



Emotional Violence against Women in the Novels of Sudha Murty

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Abstract

Emotional violence against women is a pervasive yet often overlooked form of abuse that inflicts profound and lasting harm. Unlike physical violence, emotional abuse can be subtle, insidious, and difficult to recognize, leaving victims feeling trapped and invalidated. This insidious form of violence encompasses a range of behaviors aimed at undermining a woman's sense of self-worth, autonomy, and dignity, including verbal attacks, manipulation and controlling behaviors. This article delves into the intricate dynamics of emotional violence against women, shedding light on its far-reaching impacts from the select novels of the prominent Indian woman author Sutha Murty.

Key Words: Emotional violence, victims, self-worth, dignity

Among all the types of violence, emotional abuse is one that is underappreciated. According to UN Women, emotional abuse encompasses several acts such as persistently criticizing an individual, diminishing their talents, using derogatory language or other forms of verbal abuse, causing harm to their relationship with children, or preventing them from seeing friends and family. Less frequently acknowledged than physical assault, emotional abuse is typically perpetrated by a close friend or intimate partner. Living with an emotional abuser, forces one to experience feelings of helplessness, guilt, hopelessness, manipulation, and dread, all of which can contribute to a loss of self-worth, confidence, and dignity.

Murty has given more focus to this form of emotional violence silently endured by women in her novels. *Mahashweta* is an inspiring story of courage in the face of betrayal and disappointment. This book talks about the emotional trauma of Anupama, the protagonist and ends by offering hope and courage to the readers by making her heroine emerge as a woman who rewrote her destiny. Major part of the story describes the mental agony of the girl whose physical beauty was sorely ruined and the strength of character was challenged by a sudden affliction of leukoderma after her marriage. Anand married the adorable Anupama fascinated by her lucid voice, acting skills, unpretentious attitude and decent approach. He had to face all the opposition from his family and relatives to marry Anupama. She made all the possible reconciliations to be accepted in the family. Unfortunately her life changed suddenly when white spots appeared on her body. “She began to suspect that it could be leukoderma, and became numb with fear. She was too shocked even to cry”(47).

In actuality, she got the white patch when a piece of red-hot coal, brought by Anupama to light the incense for goddess, fell on her foot. Murty describes the perturbed mind of Anupama, “Anupama could not share her agony even with Anand. She brooded constantly and prayed to God to save her from this ordeal. But the patch continued to grow, making her terrified of what the future held in store for her” (48). Researches show that men are likely to leave their spouses when they are diagnosed with chronic diseases. Marriages are reported more likely to end in divorce when the wife is ill. Murty puts across this social discrimination when Anupama learns from the doctor that she has been affected by vitiligo, a kind of leukoderma, “The doctor was aware that tiny white patches like that had ruined many marriages, shattered many hearts, broken many engagements. Most patients who learnt that they had leukoderma were overwhelmed by the social implications of their affliction” (49). The fear that the white patch on her skin might lead to the breakdown of their marriage started haunting her every minute of her life.

Anupama's emotional state seemed to have grown worse each day and she was completely distraught. After learning about her illness, her mother-in-law and other relatives cruelly abused her. A feeling of misery engulfed Anupama (55). The likelihood of a nervous breakdown was almost induced by the mounting stress. It provided her mother-in-law with an opportunity to cut her off from Anand's life. After being returned to her

father's home, she endured humiliations from her stepmother. Her in-laws and spouse didn't take her situation seriously.

Anupama's emotional condition is shown to have worsened with each passing day and she was utterly grief-stricken. When the mother-in law came to know about her disease, the merciless way she was treated by her husband's family and relatives was breaking her down.. The increasing stress almost induced the chances of nervous breakdown. It gave her mother in law a chance to remove her from Anand's life. She was sent back to her father's house where she had to undergo humiliations from her step-mother. Her in-laws and spouse didn't take her situation seriously. Without any fault of her own, her spouse and family abandoned her. She was so driven to the breaking point that she made the decision to take her own life. Murty depicts the emotional abuse a married lady experiences in a compassionate manner through the character of Anupama.

