



# Subjugation of Ethical Value over the Monopolization of Materialism and Hedonism in Sudha Murty's *House of Cards*

Mr. Shekhar B. Vispute and Dr. Bhupendra N. Kesur

## Abstract:

The present paper aims at inferring the two prominent issues; the subjugation of ethical value and the monopolization of Materialism and Hedonism through the textual and critical analysis of Sudha Murty's novel *House of Cards*. These are the serious concerns which need to be considered by the people in order to survive the human existence. *House of Cards* is the critique of materialism and hedonism in the world society. The present paper is an attempt to bring out the serious concerns of loss of ethical value in the postmodern world due to the growing impact of materialism and hedonism. Domineering nature of Hedonism and Materialism has been shown through its monopolisation over the eminent values. It has been a serious issue which is explicated by Sudha Murty through *House of Cards*. Moreover, *House of Cards* depicts the significance of ethics through characters who sacrifice the most eminent things of materialistic world only for cherishing their ethics, moral values which are the only source of their eternal pleasure.

**Keywords:** ethics; hedonism; human values; materialism; monopolization; subjugation

## Introduction:

Sudha Murty, a disciplined Indian English Writer has acknowledged the philanthropical perspectives in her writings. She has contributed to the Indian English literature through her many fictional and non-fictional works which encompass the larger parts of ethics, moral values as principles. Her writing touches the human heart and mind with a sense of humanitarian approach. Ethical value is predominantly presented in her every piece of literary work. The concept of ethics or ethical value is discussed here, which is known as the moral philosophy of human life.

## Ethics—The Moral Philosophy of Human Life:

Ethics is called as a moral philosophy which advocates the spiritual values of human life. Being a branch of philosophy, it has extensively influenced human life with supreme principles which are necessary to make life peaceful and content. Ethics refers to the customs and habits designed by the people over a long period and those become the source of their happy and peaceful life. It is the spiritual phenomenon which renders the most precious moral values that every human being has to follow and cherish for being a good human

being. “Ethics discusses men’s habits and customs, or in other words, their characters act, and considers what it is that constitutes the rightness or wrongness of those principles, the good or evil of those habits” (Mackenzie 1). There are various human values which are the result of cherishing moral values which need to be transmitted to others instead of money and material assets. As humans, everyone should love and respect others. Love, sympathy, emotions, humanity, spirituality are the forms of ethics which unite people with one another. The world is still united with others due to the existence and execution of ethics in every part of life.

Though it is right to say that ethics encompasses the enormous parts of human life yet the situation of human beings in today’s global and materialistic world has become serious due to the decline of ethical values. The minds of people are being changed due to the attraction of material world. Under the affluence of materialism, their ways are mistaken. They are falling victims to the false ideology of materialism. This is the most earnest issue which needs to be thought on. The people should try to cherish and revive the ethical values which are rapidly being declined by those who wish to enjoy life with all the material comforts. In *House of Cards*, Sudha Murty has beautifully shown the triumph of virtue over vice and ethical values over the material values through portrayal of a couple—Sanjay and Mridula. Mridula leaves her husband for cherishing ethical values and virtues. Her character stimulates the others that everyone should stick to the ethical values which can unite one with another in respect of love, humanity and emotions.

### **Monopolization of Materialism and Hedonism in *House of Cards*:**

After World War II, the perspectives of human beings seem to be completely changed due to the realization of uncertainty of life. This can be considered as one of the prime reasons of change in the behaviour of people. They started looking at life practically. Nowadays the circumstances are so critical. The people who once followed ethics in their lives now there remain no space for those ethical values in their lives. Their minds are preoccupied by the material philosophy of life that is leading them towards being practical, selfish, and hedonist. Such drastic change in human behaviour has been a universal problem which needs to be sorted out. Humanitarian perspectives are dominated by the materialistic perspectives. Science and technology have been giving many unbelievable gifts in the form of manufactured material assets that comfort the human life. The people are enticed by these material assets. They want all the luxurious things at all cost. There is an enormous competition in accessing the pleasure and comforts from these. In so called ‘dog-eat-dog world’, the human beings are getting cruel and ungrateful to others. They are ready to kill others for material assets like money and property. This is happening only because of growing impact of materialism and hedonism.

Materialism is itself a philosophical form of monism which opposes to the spiritual and intellectual existence of human beings in the world. It refers to the belief and a doctrine that highest values in the world are only the success and progress. It focuses on the material possessions. It considers the universe as a matter not any true spirituality and intellectuality. Materialism has prevailed over the western society and

the countries like India are also influenced by the prevailing philosophy of materialism. It seems that every aspect of human life is preoccupied with material values.

