

**Re-visiting the face of the Decline of Marriage
And Rise of New Families through Manju Kapur's
Home and Sudha Murthy's *House of Cards***

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Tummala Sai Mamata*
Dr. Bollavarapu Raju**

Abstract

*Naturally everyone likes to select the best in the world. It can be a job, a house, a vehicle or a partner. When the choice criterion is opened for selection, it is obviously the beautiful and attractive thing that is ultimately opted. In the modern world, physical appearance is more counted than the internal beauty. There is no doubt that God has created everything beautiful in this vast universe, but it also true that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, so we cannot say why an individual gets attracted to a thing while the others may find it not so attractive. Infatuation is the dominating factor for multiplying love marriages and subtracting arranged marriages. As we come across many changes in the fields of science and technology, the changes in the emotional levels of people are also noteworthy. The days have come that the girls are also able to express what they need from their partner. The present article is going to focus on the sensitive issues of one-sided love marriages in traditional families. Manju Kapur's *Home* (1992) and Sudha Murthy's *House of Cards* (2013) deal with two beautiful women caught in the web of conventional family systems and patriarchal societies. Are they enjoying a contended life or suffocated between the family segments and their affection?*

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*Ph.D Research Scholar, Lecturer in English, Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada

**Head, Dept of English, Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, new ideas about marriage began circulating in India through the work of the women's movement and gradual changes in the legal status of women. Changes in the perceptions of marriage were heavily influenced by the work of "American Moderns," writers who embraced new ideas including feminism and pushed these ideas into the mainstream. Manju Kapur and Sudha Murthy contributed to this flow of new ideas through their writings, in which they explored failed marriages full of unfulfilled expectations, applauded marriages that maintained their standards of companionship, passion and equality, and experimented with the possibilities of "free love." Out of these examinations and emerged requirements for modern marriage: shared interests, work, and sexual feelings, as well as equality. While they embraced some popular radical ideas of the day, unlike many moderns she did not abandon the prospect of marriage for "free love." Instead, she suggested a marriage based on passion and companionship rather than convenience and necessity. Through their writings we can better understand the major transformation that occurred in Indian culture due to the redefinition of relationships between men and women. Literature is the true replica of the society that we live in. A writer chooses from the society. When one starts reading a fiction or a drama, they certainly feel the characters in it are somewhere related to the lives of their near and dear. So society is the best inspiration for the writers to pen down their feelings. Manju Kapur and Sudha Murthy were professionally teachers and are acquainted with many youngsters and their lives. Naturally their writings show the people in their surroundings. But the small difference that is observed in these two writers is that one confines themselves to North Indian culture and the other to South Indian traditions. But the common thing shared by these two feminist writers is the position of women in two different metropolitan cities.

Manju Kapur's *Home* is the saga of a true conventional family which had migrated to Delhi at the time of partition. Lala Banwari Lal, the head of the family had reached to Delhi with his carrying wife, a son and a daughter. All the years of turmoil was swept off leaving them fresh to start again. His exuberant elder son Yashpal was the real key of

his success behind his business at the Karol Bagh area. Lala Banwari Lal was an exemplary for the patriarch. He moved heaven and earth to be on cloud nine in the new place. He married his daughter Sunita to Murli, a trader from Bareilly. The alliance proved to be unpleasant swallowing the life of Sunita. Yashpal and Pyare Lal helped their father to extend their business activities.

Yashpal was trapped by his mother-in-law who expected that rightly a boy would become mad to marry her elder daughter Sona. As the name suggested Sona was so alluring that Yashpal decided to marry her. He said he would become a celibate if his parents were not going to talk to the girl's parents. Being a true patriarch, Lala Banwari Lal was not serious about his son's proposal. "They were traditional business people. In order to remain financially secure, and ensure the family harmony that underpinned that security, marriages were arranged with great care." (3). They couldn't understand how their sensible son could fall in love with a girl whom he had seen for a few seconds? This is an unanswered puzzle. Lady Banwari Lal was so furious about the matter. "The girl must have done black magic to ensure him." (3).

