

Dynamics of Human Relationships in the Select Works of Sudha Murty: A Study

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Abstract:

If civilization is the uniqueness of humanity and family is the main stay of civilization and joint action of men and women is the bedrock of a nation, it is imperative that without proper understanding among people, no nation can survive. If there is one ‘thing’ that governs any society and its institutions, it is human relation. But, unfortunately, human relationships have inevitably been the site for challenges, changes and compromises. This paper critically examines various shades of human relationships projected in the select works of Sudha Murty’s works. Many of the modern marital relationship are the fragile and weak. Modern men and women are career oriented and give less importance to values. In many cases women suppress their dreams and desire for family but when she is ignored by her husband their marital relation becomes fragile. The present study illustrates how human relations are influence by things like money, status, corporate culture, technology, and environment. The paper also shows how some virtues like love, caring, sharing, understanding, sense of gratitude, trust, sacrifice, responsibilities and duties can build healthy relationships.

Keywords: marriage, patriarchal society, family, relationship, trust, love, caring, sharing, understanding, sense of gratitude, trust, sacrifice,

Sudha Murthy, a renowned novelist, a short story writer both in Kannada and in English who was awarded Padma Shri for social work and education, R.K Narayan’s award for literature(2006). Being a chair person in Infosys Foundation, as a philanthropist she has dedicated herself to the society to implement techno oriented facilities in teaching for most of the Government schools in Karnataka. She got best teacher award from Karnataka State Government. She also explores the needs of development and humanistic approaches to the people through her writings. Sudha Murthy works predominantly broods

over the various problems emerge in society and how the individuals react against them.

Sudha Murty has written some novels and a handful of short stories which uphold the importance of human relationships in society.

Gently Falls the Bakula (2008) was Sudha Murty’s first novel written three decades ago in Kannada, and translated into English recently. The novel artistically reveals the evil effects of career driven man-women relationships in the family. Today’s women are climbing the corporate ladder and holding positions of power and their husbands attend the chores on the home front. But the shifting of career driven does affect a couple’s relationship, as many times, it results disintegration of relationships. It is a story about two people Srimati and Srikant who get marry and move to Mumbai to lead a happy life. But Srimati has to leave all her career ambitions at the cost of her family and Srikant’s professional excellence. In course of time Srimati feels neglected and lonely and is not shown proper care and concern by mother-in-law and husband. She finally resolves to leave her husband and goes for higher studies to US. The family disintegrates like Bakula flowers gently falls down.

The book Mahashweta (2007) portrays how a beautiful love relationship between wife and husband can be broken down due to abnormal expectation of charm and beauty from the partner. The novel shows how a physician Anand is forced to believe that a cosmetic disease called vitiligo can damage their family tradition and finally spoils his relationship with an artistic and beautiful girl Anupama. The novel tries to establish how wife and husband relations are damaged due over involvement of parents in family decisions. The novel also presents another wife and husband relationship between Sumati and Hari. Hari who is attracted by beauty of another woman Anupama becomes coercive in getting it from extramarital relationships. Shamanna and Sabakka relationships are almost driven away by the filial

commitments without any sap of family enjoyment and meaning.

Dollar Bahu (2005) delineates how man-women relationships are strained and strangled due to greed for money and wrong comparison. The story is about a mother-in-law who thinks that her American daughter-in-law (dollar Bahu) is better than her counterpart in India, since she lives in the land of dreams, USA. So, she desires to live with her son in America. However, when she lives a year or so in America, she realizes that the Indians living there face the same problems and challenges as those of living in India. She learns a costly lesson that "grass always looks greener on the other side". And when she comes back to India, she shows immense love to the daughter in law whom she felt to be a trash and her grandson. Finally, after getting a slap on feelings by her dollar Bahu, Gowamma understands the fact that, may be dollar can remove the poverty from one's life, but family is much more important than that of dollars. Steven Furtick rightly says "The reason why we struggle with insecurity is because we compare our behind the scenes with everyone else's highlight reel." [Steven Furtick, Comparison2005]