In *House of Cards*, the impact of materialism is clearly shown through the character of Sanjay, his mother, Ratnamma, and his sister, Laxmi. Sanjay being a doctor does not have attraction for money and luxurious things in the beginning of *House of Cards*. He seems to be emotional and content with what he has. But later he is transformed from a simple boy to a corrupted, practical and hedonist by the influence of his mother, Laxmi and the circumstances. The narrator tries to point out the traits in Ratnamma. "Ratnamma had a lucrative money lending business. She was shrewd and, at times, ruthless. When she lent money, she charged an extremely high interest rate. People frequently commented, 'Ratnamma is a hard-hearted lady'" (Murty 44). She collects money but never spends for herself and others. Laxmi marries with a clerk. He earns little but Laxmi makes him spend money over her luxurious life. Mridula, Sanjay's wife remains as she is. She does not fall victim to the enticeable life of city. She always sticks to her ethical doctrines which are the real source of her simplicity, satisfaction, emotion, love, respect and humanity.

Sanjay becomes corrupted when he resigns from the government hospital and joins the private practice like his other friends. He is greatly influenced by his mother and sister who always insist upon him for earning a lot of money. He lived in Bombay and Bangalore and hence he knows the living style of people in city. It creates envy in Sanjay. He too longs to have everything that others have. This feeling brings the drastic change in the character of Sanjay. Mridula opposes him for joining private practice. Because she knows that Sanjay will lose his humanitarian perspectives after joining private practice. Her thought comes true. Sanjay runs after money and luxuries forgetting the real purpose of being a doctor that is to serve the poor. It is observed from the following narration from the text-

Sanjay figured that he did not need to declare all his earnings to the Income Tax Department. So he had black money as well as white. Shankar was good at handling this. He was strictly instructed not to talk about money matters at home or outside and was paid handsomely for his discretion. Shankar ensured that only the white money went to the bank. Sanjay also had a share in Alex's new factory and running. All bribes were paid using black money. (Murty 144)

He loses his kind, emotional and helpful nature which has been liked by Mridula once. His transformation leads to the breakdown of his relation with Mridula. She tries to make him understand but he does not listen to her because he is immensely prevailed by the materialism. As a result of it, Mridula has to leave him for cherishing her own ethical values.

Hedonism can be seen through the character of Sanjay who is transformed from a simple man to a Hedonist. Hedonism is a substantial philosophy in postmodern era. The minds of people are predominantly occupied by this philosophy which entices them for accessing the pleasure from the material assets. Hedonism seems to be opposite to the rationalism. It claims that pleasure is the highest degree of human life and rationalism is of the view that virtue is the highest good of human life. Both have one common thing that is pleasure but only their ways of accessing it, seem to be different. Hedonism holds its views that- "Pleasure is the natural end and motive of human action. We always seek pleasure and avoid pain. Everyone desires what he thinks will be pleasurable and for the sake of pleasure which he expects that it

will give him. Things are desired not for their own sake, but only for the sake of pleasure they will give us. Pleasure is the natural object of desire” (Sinha 119).

Despite of being rational and sensible, the people are being the hedonists. Sanjay is a victim of such hedonism after being a doctor. He is shown as good and kind boy with humanitarian perspectives. Mridula gets ready to marry him though he is economically poorer than her. She respects him due to his human compassion. He is physically challenged with a short hand yet she accepts his proposal of marriage. She accompanies him in all situations even after the marriage because she too works in government school. She does not demand anything from him when Sanjay works in government hospital in which he gets little salary. Being a doctor, Sanjay feels envy of his colleagues who prefer to do private practice instead of working in government hospital on less salary. It seems to be the first step of his transformation into a practical and hedonist person. The jealousy leads him towards the loss of his sensibility and kindness.

When he resigns from his job in government hospital and starts doing private practice, it causes to the breakdown of his relationship with Mridula. Because he completely gets changed. He runs after money and luxuries. He forgets the real purpose of his profession. He does not serve poor patients. Mridula tries to make him understand that what he is doing is absolutely wrong. But he is fully enticed by the hedonism. When Mridula gets depressed, she becomes mentally disturbed. She holds her husband responsible for her mental illness. She takes treatment from Dr. Rao who is very good person. He speaks to Mridula about her husband, Sanjay- “Mridula, your husband’s nice man. But he has a big ego because of his success. Money makes him feel powerful. He has an inferiority complex and an old value system where men are supposed to be the dominating partner. Unlike you, he’s a complicated person. That’s why he’s never established good communication with you” (Murty 214). At last, Mridula has to leave him for cherishing her own ethical values. Sanjay is the representative of a modern man whose aim is to access pleasure from all the possible ways through material assets on the ground of the loss of loved ones.