Murty talks on Shrimati's emotional wounds in her book *Gently Falls the Bakula*, which tells the captivating narrative of Shrikant and Shrimati from the little Karnataka town of Bhandiwad. Her initial years of marriage to Shrikant were marked by their mutual dedication and spirit of sacrifice. Shrimati provided for the family by working for a private company. She was compelled to leave her work in order to concentrate on her responsibilities at home. Meanwhile, Shrikant was elevated to the company's vice president position. He was able to devote more time to his profession and he progressively advanced in status and pay. His focus on Shrimati decreased as he ascended the ladder of prosperity. For Shrimati, things had changed since she began to miss her husband's attention and time. The enhanced living in a chic apartment, servants to obey, or a sizable cash account did not make up for the contentment and serenity she had previously experienced. Murty expresses the psychological needs of a woman and how she loses her strength when failed to get that, when she writes,

What happened to Shrikant now? The love, affection and sharing of ideas and dreams had disappeared. He hardly talked to her about the company or other business matters. The only time he spoke to her was to assign a list of chores for her to do. For him she had undergone so much opposition, criticism and nastiness from her in-laws. She had even given up her career, only because she really loved him. (118)

None of the wealth that Shrikant had given Shrimati could be enjoyed. Her heart ached for the days they spent together, enjoying pure moments free from the glitz of fleeting joys. Shrimati was extremely passionate about the past. She declined a scholarship to study history because she had to start a family. Even though Shrikant knew how much she loved the subject, he yet belittled her deep interest in history and treated her cruelly, making her feel angry. He called it a worthless subject and argued that it could not feed her. Murty clearly verbalizes the pain and humiliation a woman may go through, when her passion and interests are underrated and trivialized,

Shrikant was criticizing Shrimati's favourite subject and belittling her hero, Ashoka. Though Shrikant did not know much about Ashoka, he said all that because he wanted to hurt Shrimati. Business had taught him that. To insult a person, you don't need to attack him or her directly, one can do that by attacking what that person admires or respects. (126)

The physical and psychological estrangement between them grew so intense that it consumed the bonding between them, which eventually lead to their final separation.

In *House of Cards*, Mridula is shown as another victim enduring emotional distress as a result of a betrayal of trust in her marriage. Mridula married Dr. Sanjay as she was moved by his honesty, social concern, and sincerity. She found a job, supported Sanjay with his financial responsibilities, and allowed him to focus on helping the underprivileged patients at the government hospital. They donate a portion of their meager income to help the underprivileged and destitute.

Sanjay, discontented with his salary, established his own hospital, which elevated him both socially and financially. Sanjay became an unscrupulous medical professional due to his inflated status and sudden excess of cash. He lost interest in the importance of morals in daily life. Mridula was hurt, and over time, a significant rift between them developed. Talking to his wife seemed like a waste of time, so he began to measure time in terms of money. He lost sight of how his wife's earnings supported their family throughout hard times and when they were first opening the private nursing home. He ridiculed her and made taunting remarks about her job and the negligible amount of income that was drawn out of it. This made her feel small and worthless. Her friend Anita

feels sympathy for her and comforts her saying, “Mridula, do you know that when men get more money than they need, their wife starts looking ugly to them? They think that they could have done better. They forget that they were nothing when their wife married them and that she has stayed loyal to them through their ups and downs”. (148)

The fact that Mridula was unable to nurture her son Shishir in the manner she desired more irritated her. He showed little regard for his mother and idolized his father. Shishir used to be annoyed by Mridula because she would constantly boring him with lectures. He embodies the archetype of an impoverished adolescent who is obsessed with obtaining every luxury that his father could afford. When she learned that Sanjay had begun to conceal the accounts from her and had amassed a sizable amount of black money, her emotional agony intensified. Such things could never enter their lives because of her moral compass. She grew irritated at learning about his covert transactions and made her think “five years and I was not even aware of it. Isn’t this infidelity too?”(183) Studies have revealed that financial adultery is a major problem in many relationships and can seriously erode mutual trust. Mutual trust and loyalty are the cornerstones of relationships, and when these are compromised, the bonds between people erode and break. Murty describes the impact of breaking trust in a married life and writes about how it cripples the emotions of the one who gets cheated:

In one moment, Mridula had lost all her confidence. She reached home without tears and did not let her driver know that anything was wrong. She went inside her bedroom and closed the door. She was so hurt that she could not even cry. She was filled with shock and anger. ‘I can’t believe that Sanjay has cheated me like this,’ she said to herself. ‘I’ve lived with complete belief and trust in him ever since we got married. How am I going to live with him for the rest of my life? I don’t know what to do (184).

