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Emotional Isolation in Marriage: A Study of Women Protagonists in the Works of Sudha Murthy

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Abstract:

This paper looks at how a sense of emotional distance can slowly grow within marriage in the works of Sudha Murthy. At first, these relationships seem normal and settled from the outside but if we look a little more closely there is a quiet gap that begins to form over time. Through characters like Mridula in House of Cards and Anupama in Mahashweta, the paper tries to understand how two people can start feeling distant even when nothing openly goes wrong.

In most cases, this distance does not come from one big reason. It builds up slowly, through everyday life less conversation, changing priorities, and the way work and responsibilities begin to take over. The women in these stories do not always say what they feel but they are aware that something has changed. They carry this feeling quietly, without turning it into conflict. By looking at these small and almost unnoticed changes the paper shows how this kind of distance affects both the relationship and the person. It also shows how Murthy writes these moments in a very simple way, making them feel close to real life, as if they are part of everyday experience.

Introduction

Dr. Sudha Murty's works don't make an interpretation of emotional isolation in marriage as two people living apart or not talking to each other. This is a case of husband and wife living in the same house and doing their duties but gradually losing the emotional closeness that once held them together. On the surface, things appear stable, but one partner starts to feel unheard, unseen, and emotionally alone. This emotional journey is reflected in the lives of Mridula in House of Cards, Shrimati in Gently Falls the Bakula and Anupama in Mahashweta. Their situations are different but in each of them there is a gradual weakening of emotional companionship. Mridula is excluded from the decisions that shape her family's life. Gradually the demands of Shrikant's career replace the companionship that Shrimati once shared with Shrikant. Anupama, who is at the lowest ebb of her life, finds that the support she was expecting from her husband is missing. The loneliness they experience is not just about physical distance but about a lack of understanding, reassurance and emotional presence

Murty's telling of this experience is through mundane moments, not dramatic events. Mridula and Sanjay continue their married life under the same roof, in House of Cards, but as Sanjay gets more and more involved with his career, Mridula realizes that the openness and companionship that they once shared is no longer there. In Gently Falls the Bakula, Shrimati and Shrikant live together for many years but Shrikant's increasing professional commitments leave little room for the conversations and shared interests that once brought them together in their younger days. In Mahashweta, a new kind of loneliness is expressed by Anupama. Leukoderma develops in her and Anand's silence and his failure to stand by her during a tough phase makes her feel emotionally left alone even as the marriage is still on.

What these novels suggest, though, is that emotional isolation is not triggered by a single argument or painful incident. It grows slowly with less meaningful conversations. With feelings being repeatedly disregarded by one partner or with emotional support being replaced by silence. The women in Murty's fiction still care for their families and are loyal to their relationships, but they slowly begin to feel that their own feelings, fears and aspirations do not receive equal attention.



In my reading, Dr. Sudha Murty has shown emotional loneliness as one of the most subtle problems in marriage. It is often invisible because the external form of the relationship does not change. Family sticks together, responsibilities are taken care of and life goes on.Dr. Sudha Murty considers emotional isolation as one of the subtlest forms of suffering in marriage. It is seldom seen by others because daily life goes on as normal.

literature review

Dr. Sudha Murty's fiction has received a fair amount of scholarly attention for its realistic depiction of middle-class life, family relationships and women's experiences. Her novels have been studied from a number of angles including feminism, identity, marriage, self-discovery and social values. These studies certainly have contributed a lot to the understanding of Murty's literary vision, but the theme of emotional isolation in marriage has not been given as much attention.