Lala Banwari Lal's practical mind could understand the agony of his wife's shock. But at the same time he realized that it was their mistake that they didn't search a girl for their son who was already 25 and was the age to become a father. As a father he could understand his son's love, he consulted Babaji to get the horoscopes matched. But his wife started threatening him that she would kill herself. Lala Banwari Lal convinced his wife, "If he wants a love marriage, he shall have it. He has worked sincerely all these years. He has never had a holiday, never taken one paisa. His younger brother travels with me, spends what he can, while the elder one is simple and retiring. Who knows what he might do if he is thwarted in the only thing he asks for?" (7).

Finally Sona could enter as the eldest daughter-in-law of the Banwari Lal's family. A love marriage purely arranged on the basis of the boy's love towards the girl. Is Sona happy at her in-law's house? Naturally as Yashpal was keen to marry her, she has become the queen of his heart. But Lady Banwari Lal was not happy to welcome the new

daughter-in-law. Things became much worse when Pyare Lal married according to his parents wish a girl from their own community. Sushila, though not beautiful as Sona but was from an affluent family and had better options than Sona. In addition to this she was blessed with two male kids adding pleasure to their lineage. Sona's couldn't conceive and this made her to worry a lot. She spends most of her time praying god or doing fastings.

Sona was blessed to look after Sunita's son Vicky. But Sona couldn't shower her love on the motherless child. She wanted her own kids. At last she had Nisha and Raju and Vicky was made a care taker to look after them. The agonized Vicky who couldn't receive any love from the family turned to harass Nisha sexually. Nisha was terrified and not knowing what to do, she was send to her aunt Rupa's house. Rupa was not stunning as her sister. So her mother couldn't beguile a boy and she was married to an ordinary pen pusher who stayed near to her sister's house. Rupa was neither blessed with wealth nor was free from troubles. The tenant who stayed in their house made her life miserable. But she was happy than her sister as she feels, "From the time we were children; she was the special one, always noticed for her fairness, her prettiness, and every day I had to hear how well she would marry, while I would be lucky to find anybody, dark and ugly as I was. For nine years now, I have seen her become more and more depressed. For a condition she shares with, I have to console her all the time" (27).

Rupa too couldn't conceive but could become a real mother to Nisha. She could make out Nisha's problem and planned to send her only once in a week to her house and her Jijaji made sure she was not left alone with Vicky. Premnath and Rupa made Nisha a modern girl well equipped in studies rather than following cultures of the family systems. Sona, who was a true traditionalist, was unhappy to see her daughter's culinary arts when she returned to her house after her grandfather's death. For Sona a girl should be brought up only to marry and take care of her family. As there was no supervision unlike in her aunt's house, Nisha started to neglect her studies and developed adolescent attraction towards a boy called Suresh. It was too late before the family knew about the affair and she was locked in the house.

Sensitive Nisha developed eczema, a skin disease. Besides this disease and being a mangli she couldn't get married and Raju got married to Pooja. Sona was once again sad as her sister Sushila was blessed with two daughter-in-laws from reputed families. Though now she had no mother-in-law or Vicky (as he was already married) to get on her nerves her life was still miserable as she had Nisha's problems to think over. She was partial to her son than to her daughter. Raju could neither excel in studies nor in business on his own. Nisha became a successful entrepreneur by starting Nisha creations. Sona was not happy with her daughter's creative achievements. She was always worried about Nisha's marriage and at last she was married to Arvind, a widower and had twins a baby boy and a girl.