Her emotional anguish leaves her completely defenseless and helpless. The bruises from emotional violence may not show on the skin, but they leave lasting marks on the heart. The mutual faith was evidently destroyed when her husband began acting as though the money was his to do with as he pleased, and he was under no

obligation to share anything with her. Upon discovering she had been duped, she remained silent and refrained from making any inquiries or charges. She went remarkably silent and said nothing.

She was sobbing uncontrollably. She avoided social interactions and skipped work. She was no longer hungry. She wanted to let someone know how sad and disappointed she was. Sadly, she was at a loss on how to relieve herself. The events surrounding Mridula caused her to become so stressed out that she had to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Rao, who gave her advice on how to deal with mental stress. Murty conveys the frequently disregarded and subtle inner struggle that many women engage in on a silent basis through the figure of Mridula.

In “Dollar Bahu”, Gouramma treated her two sons and her two daughters-in-law differently based on how much money each contributed to the family. Her younger son Chandru made money in the United States. So she loved him and his wife. Girish, her second son, made money in India in rupees. She so paid no attention to him or to his wife Vinuta. Gouramma was maddened by the dollar's absolute dominance in the world and traveled to live with Chandru in America. Jamuna didn't treat her with respect or let her husband get close to her, which quickly demoralized her. She witnessed the defining characteristic of American lifestyles such as absence of affection, love, engagement, and sympathy. Her condition there resembled the precarious condition of Phatik in Rabindranath Tagore's “The Homecoming”. She realized, “The grass was always greener on the other side. America was no longer a fancy land for her. There was pain, misery and happiness there, as in any other country. It was no longer a country of mighty Dollar, which made magic. It was not paradise.”(136)

In Dollar Bahu, Vinuta, an orphan taken care of by a kindhearted distant relative plays the role of an ordinary middle-class Indian woman who experiences mistreatment and continual comparisons between herself and the family's other rich daughter-in-law by her mother-in-law. Besides being an intelligent student, she was a good vocalist.

Following the death of her caretaker uncle, Vinuta relocated to Bangalore. She started working as a teacher. She chance to run upon Girish, Shamanna's son, who was employed at the same school. Girish desired to wed Vinuta, and Shamanna was pleased with his son's decision as well. He was successful in persuading Gouramma, his status-conscious mother. Vinuta was able to fit in with her in-laws' household. Girish showered

Vinuta with affection and was incredibly kind-hearted. He told Vinuta to accept the fact that his mother would occasionally be harsh with her.

After six years, Girish's brother Chandru, an engineer in the US, returned to India. Proposals for marriage began to arrive from all sides. Gouramma was impressed by Jamuna, who happens to be the daughter of Krishnappa, a wealthy real estate developer. The opulent exhibition of gold, silver, and jewels at their country house completely captured her attention. The wedding arrangements were all made quite quickly. Vinu was solely supposed to take care of the household. Jamuna became the pride of Gouramma after joining the family.

After Chandru left for the United States, Jamuna made up an excuse to return to her parents' home, where she just made an appearance to let them know that she was leaving for the country of opportunity. As Gouramma continued to sing about her wealthy daughter-in-law, Vinuta grew weary of hearing it. She ought to tolerate the taunts from her sister-in-law Surabhi as well. Girish attempted to decline a buddy Shekar from Chicago's proposal for his sister Surabhi as it was discovered that he was having an extramarital affair. Without realizing the truth, "Gouramma burst out at poor Vinuta, pouring all the anger she felt towards Girish on her daughter-in-law. She blatantly disregarded the fact that she should be gentle since Vinu was pregnant . . . You are the siren that bewitches my son in a wrong direction" (64). Vinuta was terribly wounded by the way her mother-in-law expressed her hatred towards her. Surabhi in turn joins her mother and yells at Vinuta:

