

# Moral Fragility and the Illusion of Success in Sudha Murthy's House of Cards

Mrs. Mehrunnisha. S<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Geetha. M<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar & Assistant Professor,

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, KG College of Arts and Science, Saravanampatti, Coimbatore – 641035

## Abstract

In her book, *House of Cards* (2013), Sudha Murthy is a very subtle and yet incisive reflection on professional ambition and moral weakness in the context of the modern Indian middle-class world. It is set in the context of the neoliberal dreams and social mobility, as the ethical decay of Dr. Sanjay unfolds as his unremitting drive to achieve material success gradually undermines his sense of ethical sensitivity and affectivity. By contrast, his wife, Mridula, is an element of moral persistence; through her unnoticed sacrifices, she underlines stability in the house and allows moral performance to continue.

This paper cross-examines the text with the philosophical perspectives of the virtue ethics and liquid modernity developed by Alasdair MacIntyre and Zygmunt Bauman respectively, therefore, positing that Murthy foresees the inherent unsteadiness of success that does not rely on moral values. The *House of Cards* is a metaphor that eloquently explains how success based on a superficial frivolity of wealth, status, fame, instead of virtuous quality like honesty, accountability, etc. can be as shaky as a house of cards. Through foregrounding gendered labour and dissociation with emotional affect, this novel is a commentary on existing discourses of neoliberalism that equate success with accumulation. The paper then places *House of Cards* in the context of the most influential ethical literature in the Indian English fiction which questions the aspects of ambition, ethics and sacrifice of human beings in the name of professional achievement.

**Keywords:** Moral Realism, Virtue, Ethics, Neoliberalism, Gender, Materialism.

## Introduction

Modern Indian English fiction is increasingly signatory of moral panic brought about by as well professional competition, neoliberal economic logic, and globalization. The liberalization of the Indian economy has reestablished the meaning of being a middle-class and has reestablished success in measurable values such as money, status and prestige. Within this consequence, morality comes second to efficiency and success, which brings about the consequence in what may be called as a moral vacuum in the day-to-day life.

The *House of Cards* by Sudha Murthy intrudes into this cultural aspect by questioning the morality speculations behind successful tales and not like the experimental, or the sensational fiction, Murthy pursues a lowly realist line, which predetermines the banal domestic and professional experiences. Her tale is that of an expert who is better than Dr. Sanjay with mobility, a slow decay of ethical responsibility and emotional is in the offing connectedness. Along with his course of action is the life of his wife Mridula

whose sacrifices emotional, professional, are generally unrecognized in a patriarchal order to benefit male desire.

In this paper the writer tells that *House of Cards* is a morally realistic work, this is intriguing and yet is imbued with the ethical consequences of the neoliberal desire though fails to offer any formulaic moral instruction. On the distinction of inner and outer good that was established by MacIntyre and how the paper demonstrates the element of moral instability of the liquid modernity by Bauman. Murthy unveils the unsteadiness of success which has no ethical ground. The novel ultimately is an indication that professional success without integrity does not bring about fulfilment but rather to alienation and collapse.

### Review of Literature

The criticism of the fiction written by Sudha Murthy has frequently drawn attention to her easy language social commitment, moral orientation, and social commitment. According to Rao (2016), Murthy was regarded as a social realist whose plots are prefiguring ethical lucidity rather than stylistic experiment. Sharma (2019) also considers her work to be didactic, which is based on a set of traditional values that place greater emphasis honesty and selflessness. This is due to several scholars recognizing Gandhian ethical principles in the writing of Murthy. Prasad (2018) insists that her fiction is a moral vision based on responsibility and service, locating individual behavior in a larger social context. While such readings they also recognize the ethical issues that Murthy raises, they often downplay the complexity of her interaction with modern socio-economic reality.

Recent researches on Indian English fiction have shifted to ethical realism and middle-realism class morality. According to Mukherjee (2017), post-liberalization stories are more and more depicting the characters that have to find a way of operating morally in competitive business situations. The latter is followed up in (2020) that argues that too, under the influence of neoliberal culture, ethical is created dissonance because material success is no longer required to be bound to moral responsibility. Regarding gender, Nair (2021) notes that women featured in the fiction of Murthy tend to serve to stabilize the morality of male ambition, taking up the emotional bill. This article develops on these observations, making *House of Cards* a commentary on neoliberal ethics that foregrounds and ethical work gendering, and moral vulnerability.