S. S. Pachkudke, in "A Critical Study of Women Protagonist in Sudha Murty's Novels" deals with the women characters of Murty from a feminist point of view. The study discusses the battle of the protagonists like Anupama and Shrimati against social prejudice, gender discrimination and patriarchal expectations. It claims that Murty's women are slowly turned from voiceless victims into self-assured entities who can choose for themselves. But the paper is more focused on women empowerment. It does not explore the emotional loneliness which develops in marital relationships.This study is qualitative and interpretative in approach, to study emotional isolation in marriage in the selected novels of Dr. Sudha Murty, namely House of Cards, Gently Falls the Bakula and Mahashweta. The study relies on close textual reading on the experiences of the women protagonists and the gradual growth of emotional distance in their marital

Methodology

This research is mainly based on the chosen novels. The analysis focuses on characterisation, key events, dialogues, the development of the narrative and symbolism to understand how emotional isolation is created through the changes in marital relationships, traditional gender roles, silence in communication and the search for identity of the protagonists.

This study also uses secondary sources. These include journal articles, research papers, books and theses on Sudha Murty's fiction, feminist literary criticism, women's identity and marital relationship. The review of literature includes studies like "A Critical Study of Women Protagonist in Sudha Murty's Novels", "Sudha Murty's Feminist Take in Her Select Novels", "Tradition vs. Modernity: Depiction of Women and Gender Roles in Sudha Murthy's Fiction", "Analysing Marital Dynamics, Gender Roles and Self-Discovery in Sudha Murty's Novel Gently Falls the Bakula", "Status of Woman in Sudha Murty's Gently Falls the Bakula", "Transformation of Female Characters in Sudha Murty's Fictional World", "Mental Health Disorders in Marital Relationship: A Review of Sudha Murty's Fictional Characters" and "Generational Perspective of Feminism in the Works of Sudha Murthy". These studies help in understanding Murty's representation of women, marriage, identity, gender roles, emotional conflict and feminist concerns and they are the critical background for present research.

The research employs feminist literary criticism to analyze social expectations of women in marriage and psychoanalytic ideas that explore emotional loneliness, silence and the construction of identity. The emphasis of the study, however, is on the literary texts themselves rather than on the application of any one theoretical framework.

The study is based on a comparative method throughout. The study brings together the stories of Mridula, Shrimati and Anupama and identifies commonalities as well as noticeable variations in the representation of emotional loneliness in marriage. This comparative reading brings out how Murty positions emotional neglect as not an individual pain but a recurring issue for women negotiating love, duty, sacrifice and selfhood.

The aim of this methodology is to provide a text-centred and comparative study of emotional isolation in marriage, placing the novels of Dr. Sudha Murty in the larger discourse of women's writing, feminist literary studies and contemporary Indian English literature.

Marriage at the Beginning : Balance and Shared Life

In *House of Cards* the early days of Mridula and Sanjay's marriage feel simple and settled. They seem at no trouble with each other and life moves along without much strain. Their relationship grows in small ordinary ways through daily routines, quiet talks , and the comfort of being together.

At this point life is not about chasing anything big. What matters more is staying together and managing life in a



steady way. Mridula is happy with a simple life, and Sanjay, in the beginning, seems to be on the same page. There is no pressure, no rush just a feeling that things are as they should be. Sanjay is still finding his place in his profession, and Mridula stands by him without making things complicated. She slips into their life together almost effortlessly never asking for more than a sense of peace and steadiness. There's a quiet trust between them one that doesn't rely on constant explanations. Most of the time, they simply understand each other as if words would only repeat what is already felt.

What makes this phase of their relationship stand out is how unforced it all seems. This early balance becomes important later, because it shows how their relationship was rooted in mutual support and a shared understanding before things slowly began to change. This phase becomes important later because it shows what their relationship once was. It reminds us of a time when both of them were moving in the same direction, sharing not just a home, but also a similar way of seeing life.

In *Gently Falls the Bakula* the early days of Shrimati and Shrikant's marriage have a quiet settled feel. They don't have much, but they seem at ease with what they do have. There's no rush in their life, no pressure to prove anything. They understand each other in simple ways, and that makes their time together feel natural.

Shrimati is happy in these small beginnings. She looks after the home and spends her time reading and learning, something that has always been close to her. Even after marriage her interest in history and studies stays with her, and Shrikant, at this stage does not stand in the way of it. In fact, there is a sense that he respects her for it. Their conversations though not always long carry a kind of comfort.

