

Psychological Effects Caused by Marital Separation and the Stigma Around it with reference to *Mahashweta* by Sudha Murthy

Rahul Gautham ^{1*}, Dr. M. John Suganya ²

² Department of English

^{1*,2} PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore.

^{1*} dolarahul@gmail.com

² suganyajohn@gmail.com +91 9994924381

Abstract

The institution of marriage is an age-old cultural practice with great public significance. However it may collapse at times due to varied reasons. This article examines the life of a young girl who is excluded by her in-laws due to her physical condition known as Leukoderma. The cynosure of the paper is on the protagonist of the novel *Mahashweta* by Sudha Murthy. It studies the psychological and sociological effects caused due to marital separation. The social construct of marriage is questioned and the aftermath of separation leads to the outcome of the protagonist's self-actualization. The protagonist, Anupama comes to terms with her understanding of marriage and the crucial decision to disregard a similar situation. The protagonist's search for self identity is a result of the psychological impact brought about by the detachment. This study investigates the aftermath and the longing mindset that eventually changes the perception of the individual.

Keywords: Marital Separation, Social Construct, Self-Actualization.

Introduction

Sudha Murthy is known to reflect the realities in society in a very elementary and impactful manner. The language used in the novels are comfortably comprehensible and aimed to avoid the usage of complex words laying the emphasis that language must be used to communicate effectively than the use of fancy words and intricate sentences. Sudha Murthy's writings have a flavor of common lives. *Mahashweta* is the story of Anupama and her plight caused by the stereotypes of society and how she is deserted due to it. The article tries to convey how individuals are psychologically affected due to separation from marital institution. The novel includes many stereotypes that are imposed on individuals to act in a certain way leading to a conditioning of the individual and their perception about life. The fall in the life of the protagonist is due to a skin condition that causes patches on the skin. This leaves her in a state of exclusivity

and lack of inclusive nature. This is a remark on the unrealistic expectation and obsession with physical appearance in the society. Insecurity due to physical aspects can drive people to drastic decisions. Such a situation can also deprive them of the respect they deserve. Body issues are a result of systematically engaging in conversation of an ideal that may not be practically attainable or sustainable. Such instances leave an impact in the consciousness of individuals and will lead to an imbalance in the physical and mental state of what is required as per unrealistic standards and what is practically attainable. The medical conditions that are seen in individuals can be treated but certain peculiar instances do not offer such a resolution. The acceptance of such a state is not open for all individuals and moreover it leads people to disregard such people.

Anupama from *Mahashweta* has aspirations to achieve in her interests and wishes to lead a peaceful, simple and meaningful life. As time passes and situations lead to meeting new people, her life takes a turn halting her activities which will in the end prove to be her escape and also become something she yearns to do. The path of her life changes when her in-laws find out about her diagnosis with Leukoderma. The medical condition is seen as a bad omen. It is believed someone who has Leukoderma will bring bad luck to the lives of the family. This leads Anupama's in-laws to throw her out of the house. Her own family does not welcome this particular incident. Anupama's stepmother despises her regardless of this incident and does not wish to provide a space for her. Here, the importance of relations and how certain situations expose our kith and kin can be understood. This exclusion leads Anupama to a state of solitude and she even contemplates suicide. Anupama still hopes that her husband will return from his business travel and will accept her regardless of any sort of condition. This is the delaying factor that stops Anupama from taking a decision to go ahead with her life instead of hopelessly waiting for something to happen. This hope makes her wait for the time to unfold and reveal her fate. Due to practical difficulties she approaches a friend in a different city and turns a new leaf.

State of Disturbance

All through the aftermath of separation, Anupama has a trauma to surpass and overcome. The psychological effects are caused due to a number of reasons and cannot be pointed towards one particular occurrence at least in this case. The accumulation of adverse instances takes a toll on her. The contemplation departure from one's life is the pinnacle of psychological imbalance. The willpower to go through strenuous

times is shattered in the case of the protagonist and has driven her to end her life. The root cause for such a result is the emotional attachment that can be seen in people especially in the case of marriage. It is practically difficult to subtract the aspect of emotion when it forms the basis for relationship between two individuals. The absence of respect for emotions leads to a very vulnerable state of mind. Impulse rather than ethical thinking will drive the individuals. This will not result in a qualitative way of life. Therefore it is crucial to express one's likes or dislikes with the intention to resolve if at all an issue arises.

The ambiguous state of mind will lead to delirium causing individuals to act in ways out of their sane mind. New habits are formed that are not analyzed for its problem causing nature. Acts of self-destruction are not seen out of line and many calls of voids occur before a drastic action is committed. Such thoughts to commit self-harm need not be a result of an action and its consequence but in most cases there is a driving force behind an action. Thoughts as such are given more power and importance when they turn into actions because a few or more thoughts may cross our minds that are way out of line than a sane mind would think of doing. The aftermath of a particular incident can make the person to act in a certain way. That is when the action gains importance of the origin of the initial thought.