### **Inculcation of Ethical Values in *House of Cards*:**

*House of Cards* is best known for the inculcation of ethical values through its relevance and applicability in the context of contemporary societal scenario. Sudha Murty tried to signify such values through the depiction of the characters in the select novel. It has been explored through the female protagonist, Mridula. She has inherited ethical values from her father who lives in small village. He inculcates such values in Mridula in order to make her a good human being. She seems to have great compassion for mankind and poor people. Due to inculcation of ethical values in her, she remains simple, kind, helpful, and happy without falling prey to the materialistic and artificial things. It is a notable aspect in the character of Mridula that she does not accept the artificial values losing her identity like her husband, Sanjay. She married with Sanjay despite of his physical disability and poverty. She believed that he would serve the poor people in the society as a doctor. Her belief is shattered at last when he becomes a corrupted and unlawful practitioner. He amasses money and material assets which can give him pleasure. But Mridula does not like to live in his house of artificial values. She is self-reliable woman who is very much empowered. She can never lose her ethical values at the cost of acceptance of artificial values. As a result of it, she decides to give up her husband to cherish her ethical values which have been inculcated in her by

her father. She performed her all responsibilities towards her husband and son. But both seems to be ungrateful to her and do not have any value of Mridula's sacrifices for them. Mridula could do everything for Sanjay only because of her adherence for ethical values. Sanjay thinks that he is superior to Mridula in all respects. At last Mridula leaves him and then he realizes that money is important in life. There seems to be the conflict between ethical and material values. Sanjay and Mridula seem to have the influence of two different values inculcated in them. Mridula represents ethical values that she inherits from her father. On the contrary, Sanjay follows material values that have been instilled in him by his mother. Despite of two different views and values, they come together at last. It shows the subjugation of ethical values over the material values.

Sudha Murty tried to ascertain the significance of ethical values which need to be inculcated in the young generations to survive the humanitarian perspectives in the society. In the world of material assets, it has been difficult to instil values among the people due to the extreme fascination of materialistic luxuries. Sanjay is one of such people who lose his eminent values to achieve material success and seek pleasure from it. But he realizes when Mridula goes away from him. Her true love and emotional attachment enables him to think of her and goes to her village to get her back. Sanjay's transformation is the result of the ethical values inculcated in Mridula who strongly follows. Her ethical values prevail over the artificial values of her husband. She always followed the values that have been inculcated by her father. Her beliefs in ethical values make her character special and different from other characters in *House of Cards*.

### **Subjugation of Ethical Values in *House of Cards*:**

Decline of ethics from the human society has been a serious concern nowadays. The people deliberately neglect such ethics, values of life which have been enlightening their lives with eternal pleasure and contentment. Sudha Murty pinpoints the certain real aspects of human life with her own experiences about the loss of ethical values from the society. The growing aspirations of people to comfort their lives at all cost have been responsible to the decline of values. It has been very difficult to survive peacefully in such chaotic societal scenario. Human life is being completely shattered due to the loss of eminent values. Here the aim is to highlight the contemporary picture of human beings with deplorable condition in *House of Cards* who bring forth the problems in their lives due to their own growing and unending aspirations.

Though Materialism and Hedonism have enormously affected the lives of many characters yet there seems to be a prevailing ethical value which subjugates over the materialism and hedonism. Ethical value is represented by the female protagonist, Mridula. She is shown as a woman of ethics. She belongs to a small village where she inherits the human values from her parents. She likes to serve the poor people. It shows her philanthropical perspectives. She gets ready to marry with Sanjay despite of his physical uniformity only looking his good character. She accompanies Sanjay in his every problem. She stands by him like a shadow to uplift him from the lower strata to higher position to make his dream true. But she cannot tolerate the unethical practices ever. When Sanjay wants to start his private practice opening his own hospital, she helps him out. But she tells him that she would never approve if he earns money illegally



as she speaks to him, “As long as you earn money legally and ethically, I’m with you. I’ll help you in your struggle. You can earn money illegally too, but I’ll never approve of that” (Murty 128).

Sanjay starts his own nursing hospital and there seem to be different changes in his behaviour. Mridula accompanied him for starting the nursing. But he is ungrateful to her. He becomes more practical and busier in earning money and materialistic assets. He becomes the most famous doctor in his city. He is now a rich man. But Mridula becomes totally alone. She suffers from loneliness. She becomes nostalgic and mentally disturbed. She suffers a lot for Sanjay’s emotional attachment and true love that she does not get. On the other hand, Sanjay reacts practically over her illness that he is not responsible for it. She should be enough capable for coming out of her problem. Sanjay’s transformation is the best example of his loss of morality. He charges big fees to his clients. He has forgotten his duties as a doctor to serve the poor. He just wants money to make his life lavish and luxurious.

