

**ALONENESS VS. LONELINESS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY IN
MOTILAL JOTWANI'S SHORT STORY "VERY LONELY, SHE"****DR. SEEMA NIGAM**Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
D.B.S. College, Kanpur**ABSTRACT**

*Motilal Jotwani's short story *Very Lonely, She* offers a profound psychological exploration of the nuanced distinction between aloneness and loneliness, particularly within the context of aging. The protagonist, Pooran Mausi, embodies a quiet resilience, having come to terms with her solitude. However, the arrival of her nephew, Manohar, serves as a catalyst for an emotional reckoning, unearthing layers of guilt, regret, and the often-overlooked complexities of familial bonds. Through Jotwani's masterful storytelling, the narrative delves into the human psyche, revealing the paradox of seeking connection while simultaneously withdrawing from it. His use of objective correlative, subtle autobiographical elements, and a restrained yet evocative prose style deepens the story's impact, transforming it into a poignant commentary on modern societal detachment and the emotional isolation of the elderly. This paper examines the psychological dimensions of loneliness and aloneness as depicted in the story, shedding light on Jotwani's literary techniques and their broader implications.*

Keywords: Aloneness, Loneliness, Psychological Study, Family Bonds, Objective Correlative

1. Introduction

Loneliness and aloneness — although frequently used interchangeably — are two separate psychological states. Loneliness goes through emotional distress resulting from social isolation or unmet interpersonal needs, often with adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety and depression (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Aloneness, on the other hand, is a more neutral or even positive state, involving a voluntary or reconciled experience of solitude that can promote self-reflection and personal growth. In Motilal Jotwani's short story *Very Lonely*,

She, these ideas shine through the life of Pooran Mausi, an older woman who has made peace with her loneliness, but is deeply impacted by the lack of substantive social relationships.

The story's narrative is presented through the viewpoint of Manohar, Pooran Mausi's nephew, who both initially views her solitude as mere physical isolation. However, through all the time he spends with her, he comes to understand the emotional consequences of familial neglect. Pooran Mausi's condition is not just one of loneliness, but an indication of society's neglect of the emotional needs of the elderly. Through Manohar's journey, Jotwani underscores the psychological toll of estrangement, showing how loneliness can be inflicted rather than selected.

Rather, Jotwani's storytelling style leans on objective correlative, in which details that may seem banal — Pooran Mausi's austere living conditions, her habitual routines — stand in for her inner emotional world. Her embrace of aloneness does not remove the dull hurt that continues to settle in her life, leaving her moving and the embodiment of the old who have been shunned from the new quick-footed systems of family. This contrast between strength and Manohar's escalating unease, forms an important turning point in the narrative, compelling both the protagonist and the reader to reckon with the ethical and emotional cost of neglecting the elderly. In addition, *Very Lonely*, is a critique of social isolation, especially in urban areas where conventional family structures are disintegrating. The narrative implies that though solitude can be a place of self-satisfaction, loneliness—when forced by social neglect—can be very destructive. Manohar's realization of his aunt's silent agony later on emphasizes the ethical obligation of families to foster emotional connections beyond duty. By doing so, Jotwani encourages readers to reflect on their relationships and how they contribute to avoiding or causing emotional isolation.

Through its deconstruction of the psychological aspects of loneliness and aloneness in a very personal yet universally applicable tale, Jotwani turns *Very Lonely*. She into a heart-wrenching examination of the human experience. His employment of understated symbolism, well-drawn characterization, and contemplative writing guarantees that the tale itself is an absorbing study of humankind. In this paper, the author will delve deeper into these themes, cross-referencing them with loneliness research in psychology and looking for the larger consequences of family abandonment in modern times.

2. Literary and Psychological Framework

The objective correlative theory propounded by T.S. Eliot maintains that emotions find their fullest expression in literature, through external happenings, objects, and events that elicit a similar response in the audience (Eliot, 1921). Motilal Jotwani applies this theory brilliantly in *Very Lonely*, positioning a visit by Manohar to Pooran Mausi, a somewhat uneventful event, that gradually builds into an intense emotional and psychological epiphany. Jotwani paints that stillness of Pooran Mausi's solitary existence and unwelcoming setting, the long-awaited need for a visit from Manohar, as details that declare the sense of deeply embedded loneliness and neglect suffered by the elderly in a still-modern society.

To study from the psychological perspective, therefore, family detachment leads to the causation of loneliness in old age, where emotional and social bonds dissolve, as the family pattern reshuffles (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). This itself paints the picture of Pooran Mausi's condition, where she is neither abandoned physically nor in strict terms entirely estranged from family ties, but she has never been considered emotionally connected with them either. She becomes a symbol of unexpressed misery, where she is first viewed as being independent but later realized that the isolation is due to neglect and thus a compulsory state. Jotwani, through her characterization, shows how old people begin to embrace the loneliness that they have been dealt with, hiding behind an acceptance of solitude, a veil for inward mental hurt.