In the novel, *Are You Afraid of the Dark* by Sidney Sheldon, a similar scenario is recognized. The widows Diane Stevens and Kelly Harris face a threat to their life owing to the situation they find themselves in. The mysterious deaths of their husbands leave them in a state of shock and agony. However as the story progresses it is evident that the two women take a stand for themselves and fight what comes their way. This shows the competitive nature of individuals and the idea of the survival of the fittest. The two women do not succumb to the pressure imposed on them rather take on the situation with might. This is a result of positive affirmation and the effects brought about by the power of taking a strong stand.

Similarly in *Custody* by Manju Kapur, it is of importance to notice how the events unfold as a result of separation and lead the individuals to a state of turmoil. The partners choose to part ways for one or more reasons that may or may not be ethical in nature. The struggle of women to become independent in the patriarchal society is clearly depicted in the novel. The novel revolves around how women are in search of themselves and how they are not made to do so due to the pressure thrust upon them. The lives of the women as well as the men who struggle as a result of separation is portrayed in the individuals' mindset and how they make the upcoming decisions for themselves as well as the children who are in their custody. The result of a divorce leaves Raman to pity him. The life of the child is left to be a question that is caught up in this

adversity. The uncertainty of marriage is very well reflected in the novel and questions the purpose of such practices.

Social Construct

The social construct in the society sculpts the way the individuals in it function and how they lead their life. These constructs are formed as a result of practice and over time become unwritten rules. Questioning these rules or setup will lead to identifying the hidden agendas behind these rigid rules. Such practices need not be tolerated and will lead to new practices. This shift from one way of thinking to another will cause a difference in opinion and further lead to diversity in the way we lead our lives. These norms are deeply imbedded in the minds of people that they do not raise the thought of questioning the practices in everyday life. All the unwritten rules are believed to be moral and ethical as it has been followed in the past and that failing to do so will result in uncertainty. The fear of failure is what results in an unjust manner of seeing and doing things.

The institution of marriage is also one such construct. There are advantages and disadvantages to things just like two sides of a coin. In the particular case of Anupama, marriage has left a deep impact and contemplation in her mind. Towards the end it is evident that she does not wish to marry again showing that she has discarded the concept of marriage in her life. Anupama's thoughts have been reflected in her actions. This action is the breaking of the construct or stereotype done by the protagonist. This particular decision helps to prove the understanding that one's personal space and their passion will bring them peace and a sense of achievement. Discarding of social constructs cannot be done as a whole because of practical situations but one can always find a balance between what is expected and what can be done on a personal level. Anupama has in fact taken a strong stand on the decision of not allowing a construct to take place. It is highly disappointing to discard an individual for the sake of a supposed flaw in their appearance. This brings up the question of how physical appearance is seen in the society and to what extent it can change the life of people is for the better or worse, the latter in this case. The importance of financial freedom adds confidence in the lives of individuals. The protagonist does not give up on life due to her shortcomings and pursues her passion and dreams. Taking a stand in one's aims to do well in life will result in personal growth. It is necessary to reassess our beliefs and to what extent it sculpts our own lives as well as the lives of the people who are around us.

Such constructs are deeply imparted in the people and a divorce is seen as a sin and leaves a baggage for them to carry especially in the case of a women. Even today there are such outlooks but it is a situation of betterment. In olden times, women have lost their husband are subject to certain practices that are degrading as an individual. Many symbolic practices to convey that the woman is a widow have been performed. In the movie *Padmaavat* directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, the practice of Sati has been showcased. The woman as a result of her husband's death in war does this practice. Such practices go on to show the condition of the mind when a similar situation occurs. This leaves a deep psychological impact in the lives of people who end up separating from their partners.

Conclusion

The anxiety caused due to separation takes a long period of time to recover and get back to normal. This is due to the condition caused as a result of being a part of an individual's life. This sudden change cannot be accepted by many and will lead to a state of delusion that changes their outlook on many things. Separation of individuals in a marriage leaves an impact on the people that are related to those individuals too. The mind as a result no longer accepts blind faith in people and begins to set healthy boundaries for the own good. The aftermath of this treatment is the idea that is being pondered as to how decisions are made when a similar situation arises sooner or later.

References

- Chugh, Komal. "Mahashweta by Sudha Murthy." *Some Great Books*, 04 Apr. 2020, www.smgr8books.wordpress.com/2020/04/04/book-review-mahashweta-sudha-murthy/.
- Kapur, Manju. *Custody*. Random House India, 2011.
- Mudde, Raggi. "Sudha Murthy– An Iconic Women, Philanthropist, and Author." *Karnataka*, 01 Dec. 2016, www.karnataka.com/personalities/sudha-murthy/amp/.
- "Mahashweta by Sudha Murthy." *The Reader Planet*, 29 July 2018, www.thereaderplanet.wordpress.com/book-reviews/mahashweta-by-sudha-murthy/.
- Murthy, Sudha. *Mahashwetha*. Penguin Books, 2005.
- Padmaavat*. Directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2018.
- Sheldon, Sidney. *Are You Afraid of the Dark*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.