Mridula realizes that Sanjay would never change now because he is completely tempted by the enticeable materialistic and hedonistic life. Therefore, she decides to leave him. She could not live with him in the atmosphere of materialistic values. Sanjay feels sad and lonely when Mridula leaves him. He earns every materialistic thing in his life but loses the most precious thing, his wife; Mridula has accompanied him in every circumstance when Sanjay was nothing. She wanted to uplift him for serving poor people in the world. She too believes in virtues. She considers virtues as the real pleasure and contentment of life. She supports him and makes him capable of doing what he thinks. But now she is not with him. He earns money unethically and illegally. This is the reality of human life. The people are running after money and materialistic things but they are going away from those who love and respect them. Hence the decline of ethics causes to the breakdown of human relationship. The real and eternal pleasure comes from only the virtues and selfless relations not from the material assets which are the transitory ones. At last Sanjay realizes that he was wrong. He was running after the mirage of transitory pleasure through unethical values.

Sishir, the only son of Mridula and Sanjay seems to be modern young man with patriarchal ideology like his father. He too thinks like his father that women are treated subordinate. After interacting with a girl, Neha, he is completely changed. She makes him realize his wrong attitude towards women. It is Neha who makes Sishir transform from a careless young fellow to a responsible person. She tells him the significance and place of a woman in man’s life. Then Sishir realizes that he too cannot understand his mother’s pains and sufferings. His father always dominated his mother and treated her badly. Yet she performed her duties sincerely without blaming anyone. He realizes that his mother is really a woman of great ethical value who always does well to others. When he calls his father, Sishir is informed that Mridula has left him. It makes Sishir hurt. He advises his father to get his mother back from village. The following dialogues will show Sishir’s love and realization of his mother’s real nature as well as the triumph of ethical value over his and his father’s materialistic and hedonistic ideology-

When I was there, I never realize how important she is. When I see women here, I realize Amma’s selfless sacrifice .... When I was there, I laughed at her advice, but today, I follow everything she used to say, including going to bed early and getting up early. Dad, home is not just made of four walls and luxury items. Home is home because of a father and a

mother. Cheer up, Dad. Amma must be finding it hard to live without you too. Don't wait for her to call you. (Murty 231)

Sanjay gets surprised seeing the great transformation of his son who used to worship him as hero. Anita, a friend of Mridula too makes Sanjay realize about his mistakes by telling Mridula's sacrifices for him. Sanjay could not concentrate on his practice in the hospital. He understands the selfish motives of his sister, Laxmi and Shankar. He starts living away from the others thinking about Mridula. He feels lonely and imperfect without Mridula. It shows that he has realized that why Mridula left him. He could not ever understand her emotions and her importance. But he knows that she loves ethics more than anything in the world. When she finds her husband earning money being unethical, practical and hedonist, she feels very sad.

The characters like Sishir and Sanjay are shown being completely transformed due to the prevailing ethical value of Mridula over their materialistic and hedonistic perspectives. Both Sanjay and Sishir understand that true love and ethical value are more valuable and significant than money and any other luxury items. The *House of Cards* ends with the hope and subjugation of ethical value over the monopolization of materialism and hedonism through the realization of Sanjay about Mridula's selfless sacrifices, her love for ethical values, and humanitarian perspectives. At the end of the novel, Mridula is shown swinging under the big banyan tree in her village happily. "Suddenly, Mridula felt that someone was trying to stop the swing. Surprised, she turned to look. Sanjay was holding the swing, with his one good arm" (Murty 232). It means that Sanjay has suddenly arrived there to meet her being as her old Sanjay who would love her and respect her. Sanjay is now transformed due to the subjugation of Mridula's ethical value over his materialistic and hedonistic attitude.

### Conclusion:

Thus, ethical value has been explicated as the most incredible part of human life through the textual analysis of the novel *House of Cards*. It needs to be revived and cherished to survive the humanity and the eminent values in the society. It is observed that the monopolization of materialism and hedonism in the life of people like Sanjay and Sishir who fall victim to the materialistic and hedonistic life which provide them temporary pleasure and luxuries but snatches the most lovable ones from them permanently. In the era of science and technology, though the ethical value is being declined yet there are some people like Mridula who sacrifice anything for reviving and cherishing their ethical values. Therefore, the materialism and hedonism are subjugated by the ethical value of Mridula in the *House of Cards*.

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