

# STUDY OF DISENGAGEMENT THEORY IN SUDHA MURTHY'S NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

*The introduction part traces the theme and settings used by the author Sudha Murthy in her novel *The Mother I Never Knew*. The novel deals with how younger adults show interest to go in search of their biological parents. The significance of the geriatrics and the study that deals with geriatrics is also elucidated in this paper. The novel comprises of two novellas which deal with two different plots yet dealing with same theme. This paper narrates about the first novella speaking about the protagonist Venkatesh. The theory of Disengagement is applied to this story in order to narrate how the protagonist is actively participating according to the expectations of the society. And it also tries to highlight how the elders portrayed in the novel have denied their duties and escapes from the societal expectations. Disengagement theory was formulated by Cumming and Henry in the year 1961. Further this paper explains how the protagonist ceaselessly takes efforts to take responsibility to solve his elders' burden, a left out duty. He finds out that his father and grandmother have ignored a family and had been a reason for the family's miseries and agony. He probes further into his father's buried past and realizes that he has a step mother and a step brother. Against all his family opposition he tries hard to help the recently found family by giving away his half of fortunes inherited from his father. Will his efforts be fruitful and will he be able to pay his debts remains to be the rest of the plot. Venkatesh tries hard to help out the newly found family though it was not a necessary deed for him to do so.*

**Keyword :** *Sudha Murthy, The Mother I Never Knew, Disengagement Theory, Gerontology*

## INTRODUCTION:

The novel, "*The Mother I Never Knew*" which was written by Sudha Murthy comprises of two novellas. It deals with two different pursuits of two different men. The author explains about two entirely different plots dealing with entirely different settings and background. But yet keeps the theme same for those as both deals with the search of mothers by their sons respectively. The author ensures that the reconciling with the relationships what one has lost and was unaware in their lifetime is worth the life's cost.

The emotions and feelings are expressed in a coherent manner which makes the readers to interconnect themselves with the characters of the novel. The stories are set up in a way that the protagonists' inquisitiveness to know about their buried past and the efforts invested by them in digging out the facts accordingly makes the plot

interesting. The theme deals with the aged people and how younger adults are taking efforts to look out for their older parents.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF GERONTOLOGY IN THE NOVEL:**

The author gives voice to the Geriatrics and the study which can be applied for these two novellas are Gerontology. Genial words of the author are life capturing and it is also vibrating, easing and comforting. The first story deal with the protagonist Venkatesh being a bank manager is a mildly unhappily married man and is having a son and daughter.

The main plot commences when Venkatesh stumbles upon his look alike one fine day. This makes him to probe further which brings in the turning point and twists in the plot. He comes to know about his father's hidden past which includes an abandoned wife and child.

Venkatesh, though initially awestruck, prepares himself and is determined to make amends to his impoverished stepmother. He finds his stepmother and stepbrother living a miserable and poverty filled life. This hits Venkatesh's guilt conscience and empathizes with them considering being a part of his family who were abandoned long ago by his grandmother. Though he is not revealing his identity to them he decides to repay his father's debt somehow.

Venkatesh finds a strong opposition from his wife and son who look down at his thoughts. They mock and humiliate him by saying that giving away a huge amount to the family who is barely known is nothing but a foolish idea. The rest of the plot deals with how he plans to help his stepmother and his stepbrother against all odds.

In this first novella the author throws the light on the protagonist and his empathy for the family left abandoned by his father and grandmother. Instead of neglecting these hidden past of his late father, shows interest and probes into the buried details. When the protagonist finds out about his stepmother and his stepbrother he develops a bond and love for them.

He entreats them as his own family and yearns to pay his father's debt as he feels that he has inherited his father's fortune alone but also in his father's mistakes. He takes the responsibility to help them out when he learns about their miseries and poverty.

### **STUDY OF DISENGAGEMENT THEORY:**

Comprehending the older adults' psychology and attempt made by the young adults either in helping the aged to retain or by disturbing their emotional balance gets highlighted in this context. Both physiological and psychological conditions play a significant role in the way the aged people are taken care of. Though there are several theories that can be implied in the Gerontology, the theory of Disengagement proves to be the more accurate one.