There are moments when their togetherness feels complete in its own sitting quietly sharing daily routines or simply being around each other without any strain. Shrimati does not expect a grand life; she is content with what they have. Shrikant, too, seems grounded in the beginning still connected to the simpler life they once knew.

In Mahasweta , Anupama's marriage start with hope and happiness. She enters this new phase with trust believing that she has found a place where she will be understood and accepted. In the beginning, there is nothing outwardly wrong everything appears proper, settled, and socially acceptable.

There are moments where she feels she belongs where life seems to be moving in a stable direction. Her expectations are not very high she only hopes for understanding and emotional support. Anupama makes a sincere effort to fit in at her new house. She views marriage as a relationship based on respect and camaraderie, and she conducts herself with warmth and dignity.

But even in this early phase there are slight signs that things are not as strong as they seem. Anand's presence, though important, does not always feel deeply connected. Still Anupama holds on to the belief that time will strengthen their relationship. She does not question much and chooses to trust the situation she is in.

If we look at all three *House of Cards, Gently Falls the Bakula* and *Mahashweta* the beginning of marriage carries a similar feeling of hope and balance, even though each story moves in a different direction later. In House of Cards, Mridula and Sanjay share a simple, steady life where understanding comes naturally. In *Gently Falls the Bakula* Shrimati and Shrikant begin their married life with a quiet sense of closeness, where even the smallest moments together feel enough. In Mahashweta, Anupama enters marriage with trust carrying a simple hope that she will be understood and accepted.

In all these stories, the early phase of marriage does not carry any visible strain. Life feels settled, and the relationships seem easy to hold together. The women are not asking for much they look for respect a bit of care and the feeling of belonging somewhere. There is a sense that everything is in its place at least for that time. But it is this very calm beginning that makes the later changes stand out. Because things start on such a steady note, even small shifts begin to feel important. The novels show this in a quiet way that a relationship may begin with simplicity and balance but holding on to that same ease is not always as simple as it first seems.

Changing Priorities: Work, Ambition, and Distance

In *House of Cards,* the shift begins so quietly that it's easy to miss at first. As Sanjay's practice grows, his days fill up long hours at the hospital new responsibilities and a steady push to move ahead. Work starts taking up most of his time and attention. What once felt like a shared life slowly begins to feel separate not because of any open conflict but because there is less space left for the two of them. Mridula notices the change in their life when the conversations between them become shorter and the comfort which they fell in their relationship goes missing Even when they are in the same room, there is a distance that wasn't there before. She does not question him directly but she can sense that



his priorities are no longer where they used to be.

A similar shift can be seen in *Gently Falls the Bakula.* As Shrikant becomes more involved in his career his focus turns outward. Meetings travel and professional success begin to shape his routine. In the process Shrimati's presence in his life becomes less central. She remains in the background adjusting quietly even as the gap between them grows.

In Mahashweta the distance comes in a different form, but it is just as real. Anand's priorities shaped by social expectations and personal concerns, affect the way he responds to Anupama. The connection they might have built is weakened, not by constant conflict but by a lack of emotional support when it is most needed.

In Mahashweta the distance in Anupama's marriage doesn't come from long work hours or career pressure in the same way as the other novels, but it still grows out of changing priorities. At the beginning, she steps into marriage with trust, believing that she will be accepted and cared for. She carries herself with quiet confidence and does not expect more than a sense of belonging.

The transformation starts with her facing a health problem and the response she gets is not what she expects. Instead of support there is hesitation and withdrawal. Anand who seemed close, starts to distance. He is directed in his choices by self-comfort and social norms not by emotional understanding. In that moment, what mattered to Anupama care trust, and togetherness no longer holds the same place.

For Anupama, this change is deeply felt. She does not create a scene or argue loudly, but she becomes aware that she is standing alone in a relationship that once promised support. The distance here is not loud or dramatic it is quiet, but it changes everything. She begins to turn inward relying on her own strength rather than waiting for reassurance from others.

