

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

August 2015 Vol. 6, Issue-4



6th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Costly Price of Ambition

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Abstract:

Dr. Sudha Murthy, the author of the novel *House of Cards*, is a successful modern day writer whose works have been translated into many Indian languages. 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. This article is based on the psychological realism, specifically in the leading protagonist of the novel, Mridula, which forms the basis in the novel *House of Cards* by Dr. Sudha Murthy. Psychological realism is the key in every human being's life, in particular, in every average family living in small towns of India. Necessity creates good and bad thinking for survival. In this novel, the author visualizes such latent strengths and creates an optimistic reassurance in the minds of the readers.

Keywords: Psychology, Realism, Introspection, Trauma, Family Relationships and Ambition.

The author, Dr. Sudha Murthy is from Shiggaon in North Karnataka and has completed her M.Tech in Computer Science from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. The first woman engineer in Telco and currently, she is the chairperson of Infosys Foundation. She has to her credit twenty- four novels, three non- fiction books and four books for children. A multi-faceted personality, she is a successful writer, social worker and a philanthropist who contributes to various charities in the capacity as the chairperson of Infosys Foundation. Dr. Sudha Murthy is the recipient of various awards for her contribution to the society. She has been bestowed with the 'Padma Shri' Award by the Government of India in the year 2006 and the R. K. Narayan Award in the year 2006 for her contribution in the field of literature.

As one of the leading and successful women writers of the contemporary modern era, her works are a realistic portrayal of the socio-psychological issues faced by the contemporary Indian women. In a simple style, she has analyzed the significant current-day issues in her novels. She has explored in-depth the workings of the inner mind of the women characters in her works. The main protagonists are portrayed as well educated women with the inherent inner power who were ready to face the challenges under any circumstances and emerge successfully by carving a place for themselves in the society within the parameter of the Indian traditional culture.

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. The author in the novel *House of Cards*, portrays in a realistic manner, the life of the modern day society. It is about the

emotional and psychological journey pertaining to the dilemmas and the internal conflicts faced by the majority of the present day society. This novel analyzes as to how ambition leads a person in quest of supremacy and material wealth. This results in corruption and slowly the breakdown of family life and individual's behavior. *House of Cards* is all about the life of Dr. Sanjay and Mridula, the couple whose family life fell like a pack of cards unable to withstand the velocity of the wind. The reason being the ambition of one person, Dr. Sanjay, whose psychological craving for power and money led to the end of their married life.

The concept of psychological realism by Henry James, the *Father of Psychological Realism*, is based on exploring the different human behavior, the hidden ambitions of the characters and working pattern of an individual inner psyche which results in their different viewpoint, mental state, which changes according to their life and requirements. Similarly, Dr. Sudha Murthy has brought out the various emotions of the leading character Mridula. The author has explored the thinking process of the main character and her emotional reactions which varies according to the situations. This resulted in the main protagonist of the novel, Mridula, to make up her mind and with determination face the hurdles in her life and emerge stronger.

Marriage changes the life of a woman. She enters a new phase in her life where she has to play various roles like wife, mother and daughter-in-law. In this new journey, she also has to face many challenges and it depends upon the individual's mental capacity and her inherent strength to emerge successfully. A woman has to adjust to the new surroundings and new family and approach the problems she has to face with a positive frame of mind. It is not only the beginning of a new life for a woman but also for a man who has to take up the various roles like husband, father and as a dutiful son. Love, mutual understanding and trust coupled with give and take attitude with no personal ego clashes and unshared secrets form the solid base for a successful lifelong commitment.

Mridula, the chief protagonist of this novel, who hailed from Aladahalli, a small village, was a very bright and an energetic young woman. She loved nature and with the support of her family, father Bheemanna, mother Rukmini and brother Krishna grew in an atmosphere filled with love. She was taught to respect elders, the value of life, the art of sharing and the significance of human relationships. By nature, she was very honest and sincere in all her ventures. With the blessings and support of her parents, Mridula graduated with flying colors and pursued her teacher's training at Hubli. After completion, she joined as a teacher in the government school at Aladahalli.