'What Amma is saying is nothing but the truth,' screeched Surabhi. 'You are jealous of me. Ever since you have come, I have noticed that you create a fight between Amma and Girish. You are doing everything possible to stop me from going to America. You want that I should live like you, earn my living by hard work and count every paisa. Learn from Jamuna. She is so generous and caring. You think if I become richer than you, what will happen to you. You are also afraid that if this house has to be sold for my marriage, then you will become homeless and face difficulties. You are selfish to the core. Those are your real intentions and to hide them you play

this stupid drama thinking you can fool everybody with your innocent smile. But you can't fool me . . . (64).

She went on accusing Vinuta and started talking ill of the way she had been raised. Vinuta had to put up with all the impeachments silently. Vinuta was shocked to receive so many ugly remarks about her and her family. She tried to explain herself but in vain.

Later Surabhi got engaged to a lawyer who satisfied all the conditions of Gouramma like owning a big house, a farmland and a fancy car. The way she was ill- treated and humiliated was growing unbearable to Vinuta. Girish was not able to understand the intensity of emotional hurt his wife was undergoing. He took it in a lighter vein. "As days went by, Vinuta shriveled up, like a flower closing its petals to protect its soft vulnerable core. But then, life had trained her to live in pain. She did not take long to adjust to the new oppression she felt in the house" (67).

The topic of Surabhi's wedding date was discussed. They intended for the wedding to take place in December because Vinuta was due in August. However, Jamuna only has time to travel in July because she had a trip scheduled for December. Because Gouramma believed she could not afford to harm Jamuna, the wedding was scheduled at a time that worked for Jamuna. For her delivery, poor Vinuta was forced to relocate to her birthplace of Dharwad. Since everything was determined by the financial contribution she made, her absence would have had no bearing on the family wedding. When Chandru came to see the baby in Dharwad, Vinuta confided to him that she was not happy at all. She could not bear to hear Jamuna being compared to her. . She gives vent to her frustrations, "I don't want and can't compete with anybody. But it is evident that the family does not need me anymore" (72).

Gouramma had a biopsy for a breast lump, and Vinuta took good care of her despite all the unjust treatment from her in-laws. After then, Gouramma departed for the United States to care for Jamuna throughout her delivery. The consideration, care and presents that Jamuna received from her in-laws made Vinuta think of the disdain and mistreatment she experienced in a similar circumstance. Vinuta felt so inferior because of the

discrimination and unfair treatment she received from her family. She was beginning to feel unworthy every day and was losing confidence.

It is not unusual for Indian mothers-in-law to exhibit partiality for a daughter-in-law who has more wealth. Murty uses Vinuta's story to illustrate how countless middle-class married women "train" themselves to suppress their emotions in order to keep their marriages together. In contrast to the other Murty heroines, Vinuta's situation can be given less weight because Shrimati, Mridula, and Anupama experienced emotional abuse at the hands of their life partners. In her narratives, Murty refrains from solely portraying her protagonists as victims of patriarchal oppression. Rather, she elucidates that challenges faced by women stem not only from men but also from other women within familial structures. Rejecting the notion of placing blame solely on men, Murty intricately depicts the multifaceted nature of gender dynamics within families. Her lead female characters embody the silent emotional struggles endured by women across society, navigating through a labyrinth of cultural, economic, and psychological constraints. Through her storytelling, Murty illuminates the nuanced complexities of women's experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate webs of oppression that women confront.

Sudha Murty's novels serve as poignant explorations of the idea of emotional violence against women, often weaving intricate narratives that shine a light on the subtle yet pervasive forms of abuse that women endure. Through her characters and their experiences, Murty delves into the complexities of emotional manipulation, societal pressures, and patriarchal norms that contribute to the oppression of women. Whether it's through the stifling expectations placed on women or the insidious ways in which they are made to feel inferior, Murty's novels capture the nuanced dynamics of emotional violence with sensitivity and depth. By portraying the emotional struggles and resilience of her female protagonists, Murty not only raises awareness about the prevalence of emotional abuse but also offers a platform for dialogue and reflection on how to challenge and overcome it.

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