### Theoretical Framework: Ethical Fragility and Moral Realism.

*House of Cards* can be read in the context of moral realism as a fruitful concept. Moral realism does not attribute some abstract moral absolutes, it merely investigates the problem of ethical dilemmas as they come out of the experience of life. This tradition is followed by Murthy in her story integrating ethical dilemma in the daily work and home environment. The virtue ethics provided by Alasdair MacIntyre is an essential perspective of explaining the decline of Sanjay. MacIntyre differentiates internal goods that come as a result of ethical practices and external goods, e.g., money, prestige, and power, communal responsibility. Sanjay's failure is that he only pursues the external goods, and this causes him to give up the virtues similar to empathy, faithfulness and integrity. The ethical concept in the novel is further explained by Zygmunt Bauman in his idea of liquid modernity concerns. Success and the moral systems are destabilized in the societies that are liquid modern more and more provisional and unstable. Like a house of cards, the success of Sanjay manifests itself stunning but not long-lasting since they are not anchored on moral obligation.

### **Material Desire and Moral Decadence.**

The driving force behind the moral change in Sanjay is the material ambition. Initially described as an obedient and competent person, he slowly adopts a system of values which makes him equate a value on career growth. Murthy does not introduce this change as a dramatic fall but as a sequence of gradual concessions, the importance of erosion of ethics usually taking place through normalization and not transgression.

When economic profit becomes the most significant index of success, the novel notes, then the whole idea of success is destroyed considerations of ethics are gradually pushed aside. This description is indicative of greater neoliberalism dynamics, in which competitive spirit is encouraged by the professional setting and disheartened moral reflection. The decisions taken by Sanjay can be used to explain the role of ambition in changing perception in ethical vision towards instrumental outcomes.

This criticism is quite successful since Murthy does not use direct condemnation. Instead, the narrative uncovers the psychological price of being obsessed with material things and exposes that ambition relational and moral values are being pushed out by it, slowly.

### **Professional Success and Emotional Alienation.**

Naive Sanjay loses his inner world even though he is recognized as a professional. Murthy breaks the belief that success is a sure-footed achievement by depicting excess as cognitively corrosive where deprived of any ethical accountability. Sanjay's is alienated with his wife, family and eventually with himself which brings out the irony of accumulation without satisfaction: neoliberal success.

This contradiction is explained within the framework by MacIntyre. Sanjay has put his emphasis on external goods disregards the ethical standards he used to make his profession meaningful. His medical career, instead of being a service to the morality it is turned into a means of self-promotion. The upshot is no empowerment but moral fatigue. Mridula is the soul of the moral concept in the novel. Her sacrifices although socially accepted disclose the ambition-based gendering imbalance in the patriarchy. She relinquishes personal speculations to carry on the career of Sanjay which could be termed as being ethical and emotional labor.

Notably, Murthy never romanticizes this sacrificing. Rather, she reveals that it is invisible, implicating that there is a propensity of women moral labor to pay off systems that have marginalized them. Mridula's endurance is opposite to the weakness of Sanjay which supports the major ethical of the novel argument: it is the stability which is the result of moral commitment, rather than achievement.

### **The Metaphor of *the House of Cards*.**

The title acts as a ruler metaphor which summarises the ethical vision of the novel. A *House of Cards* seems to be a stunning work but it is structurally unsound. Similarly, Sanjay's success is not long lasting since it is built without ethical roots. This analogy compares well with the characterization of liquid modernity present in the text by Bauman where through accomplishments are tentative and effortlessly demolished. The symbolism of Murthy then flows more than the failure of single persons, critique, to indirectly attack a greater cultural situation that favors speed, clamor, and development at morality.

### **Discussion and Findings**

The investigation provides some major findings:

- Ethical fragmentation is expedited by the neoliberal ambition.

- The success on the outside is not guaranteed of emotional or moral satisfaction.
- Gendered sacrifice acts as a stabilizing force by being invisible.
- Ethical integrity offers narrative and psychological integrity.
- Moral realism facilitates a non-didactic long term social critique.

Indeed, all these findings by themselves make *House of Cards* a substantial ethical intervention in modern Indian English fiction.

### Conclusion

*House of Cards* presents a very sharp analysis on the topic of ambition, morality, and ethical frailty in a neoliberal social order. Sanjay is morally disintegrated, which is contrasted with the moral disintegration of Mrsidula. Ethical resilience, Sudha Murthy thinks about the prevailing discourses which propose that being considered a successful person is being materialistic. accumulation cum visibilitats. The novel shows a description of the instability of constructed accomplishments on worldly goods and renewing the principle of enduring worth of integrity and accountability.

This paper argues that the work by Murthy should be given more critical consideration not only due to its social relevance and, because of its advanced interaction with the ethical realism. In an era where *House of Cards* is a sign of success and it is measured by metrics instead of being meaningful remind that without ethical basis, the most extraordinary buildings will be filled with destruction.

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