What makes her journey different is the way she responds. Instead of breaking down completely she slowly rebuilds her life on her own terms. The emotional distance she experiences pushes her towards self-realisation. In this way Mahashweta shows that changing priorities do not just create distance they can also lead a person to discover a new sense of identity even if that journey begins in isolation.

Across all three *House of Cards, Gently, Falls the Bakula a*nd Mahashweta the pattern feels familiar in a very everyday sense. As work and ambition start taking up more space, relationships don't break suddenly they just begin to change in small ways. Time that was once shared becomes limited conversations become shorter and slowly there is less effort a1to stay connected.

It often begins with practical reasons busy schedules, responsibilities, the need to move ahead but over time, these things start affecting how people relate to each other. One person moves forward with new goals, while the other tries to hold on to what once felt steady. The difference is not always verbalized, but it can be felt in the silence, in the way mundanity is no longer as warm.

What makes this pattern stand out is how quiet it is. There are no dramatic turning points yet the distance keeps growing. The novels show that when attention shifts too much towards achievement, relationships are often the first to feel the change. It's not that people stop caring completely but the space for that care becomes smaller, and over time, that absence begins to matter.

Silence In Relationships: when communication fades

In Gently Falls the Bakula the growing silence between Shrimati and Shrikant is one of the most noticeable changes in their marriage. It does not begin with a disagreement or any dramatic event. Instead, it enters their relationship gradually as life begins to demand different things from both of them. During their college years and the early period of their marriage they share a deep sense of companionship. They discuss their dreams spend time together and take genuine interest in each other's lives. In addition to loving Shrikant, Shrimati has complete faith in his goals and prospects. He gains recognition and new chances from his professional success, but he also has less time for the relationship that used to be so important to him. His aspirations are never thwarted by Shrimati.

She supports his decisions and quietly adjusts her own life around them. In doing so she slowly puts aside many of her own interests and aspirations. With time, she begins to feel a change that is difficult to explain in words. The conversations that once came naturally are no longer a part of their daily life. Although they still reside together, their emotional space is no longer shared.

In House of Cards, a similar situation unfolds in the relationship between Mridula and Sanjay. The distance between them does not begin because of a major disagreement or a dramatic incident. In fact their married life starts on a positive note. They face difficulties together support one another, and work towards building a better future. In the early years of



their marriage, Mridula is deeply involved in Sanjay's journey. She stands by him when he is still trying to build his career and shares the responsibilities that come with those difficult years. While Sanjay focuses on becoming a successful doctor Mridula takes care of the home and family making countless adjustments without ever drawing attention to her own sacrifices. She genuinely rejoices in his achievements because she sees them as something they have worked towards together.
As Sanjay's professional life expands, however, a gradual change begins to take place.

Inner Response: Awareness, Endurance, and Identity

In Gently Falls the Bakula, Shrimati's reaction to the changes in her marriage is quiet and thoughtful rather than loud or dramatic. She is not the kind of person who openly complains or creates scenes. Instead, she watches, reflects, and slowly begins to make sense of what is happening in her life. For a long time, she believes that standing by Shrikant's dreams is also part of her own happiness. She gives up her academic interests without much resistance because she sees marriage as something in which both people are supposed to grow together.

As Shrikant becomes more successful, Shrimati does not suddenly feel ignored. The distance between them grows so slowly that she almost accepts it as normal. She keeps waiting for the time they might spend together, but work, meetings, and travel keep taking that time away. Only after living like this for years does she realise that she has quietly moved away from the life she once imagined for herself.

What stands out most in Shrimati's character is that her silence does not mean weakness. She knows very well that the gap between them is growing, but she chooses patience instead of confrontation. She continues to respect Shrikant and never tries to stop his success. At the same time, she slowly understands that caring for someone else's dreams should not mean forgetting her own. This becomes an important moment in her emotional journey.