House Of Cards (2013) is another novel written by Sudha Murty. The major theme of the novel is the devastating effects of money on familial relations. The novel shows how the marital relation between Sanjay and Mridula utterly fails due to the lack of mutual faith between the couple. The dominating theme runs through this novel is that material riches may be means to build physical convenience and conveyances but result the disintegration of the lovely human relations. It is a story about a village girl Mridula who marries a doctor Sanjay seeing his honesty I his profession and commitment in the beginning. Both of them enjoy mutual understanding in serving people in charity work. Mridula starts earning money in order to support her husband to assist his services to poor needy. Later, Sanjay starts his own hospital which brings him unexpected success in the field and tempts him to amass easy money and starts spoil his professions ethics. His son Sishir is also a spendthrift and exploits parents. What hurts Mridula more is her husband's unethical practices in medical professional. She deeply gets hurts how money changes him to be insensitive to the importance of professional values in personal life. She gradually starts alienates herself away from Sanjay. Finally, Mridula leaves Sanjay in order to save her conscience from corruption. Huge building of hospital and palatial residential quarters collapsed like a

baseless house of cards. The message of the novel can be great enlightenment to the people who engage themselves busily in earning money at the cost of their family life will certainly one day reap its negative consequences. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn points out "....mutual lack of understanding carries the threat of imminent and violent destruction." [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Lack of Understanding]

The same theme of unbalanced and problematic nature of earning and using money among people and their shallow relations is seen in many of Murty's stories. The story Life is an Examination shows the attitude of a rich couple towards money. While one supports to philanthropy, the other is lured by its pleasure of spending money lavishly. The story, My Money, Your Money depicts how the crave for the financial independence of a wife and husband due to their jobs will impact their relationships. In the process of earning more, the wife Anita forgets to respect her husband, proves how values change with the change in income. The story Freedom of Speech projects the rights of a person and attitudes of people towards money where husbands spend the money earned by their wives without acknowledging the fact. Talking about importance of handling money, Sudha Murty says:

"Money is a double-edged sword that can be used to cut a fruit and also to kill a person. It is important to earn money, but much more important to handle money." [Wise and Otherwise,209]

Gratitude is one of the greatest virtues that binds people together and gives meaning to their relationships. The short story Gowamma's Letter shows how gratitude in relationships is important. Gowamma's who has only words of gratitude for a student like Sudha Murty, who gives her the acknowledgement that her own children didn't give. The story expounds how children neglect and exhibit their ingratitude towards their biological parents and put them to disgrace in spite of their selfless service towards their children. Sudha Murty acknowledges her art of storytelling to her childhood teacher Gowamma who taught her wholeheartedly. Murty proves that gratitude is the greatest virtue that goes beyond any familial relationships. The story The Grateful Tenant is a story, which depicts the gratitude of Ramesh, the protagonist, feels for an old couple Shyama Rao and Kamala Bai, who support Ramesh's education, stay and food in Dharwad. Ramesh with heart of gratitude is motivated and acknowledges their

sacrifice by naming his house Shyam Kamal. He humbly recollects how the old couple not only gave him space to live, but also shared the food, paid his fees from their meager income. Above all, Ramesh is benefitted by the spirit of encouragement and moral support by couple and challenges him to be a successful man in his life. Amy Collette aptly says that "Gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness and healthy relations." [Amy Collette, Gratitude]

Understanding one's responsibilities and being diligent in carrying out them will pave strong bonds between people is another dominate theme in the works of Sudha Murty. The story Each Mop Counts depicts the diligence of a nurse who does not allow the doctor to carry on with his work till the number of mops used tallied with the number of mops recovered. She is habituated herself to be committed and tries to enjoy her job with sense of satisfaction and commitment. The story May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Children shows Amba Bai the paternal grandmother, who spends her time fulfilling the responsibilities of looking after a large family. Though she was a widow, she cares for women's education and family planning. The story shows how the society treats widows in our society. Though she is an uneducated, she shows her diligence in every walk of life and cheerfully helps women while delivering children. She is meticulous convictions and she treats that job as her call not coincidence. Murty conceptualizes how today youth cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today, through these stories.

Murty throws a bundle of beams of light on the theme how the right and positive attitude towards people and work is an essential ingredient for healthy relationships in life. A Lesson in Life from a Beggar depicts how Meena, a pessimist, changes into an optimist when she sees a beggar and his granddaughter. They are moved how the beggar laughs and claps, and screams in the rain seeing that there is no traffic that day owing to the rains and enjoys himself. Meena jealous at the spirit of the poor and startles why she cannot experience that attitude. She learns a lesson that God doesn't create any creature on earth to be hopeless and helpless. Think Positive and Be Happy presents how a maid Girija values all the things in her life positively though she is an uneducated while Vasanta the family friend of Sudha Murty is cribbed and felt miserable by thinking about the uneducated. Murty ideologically pens all these incidents to help us to inculcate passion for life and in return improve a positive attitude towards life and people. She opines that life is still can be a great treasure if we are optimistic in spite of our tuff

journeys through the valleys of problems. She instills among her readers that optimism galvanizes a tremendous power and interest for life, if we engage ourselves as active with a doubled interest in day-to-day activities. She is right what Frances Hodgson Burnett opines about positive attitude, "If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden". [2018]