Destiny plays an important role in the life of human beings. One does not know what fate has in store for a person and that is the reason as to why life is filled with surprises. It was due to destiny that Mridula met her future husband, Dr. Sanjay in her friend's wedding. Again it was the same destiny which helped Mridula and Dr. Sanjay to meet in Bombay and Sanjay's physical deformity in his hand did not deter them from making up their mind to hold hands and walk the life's journey till death do them apart. Without much opposition from either side, they were bonded forever in their life as husband and wife. Mridula came from a wealthy background but Sanjay came from a poor background with only two people whom he could call as his family, his mother, Ratnamma and sister, Lakshmi. The couple settled down after marriage in Bangalore where Sanjay joined in a temporary job at Victoria hospital and Mridula got a government job as a school teacher in Yelehanka.

Both of them were not very ambitious or avaricious during the initial stages of their married life. Life is not always smooth sailing and we gain experience only when we face the challenges. Each individual reacts differently under different circumstances depending on their capacity to handle the pressure. Mridula, a simple woman was more pragmatic and matured enough to handle all crisis with a positive solution. Whereas, Sanjay succumbed to pressure since he lacked the capacity to handle it. He did not have the boldness to handle with assertiveness either the work pressure or challenges he had to face in the hospital. Meanwhile, Sanjay completed his post-graduation by specializing in gynecology at Vani-Vilas hospital. It was possible mainly due to the support of his life partner, Mridula.

Bonding and love go a long way in strengthening the relationships among human beings. Every individual needs someone to share their joys and sorrows, be it the family members or friends. Mridula was definitely a more friendlier person who was capable of keeping the relationships going with her easy nature. She was able to forge a strong friendship during her earlier days at Bangalore with Muniyappa, the principal of her school and his wife, Kantamma and later on with Anita, Alex's wife. It was Muniyappa and his wife Kantamma who helped Mridula to continue with her job by taking care of her son, Sishir.

Mridula might have grown up in a village atmosphere without much exposure. When the occasion demanded, it was she who took a bold decision rather an important one which ultimately changed the course of their life. Mridula encouraged Sanjay to accept Dr. Alex, Sanjay's friend's offer to start a new private hospital as a partner. She gave him the mental support and encouragement by saying:

"I know how difficult it is to stay in Bangalore even in my job. We aren't well-connected people. My nature is different and I don't take life so seriously. But you don't share your feelings with others and you take everything earnestly. So maybe you can resign and start something of your own." (*House of Cards*, p. 109)

Women have the ability to balance both their profession and their family. They are more committed to the family and do not hesitate to act as an adviser to their husbands. They lend their support to the family. Mridula was no different. She mortgaged her jewels to support her husband financially to help him to invest in his new hospital. This big decision changed the course of their life. Little did both Sanjay and Mridula who were till then leading a contended life in a small apartment, know that this giant leap was the first step which would lead them to the disintegration of their family life. As Sanjay grew in his profession came the lust for name, power and money which hitherto was not known to him in his life.

The couple along with their son Sishir had moved into a bungalow. Mridula also had become the principal of Vijayanagar high school due to her personal capacity, persistent hard work and sincerity towards her profession. Mridula did not shy away from the challenges in her life. She always had a positive attitude and was confident enough that there was always a solution to all the problems. It was possible mainly because she was always able to balance her emotions. It was this inherent quality of hers which gave her the strength to face the mental trauma she had to face later on in her life.

Every individual have an ambition in their life. It is only the path which they take to achieve their goals, dreams and aspirations without knowingly or unknowingly should not hurt

others in their drive for success. Sanjay, being a doctor, should have realized that his success was not only due to his dedication to his medical profession but it was mainly due to the sacrifices of the silent woman who stood behind him like a rock, Mridula. With success, came the arrogance and corruption in Sanjay's life. Sanjay spoilt his son Sishir so that it ultimately led almost to the estrangement in the relationship between the mother and the son. Sishir refused to heed to any of his mother's advice. It was later in England where he had gone to pursue his higher studies, met Neha, the true love of his life, realized his mistakes and repented for his indifferent attitude towards his mother. The simple down-to-earth girl Neha made him open his eyes and view the world from a different angle.