Sona had no wishes about her marriage or life. Her mother made her a toy and she acted according to her wishes. Though she was adored by her husband she missed an independent status in the family. Rupa rightly feels for the occasion where her brother-in-law had brought a gift to her sister when she conceived for the first time, "There lay not only a gold filigree necklace but matching dangling earrings. How had Yashpal managed to buy a necklace for his wife and that too for no recognized occasion, without having to buy one for every other woman in the family? Was Sona's pregnancy going to divide them?" (33). Sona was a good home maker but was it alone enough for her to lead a contended life? She was sandwiched between the patriarchal powers and independent status. While Rupa and Sushila had independent status in their families, Sona had to exercise her powers according to the wishes of the elders. She suffered to hide her feelings when she was handed over the duty of looking after Vicky. She knew well, "The house had many eyes quick to detect neglect, and many people quick to attack with their conclusions" (26).

Whether it is a love marriage or an arranged marriage women aim for an independent status. It's a common belief that women in love marriages have more independent powers to work out than the women in arranged marriages. But unfortunately in this novel Sushila and Rupa who had arranged marriages were happier than Sona who was blessed with beauty. Though Rupa was not blessed with wealth, she supplemented

her family income by supplying pickles to the shops. Premnath and Rupa had good discernment between them to lead a gleeful life. Sushila had never a chance to worry about life. Everything was meticulously planned in her life. For Sona except marriage, everything was bag of nerves.

The second novel *House of Cards* from Sudha Murthy's pen is another example for a woman who had led a contended life until money played a vital role in her life. Mridula, the protagonist of the tale *House of Cards* hails from a simple village background. The writer introduces the Aladahalli girl as "She was different. She had enormous enthusiasm for life and unlimited energy for reading, cooking and sketching. She wanted to spend every minute of the day fruitfully. It seemed that the sun rose for her and the rainbow colours were meant for her. Every day was to be lived to its fullest and every beautiful minute to be enjoyed."

(2). Such a high-spirited girl who became a government teacher was adored by all the village people. She was talkative and always liked people to be around her like her father Bheemanna. Though they were rich neither Bheemanna and Rukuma Bai or Krishna and Mridula never showed it. They enjoyed a serene life in their tranquil village.

Dr. Sanjay Rao was an assistant of Dr.Jog, in the Bombay hospital. When Dr.Sanjay attended his friend's wedding at Hubli, he was struck by the magnificent beauty of Mridula. The next day he went to Aladahalli to deliver a packet given by Dr. Jog to his mother Champa Bai, who had adopted him. Champa Bai was a widow who stayed near to the house of Bheemanna. As she was out of the village, Bheemanna as usual entertained Sanjay with his great hospitality. Mridula has set her foot in the heart of Sanjay and he couldn't forget her even after he returned to Bombay. May be his love was true and powerful. So he could meet Mridula again in Bombay for the second time when all the teachers came to a tour to Bombay as a part of annual trip arranged by the Hubli Teacher's Association. Mridula fell ill and as recommended by Dr.Jog she stayed in the hospital under the supervision of Dr.Sanjay. Sanjay had a good time with her as they had a ride over the city.

Sanjay didn't want to miss Mriduala. But his timid nature didn't allow him to express his love. Sanjay was physically handicapped. He

had one hand short than the other and was mocked by others for this reason. As an intelligent and well trained emotional observer he wrote a letter to Mridula expressing his deep thoughts of fondness to her. Mridula who was humble showed it to her parents and with their approval she married Sanjay and settled in Bangalore. She was shifted to Bangalore and with her unusual charm she attracted the principal Muniappa's family, who later looked after her son Sishir when she was busy with her job. Sanjay got a seat in his PG in Gynecology and as he was an extra ordinary student he performed well and was posted in Government hospital. His talent was swept under the carpet in the hospital caught between the head and the other doctors.