Shrimati's decision to leave does not come from anger or a desire for revenge. It comes from a deeper awareness of herself. She realises that the companionship she once hoped to hold on to is no longer there in the same way, and staying in the marriage without emotional fulfilment would only make her lose herself further. Going back to her love for history and learning is not just a career move. It is her way of finding the person she had left behind.

To me, Sudha Murty presents Shrimati's journey as a quiet search for identity, not as a rejection of marriage. This makes her journey feel so real and human, because it grows out of ordinary pain, silent endurance, and the courage to start over.

Loneliness Within Marriage

In Mahashweta, Anupama's loneliness does not begin when she leaves her husband's house; it begins the moment she notices the first white patch on her skin and realises that her life is about to change forever. What hurts her most is not only the disease, but the way Anand, the man who once loved her so deeply, slowly begins to drift away from her. When she needs comfort, he gives her silence. When she needs support, he keeps his distance. That silence becomes one of the hardest things Anupama has to bear.

The novel brings out this loneliness through painful incidents. After her illness is discovered, Anupama goes to her mother-in-law's house hoping for sympathy, but instead she is met with suspicion and cruelty. The very people who should have stood beside her treat her as if she has brought shame into the family. Anand, too, fails to protect her from this humiliation. He once admired her beauty and confidence, but after the illness, he becomes weak and uncertain. For Anupama, this is a deeper wound than the disease itself, because she realises that she is facing everything alone.

Another painful part of her journey is the loss of her sense of home. The house she entered as a bride no longer feels like a place where she belongs. Mahashweta shows that the deepest loneliness in marriage comes not from physical distance, but from the absence of love, trust, and emotional support. Through Anupama's painful experiences, Sudha Murty shows how cruel prejudice can be, but she also shows that a woman can rise again after heartbreak.

Identity Beyond Physical Beauty

In Gently Falls the Bakula, Shrimati's identity is never limited to her appearance. Although people notice her beauty, what truly distinguishes her is her quiet intelligence and her deep interest in history. Even as a college student, she is



known for her love of learning and her ability to think independently. These qualities become a natural part of her character long before she enters married life.

After her marriage to Shrikant, life begins to change in ways she had not imagined. She leaves behind the academic world that once gave her so much happiness and moves with him to Mumbai as he begins building his career. She does not see this as a sacrifice at first. Like many newly married women, she believes that supporting her husband's aspirations is part of building a shared future. She is content to manage their home, adjust to a new city, and stand beside him as his career grows.

As Shrikant becomes more successful, Shrimati is introduced to a world of corporate parties, formal gatherings, and social expectations. She attends these events because they are part of her husband's life, but she never feels that they reflect who she really is. While others admire success, wealth, and social status, she continues to find comfort in books, history, and quiet moments of reflection. The difference between the life she is living and the life she once imagined becomes clearer with each passing year.

There comes a point when Shrimati begins to ask herself a simple but important question: Who am I beyond being Shrikant's wife? This question does not arise because she is unhappy with marriage alone. It comes from the realisation that, in helping someone else fulfil his dreams, she has slowly moved away from her own. The young woman who once wanted to spend her life studying history has almost disappeared beneath the responsibilities she willingly accepted.

Her decision to return to her studies is therefore deeply significant. She is not trying to prove herself to anyone, nor is she searching for recognition. She wants to be connected with the part of herself.Choosing history again is her way of reclaiming an identity that had always existed but had been pushed aside.

To me, this is one of the quiet strengths of the novel. Sudha Murty suggests that a woman's identity cannot be measured by her appearance, her social position, or even by the success of her husband.

Traditional Roles of Women and Emotional Isolation in Marriage

Dr. Sudha Murty’s fiction has marriage as an important theme, but she does not show it as a relationship that remains static over a period of time. In many of her novels, women enter marriage with trust and affection and the hope of building a life together. They willingly shoulder family responsibilities because they believe that caring for the people they love is a natural part of married life. Yet, as the stories unfold, it becomes clear that this willingness to give often goes unanswered. The women keep supporting everyone around them, but very few take the time to ask how they themselves are feeling. It is this silent neglect that slowly turns into emotional isolation.