Sacrifice is another essential quality that is very much needed in relationships. The story Three Ponds depicts three stories related to the construction of three ponds. The first is a stand on Rama Gowde's promise of constructing a pond for the people of Naval Gund to please his daughter Neelima. It includes Bhagirathi's sacrifice of life to stand on a promise of providing water to the people. Her husband joins her in her sacrifice. To mark the simplicity in people we understand that their love is depicted as flowers, which bloom in pairs. Rahman's Avva is a poignant story where Kashibai raises Fatimabi's son Rahmaan after his mother's death with his own religion but loves him like her own son. The story is a delectation of human values amongst people belonging to a humble background who cultivate compassion and a magnanimity in heart depicted through the pictures of Mecca and Krishna on the same wall. It is true what Mitch Albom says about sacrifice, "Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else." [Mitch Albom, Sacrifice, 1997]

Self-respect and dignity is another feature that requires among people. Abraham Joshua Herschel says "Self-respect is the fruit of discipline; the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself." [Abraham Joshua Herschel, 2003] The story, Treat Me as a Human depicts a young couple in Ahmadabad, at the Law Garden road, selling embroidered purses, but they refuse to accept money given as a gift by Sudha Murty to their son as a gift for the first birthday. The lady returns the money portraying the values of self-respect and dignity in the poor. The story, The Old Man and His God, depicts an old couple who are happy and contented with what they have and wish to lead a life of dignity though they were poor. They do not want money given to them as a mark of pity, but are contented to live on what they believe is rightfully theirs. Though blind, the old man can sense that Sudha Murty has given him a hundred rupee note. He returns it back to her saying that the money is far more than what one generally submits as an alm to priest for puja ceremony.

Strikingly both through her works and words, Murty proves that empathy is very much demanded for healthy relationships. She strongly feels that there is tremendous power in empathy. The story Mother's Love teaches one to empathize with a mother who first wishes to give away her unwanted child to a rich couple, but the mother in her refuses to do so after the child's birth. It also depicts the story of another mother who leaves her helpless blind child as she was blind. . it is true what Meryl says, "The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy." [Meryl Streep,2007]

One has to keenly observe and understand the changing habits of others and environment around them in order to maintain good relationships in life. Change might not be fast and it isn't always easy but with time and effort, almost any habit can be reshaped. The story Alliances Invite shows how people change in life with the changing circumstances. It depicts matrimony, alliances, and the preferences of the present generation and young people's choice of nuclear families rather than joint families even before they get married. Sorry the Line is Busy is about material affluence spoiling normal life. It shows how youngsters prefer being hooked onto the telephone and the Internet, chatting rather than paying friendly visits to friends and neighbours. It shows the forgotten value of respect and affection for people. It also depicts how the present generation tends to abuse technology and gadgets.

The author observes how injustice, betrayal by loved ones, and disobedience will damage the relationships among people. The stories A Man Too Clever by Half, A Bond Betrayed on Rakhi Day, Sorry the Line is Busy, and Is Life Fair depict betrayal by loved ones, injustice, disobedience to elders' advice and self-centeredness. The story, Sticky Bottoms is a wise counseling to people to maintain others's privacy which demonstrates people to reform themselves instead of imposing themselves on others as an 'annoyance.' It helps to comprehend the value of thoughtfulness for others. The story, Two Faces of Poverty is a readdress of courage and generosity of a poor woman Leela, who adopts a child to share its responsibilities in the crushing poverty of life keeping humanity alive. It also depicts the self-centeredness of Ramappa who uses the money collected through charity to cure his son affected with cancer as a source of income to build a house.

Sudha Murty also feels how sharing and trust are the best intertwining threads in familial life. According to

Shakespeare, "Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none" [Shakespeare, Trust] The story of Yellamma and Madha a very poor couple illustrates the unique relationship in their marriage in the story Made in Heaven. The couple believes in sharing trust and happiness in their life full of hardships in a society where marriage is treated as a security measure and wedding ceremonies as a social event.

Sudha Murty mainly exploits the genre of short story to explore the harsh realities of life and communicate them to a wider audience. In order to satisfy and establish her credibility as a story teller, she selects various method and narrating techniques. With all her experiments, she is highly successful in imparting incomparable wisdom and practical knowledge to all groups of people of present and future without raising any scope for criticism.

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