Dr. Alex and Sanjay worked in the same hospital in Bombay and he travelled to Middle-east to make money. He was successful and he often visited Sanjay in Bangalore as his wife Anita and Mridula were good friends. Dr. Alex encouraged Sanjay to start private practice as he knew the dirty politics prevailed in the government sector. But Dr. Sanjay was hesitant as he was committed to serve the poor and his job gave him a permanent income. With Mridula's support he at last resigned from his job as he was also vexed up with transfers and started his own practice with a partnership deed from Alex. Dr. Sanjay became a famous gynecologist and his status knew no bounds. Dr. Sanjay's mother was a practical woman who worried about money than anything else in the world. His sister Lakshmi wanted to show off things to her sisters at her in-laws house and was a spendthrift supported by her husband Sankar. Soon the things were out of control and Lakshmi lost everything.

Sanjay never interfered in the financial matters. It was Mridula who could manage things well and Sanjay could concentrate on his professional growth. Once he started earning more he gave powers to Mridula to look after the financial matters. Mridula was under the impression that her husband didn't manage to do things beyond her knowledge. She was happy as her life was scrupulously planned. She had a husband who was famous medical practitioner in the city and a son who followed his father's genius and stepped into the same profession. She was shocked to realize that her husband maintained separate pass books for his mother and sister. He gave job to Sankar, house, gold and

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lakhs of money to Lakshmi and a big car to their son Anil. All this happened without her knowledge. She was shocked but wasn't controlled by her husband. She was depressed and was treated by a psychiatrist. Sanjay didn't worry about his wife nor tried to pacify her feelings. Money had changed him a lot and he started to take revenge on the people who had once played with him when he was an ordinary man.

Mridula understood that she couldn't bring about change in her husband's attitude. She applied for a transfer and left to Aldahalli on their 25th Marriage anniversary celebrations leaving Dr.Sanjay alone. Sanjay was shocked but his male ego didn't allow him to bring back Mridula. Sishir could realize his mother's greatness only when he met Neha. With Sishir's encouragement and his self-reliance Sanjay left to Aladahalli to get his precious wealth back. Anita rightly opened his eyes as she said to Sanjay, "I don't want to tell Mridula to come back. She won't get any happiness from you. Sanjay you were lucky to get married to her. You should have been grateful to God. Now that you've lost her, all the money you earn from your nursing home is of no use. You may not like what I'm saying, but a true friend should tell truth even if it hurts."(222)

Though Mridula was from a rich family and was so stunning she agreed to marry Sanjay without thinking of his handicapped hand. She was a good support and fortune for his present status. She was always open to her husband. She was a humble woman with a helping hand. She was shocked to see Ratnamma's house. But she didn't dare to express her feelings to her husband. She wondered, "What will my mother, Rukuma, think about this house? Would my parents have allowed me to marry Sanjay had they seen his family home?" (67). How could Sanjay forget that she was the only woman who loved him despite his short hand? Would any other girl in the place of Mridula like to accept him? Sanjay showed his real attitude forgetting the past. As Anita said, "I've known Mridula well for the last twenty-three years. She shared all your difficulties. Your mother or sister or son can't take her place. Sishir will marry and have his own family. After that, a father is just a guest. Regarding your mother, the less said the better. Your sister just looks for a chance to make money off of you. Nobody can match Mridula in

terms of simplicity, innocence and affection.” (222). Yes, Sanjay really lost a valuable diamond.

The two protagonists Sona and Mridula were beautiful and simple woman who came from conventional families. They were adored by their partners and entered into patriarchal headed families, tried to make their families happy but they were trapped in the webs of customs and relations. Mridula, who was from a rich family transformed herself to suit to the needs of her husband but was ultimately deceived by her husband. Sona sacrificed her whole life for safeguarding the fame of the family. May be the two female protagonists were evolved from the novels that started with “H”, *Home* and the *House of Cards*, which symbolize happiness and humbleness. “To judge rightly an author”, wrote Samuel Johnson once, “we must transport ourselves to his time and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries and what were his means of supplying them.” Sudha Murthy and Manju Kapur have rightly addressed the current situations prevailing in the society.

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