Mridula was always disturbed with her son's behavior and when she came to know about her husband's misdeeds, it was not only a shock but also brought along the loneliness and feeling of insecurity. Mridula had never wavered from her duty as an obedient daughter-in-law or generous sister-in-law. In fact, it was she who had asked Sanjay to help her sister-in-law Lakshmi's family financially and also to support her mother-in-law, Ratnamma. It was Sanjay who had pretended not to heed to her advice and help his mother and sister but without Mridula's knowledge, he had helped them financially and that too from the second account. When she realized that her husband had cheated her by keeping her away from confidential financial matters, ultimately, this breach of faith broke the backbone of their married life. Her first reaction was:

"How can Sanjay open an account without telling me? The date of the first transaction is five years ago. I've been cheated for the last five years and I was not even aware of it. Isn't this infidelity too? Alex cheated on Anita in one way and Sanjay has cheated on me in another. He's the one who said, "I don't want to handle money. You manage it and I'll manage the nursing home." I guess the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree. When my mother-in-law is desirous of money even at this age, what else can I expect from her son?" (House of Cards, p. 183)

Psychologically affected by the happenings in her life and with no one to whom she could confide her problems, Mridula was forced to consult a psychiatrist, Dr. Rao, who finally helped her to overcome her problems which were caused due to the mental stress. It was not again her husband, Dr. Sanjay the leading gynecologist, who helped her in the hour of need but it was her former student Vani, who suggested Mridula to consult a psychiatrist. When Mridula needed the help and support of her husband, he was not there. The man who had held her hand with a promise to look after her for the rest of her life failed in his duty as a husband when she needed his comfort, soothing response and assurance. In fact, Sanjay often wondered whether he had made the right choice in his life by marrying Mridula. For Mridula, her entire existence revolved around only Sanjay and Sishir. This brings out the contrast in characters and their thought process of a man and woman who had committed their life with each other.

What finally made Mridula to take the drastic decision of leaving her husband and her married life of twenty-five years was when she overheard the conversation between her husband, Sanjay and his partner, Alex.

"No, I don't want to ask her. I've known her for almost twenty-five years. She doesn't cooperate with us. In fact, she'll create problems because she's an idealist. Instead of her, I want Lakshmi to be the silent director. She doesn't understand all this anyway. We can

just ask her to sign papers whenever we want and, in return, we can give her some money.” (House of Cards, p. 215)

The man with whom she had lived for twenty-five years did not want to share with her his personal matters and thought of her as an object who was more of an hindrance to him. This rather helped Mridula to recoup herself to gain self-confidence and restart her life once again. She was able to take an important decision about her future, the future which did not include her husband, Sanjay. This led to her leaving him stranded, paralyzed, speechless and knocked him out completely when they were to attend their silver jubilee celebration of their married life. When Sanjay asked Mridula as to when she would be back after seeing her with a suitcase, she calmly replied: “Never.” When she gave the reason for her decision, it was an answer for which Sanjay had no reply. She told him:

“I’ve spent twenty- five of my most important years with you, and yet, I never felt I belonged to you or your family. I’m still an outsider. My father’s house now belongs to Vatsala and I don’t want to be a burden on my brother and her. 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. I have my job, my school and my village. You don’t have to worry about me any longer. You and Sishir can visit me whenever you want.” (House of Cards, p. 218)

This reply sums up the failure of their life which actually in the later stages, was filled only with deceit and misunderstanding between the estranged couple. A woman who had no support from either her parents or from her in-laws, had indeed taken a bold path after accepting the reality. What makes this character of Mridula worthy of praise is she did not look back and brood about her past but was confident about her future, the confidence which was inherent in her due to her mental strength. After a couple of months, Sanjay who had realized his mistake, had gone to Aladahalli to bring back the light of his life, Mridula. The author has left to the readers’ imagination as to whether Mridula should forgive her wayward husband and give him another chance by starting their second innings in life. Or whether she should stand by her decision and lead a life with independence and mental peace which she derived from her work in her school at Aladahalli, a place which she considered as a paradise on earth.

In conclusion, ‘The Costly Price of Ambition’ article clearly brings out Henry James concept of psychological realism into the perception of individuals and their outlook. It also portrays the mental framework and introspection of the typical middle class average characters. Dr. Sudha Murthy in her own inimitable style brings out the realistic individual’s thinking pattern in her lead characters. She also gives a visual realism when she describes the family fabric in this novel.

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