In a very mundane, but convincing way, Mridula in House of Cards echoes this experience. She doesn't consider herself to be making great sacrifices. She takes care of the family, cheers Sanjay on during the difficult years of his career and makes a peaceful home come naturally. Even when Sanjay becomes a famous doctor, she continues living the same simplicity. The difference is not in Mridula but in the atmosphere of the marriage. As Sanjay’s career starts to soar, the conversations they used to have are few and far between, and a lot of major decisions are being made without her knowledge. She does not object, for she thinks trust is worth more than arguments. Only much later does she realise that she has slowly become a spectator in the life they had once built together.

The same feeling of quiet loss is there in the story of Gently Falls the Bakula, Shrimati. She loves her academic life, but she does not feel that she is being deprived of something because she believes that marriage is walking together through each stage of life. Shrikant’s career takes them to Mumbai and she settles down there without a second thought. She learns to live differently, she entertains his colleagues, she makes their home a place to receive them. But as Shrikant moves steadily toward professional success, Shrimati is moving steadily away from the life that had once brought her happiness. She doesn't ask him to choose work and family. It is not comfort or security she misses, but the companionship they shared with such facility.



Mahashweta's story of Anupama is different but the imbalance is the same. She has developed leukoderma and hopes her husband will stand by her side. But she is left to face fear, social prejudice and rejection almost entirely alone. Even then, she does not respond with bitterness. She quietly leaves and begins rebuilding her life through education and work. Her silence is often mistaken for helplessness but it is the symbol of dignity. She will not beg to be accepted, but prefers her own dignity.

And reading these novels together I feel Sudha Murty is asking a simple but important question. Why is the responsibility of preserving a relationship so heavily put on women? Mridula, Shrimati and Anupama do not expect magical gestures from their husbands. They want respect, reassurance that they are equal partners and attention. If these are missing, their loneliness is not dramatic, not visible. It enters their daily lives quietly.

For me, this is one of the strongest aspects of Murty's writing. She does not portray her women as victims, nor does she turn them into rebels. Instead, she depicts them as ordinary women who slowly come to realize that caring for others doesn't mean losing yourself. Their stories suggest that marriage is only meaningful when both partners listen, understand and grow together. Without that balance, a marriage that's been long and successful on the surface can still leave one person alone in a very real way.

Conclusion

Dr. Sudha Murty's portrayal of marriage often highlights the problem of emotional isolation. In the lives of Mridula, Shrimati and Anupama she establishes that loneliness in a relationship is not always a product of conflict, separation or end of love. It is more often a creeping in, silently, when communication is limited, emotional support is diminished and one partner's feelings are slowly left unacknowledged. These changes are not usually dramatic and that is why they seem so true to everyday life.

What makes Murty's treatment of this theme distinctive is that it is focused on ordinary experiences. She does not depict her women heroes as helpless victims, nor does she depict marriage as an institution beyond hope. Instead, she shows how emotional distance can be created through small, repetitive acts of neglect, and how this distance influences a person's feelings of belonging to the relationship. Her women still perform their duties with dedication, but they also begin to realize that a marriage cannot be meaningful if only one partner continues to nurture its emotional basis.

However, Murty's novels do not end with despair. Mridula, Shrimati and Anupama's experiences suggest that emotional isolation can be a moment of self-reflection. Each woman confronts her loneliness and gradually discovers her own worth, finding an identity that extends well beyond wife or daughter-in-law. Their travels are not acts of rebellion but expressions of dignity, self-respect and emotional maturation.

I think Sudha Murty's biggest strength is that she narrates these experiences in a simple and honest way. She reminds readers that a successful marriage is not just about sharing responsibilities but also about empathy, conversation, and being there for each other emotionally. Through the silent struggles of her women protagonists she invites us to see that true companionship is built when both partners keep listening, understanding and growing together. A marriage can be as stable as it wants to be, but without that emotional connection, it can be a place of silent loneliness.