cultural traditions and familial constructs before moving out of the family. The decision is made only after having thought about the consequences which are about to take place in the aftermath. The characters feel that when the sense of belonging is lost in their own family, there is no point in staying inside the house as one among them. Since they want to live a life of their own, nothing stopped them from doing anything of their wish. Even though people talk about freedom, feminism, rights, and so on, our Indian society still relies upon the patriarchal stereotyped society. It is never appreciated in the male-dominated society to welcome women who leave their husbands and live independently. Every relationship should be given part or equal preference for self-expression.

The main solution to any problem is, as a human, we need to speak up for ourselves. As an individual we fail to, and that is the place where we lack individuality. It is better to point out whether it is right or wrong as an

individual we must voice out our opinions at places where it is needed. It is said that people change for two reasons. First is when a person learns a lot and the second reason for the change is they have been hurt a lot. Shrimati and Mridula even though they learned a lot from society and the family, they have lost their significance in life after getting hurt by their own family. According to Adler's theory, Shrimati and Mridula long for a sense of belonging, and through that they think that they can attain individuality.

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