The Disengagement theory was formulated by Cumming and Henry in the year 1961. This theory of aging states that, "*aging is an inevitable, mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social system he belongs to*". It claims that the withdrawal of the older people from the society is a natural and socially acceptable phenomenon. Moral Disengagement theory is one among the several variations of this theory.

Disengagement theory was published in the book *Growing Old*, which the Social scientists developed for the first time. If the individual is ready and the society is not ready, then there will be a dysfunction of the social activities. There will be disappointment in the expectations but yet the engagement occurs. But when the society is ready and the individual is not ready then the disengagement of activities takes place. This is because the individual shows no interest and there will be a lack of involvement in the society.

There are several analogies that can be quoted and explained where the postulates of the theory abide. The book, *The Mother I Never Knew* explains about how the two postulates of the theory go hand-in-hand making itself a self-explanatory. In the first novella where Venkatesh probes into his father's past and brings the hidden story to the light he finds out how his step-mother has been greatly influenced by her mother-in-law who is none other than

his own grandmother. Venkatesh's step-mother Bhagirathi is portrayed by the author as very submissive yet beautiful local village girl whose parents were died by the floods and was bought up by her maternal uncle.

Bhagirathi, Venkatesh's step mother was born in another village nearby. Her parents were drowned in a flood when she was a toddler and her maternal uncle Gopal Kulkarni offers to take responsibility of the orphaned girl. He was the village postman in Shurpali. Gopal's wife, Kaveramma, scolded her frequently, '*Your parents have given you an apt name- Bhagirathi. You keep playing in the river all day!*' (63)

Her aunt decides to look out for a groom for her. When the suggestions came that she could give her own to Bhagirathi, she simply ignored those as she knew pretty well that there will be no use for her family as she will not be able to get any dowry. So it is then Champakka and Setu who is Venkatesh's grand mother and father respectively visits that village during a fair. They both stayed at a guest's place as they were settled in Bombay long ago.

Champakka decides to get her son married to Bhagirathi as soon as she sees this beautiful young girl. Both of them, Bhagirathi and Setu were never asked for their opinion about the marriage. A condition was also put by Champakka that as her son is in his final year of his studies, Bhagirathi will not be able to accompany them to Bombay as it will distract his studies. So the plan was to be made that Bhagirathi will be joining them only after Setu finds himself a job which will be around one year of time. Again this also tends to be a decision taken by Champakka irrespective of what the newly-weds feels.

At the end of the fortnight, Champakka laid down one condition- her son's education must be completed in that year as scheduled. His studies would be disturbed if Bhagirathi came to Mumbai.... Gopal and Kaveramma agreed to her condition but nobody asked the newly-weds for their opinion. (66)

In the current scenario where people find no time for their own family, always chasing for the monetary status as they find family bonding insignificant. But in this novella, Venkatesh goes in search of the lost relationship. Despite Bhagirathi not being his biological mother it remains to be necessary for him to undo his father's mistakes.

Against his wife and son's unwillingness and trouble making actions to prevent him from helping his so called family, he takes all efforts to help out his family who are in misery and poverty. This shows his attachment towards the blood relations and his ceaseless efforts to withhold the family members together.

## CONCLUSION:

The plot concludes with Gauri contributing the amount her father needed to pay of his elders' debt. Venkatesh was proud of her. He feels that his daughter was much wiser than he had ever been at that age. He asks her, "*Gauri, your mother will find out about this. You know that. What will you do then?*" (112.) She replies,

I haven't stolen this money, Anna, nor have I given it away to a cause that I don't believe in. I'm not afraid of her or anyone else. No matter what people say, I'll always follow my conscience. It doesn't change with rank or money and it doesn't fade like fame or beauty. You have taught me that.' (112)

This makes Venkatesh to be proud of his daughter and wonders how his little daughter can even talk about philosophy. And when Venkatesh asks Gauri about why she is doing this, she replies, "*That's so easy, Anna. You want to pay back a debt that your father owes somebody. I want to pay back a debt that my father owes too*" (113)

When his daughter finishes her talking, the tears run down his cheeks and falls on her hands. She smiles and leans against her father without wiping those tears. "*It felt like a burden of generations had been lifted of their shoulders*" (113).