Manohar is the focalizer of the novel, leading the readers through his ever-changing feelings and growing insight. At first, his journey to see Pooran Mausi appears to him to be merely a family visit, mostly lacking emotional attachment. However, as it evolves, the journey becomes a journey of self-discovery, confronting Manohar with his own callousness. The

grim realization occurs to him that, contrary to most families, those close to him deliberately did not inform Pooran Mausi about the death of one of their own. The profundity of this insight disturbs him, making him question the unemotional quality that characterizes family relations. Jotwani condemns the emotional aloofness in contemporary family systems, particularly in the treatment of the elderly and marginalized, through Manohar's indecisiveness.

Moreover, Manohar's realization is not simply the recognition of his own error but indeed also some kind of social commentary on the entire society towards the elderly. Pooran Mausi's quiet strength begins to dawn on him, and his discomfort grows with his insight into her ability to endure decades of emotional neglect without a whimper. The recognition of this realization is paralleled in guilt and empathy theories suggesting that people tend to come to know about the fullness of their neglect only upon confronting it personally (Batson, 2011). Following Manohar's experiences, Jotwani gives the reader opportunity to witness this epiphany as the protagonist does, thereby lending the story an incisive commentary on emotional detachment.

Through the interplay of literary and psychological frameworks, "Very Lonely, She" goes beyond a simple tale of solitude and becomes a multilayered exploration of human relationships, emotional neglect, and the moral duty of family. Employing objective correlative along with psychological realism, Jotwani ensures that the story resonates so much that it urges the audience to imagine their obligations toward family and the more banal—and, therefore, often, unobserved—abandonment that the elderly suffer.

3. The Psychological Conflict in the Story

3.1 Manohar's Awakening

Manohar, who appears to be a responsible man, is disturbed to realize that his abandonment of Pooran Mausi is not an isolated event but is actually indicative of a larger pattern of family withdrawal. Although he never intentionally meant to leave his aunt behind, his full-time immersion in the realities of life in Delhi caused him to build an increasing emotional and physical distance from his extended family. This systematic withdrawal fits within the *theory of social disengagement*, whereby aging populations automatically suffer withdrawal from both family and social roles, a progression which is indirectly encouraged by young people who care more about personal duties than ensuring continued inter-generational relationship (Cumming & Henry, 1961). Pooran Mausi's loneliness, therefore, is not merely a consequence of her age but a symptom of a larger cultural shift where the elderly, once integral to family structures, are increasingly sidelined in favour of modern, fast-paced lifestyles. Manohar's internal conflict highlights the tension between obligation and convenience—while he respects and cares for his aunt in principle, his inaction underscores the ease with which familial responsibilities are overlooked. This awareness is compelling him to repress a painful truth: that his inability to remain connected was not lack of love, but a passive complicity in a social exigency that naturalizes the emotional abandonment of the elderly. In Manohar's transformation, Jotwani denounces this alienation and encourages readers to reflect on their own relationships and on the silent suffering too often overlooked in aging members of their own families.



3.2 Pooran Mausi's Resilience

In contrast to the stereotypical portrait of old age loneliness as a state of helplessness or despair, Pooran Mausi is a portrait of quiet strength and resilience. Despite having been rejected by her own family, she does not succumb to bitterness or self-pity. Instead, she claims her independence by seeking meaningful activity—teaching tailoring and embroidery—demonstrating her adaptability and self-sufficiency. Her ability to find meaning in solitude is also supported by psychological research, which shows that individuals who learn coping skills, such as learning new skills or maintaining routines, report lower distress related to loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). But beneath her serene exterior, the emotional scars of past rejections linger. When reminded of the neglect of her family, her hurt is again felt, demonstrating that resilience is not immunity to pain. Her case also demonstrates the paradox of aloneness: although she has learned to cope with life alone, the human need for belonging is still present. This subtle portrait of Pooran Mausi defies the notion that old age is marked by frailty and dependence, instead demonstrating it to be a phase of life that, while marked by loss, can also be marked by inner strength and personal agency.

3.3 Loneliness

Motilal Jotwani's *Very Lonely*, She makes a profound distinction between aloneness as a personal choice and loneliness as an externally imposed condition. Pooran Mausi's life, though solitary, is not inherently miserable—she has learned to accept her isolation and adjust to her circumstances with quiet resilience. Her days are occupied with tailoring and embroidery, allowing her to maintain a sense of purpose. But the story teaches us that aloneness develops into loneliness if coupled with cruelty and rejection. The cruel comment from her brother-in-law's son—"For God's sake, Chachi, leave us alone"—reminds us of a fact that hurts, which is that her aloneness is not completely self-willed but is also a result of purposeful family exclusion. This aligns with psychological research, which differentiates between voluntary solitude, which can be fulfilling and restorative, and involuntary loneliness, which leads to emotional distress and social pain (Long & Averill, 2003). Pooran Mausi's experience highlights how social relationships shape one's perception of solitude; while she has found ways to cope with her isolation, moments of explicit rejection reawaken her suppressed grief.

In this juxtaposition, Jotwani is criticizing society's abandonment of the elderly, showing that loneliness is not only about solitude—it is about being made to feel unwelcome.

4. The Shrinking Family Bonds

Motilal Jotwani's *Very Lonely*, She serves as a poignant commentary on the erosion of familial ties, particularly in the context of urbanization and shifting family structures. The transition from joint families to nuclear family setups has led to the increasing marginalization of elderly relatives, often leaving them excluded from significant family events and decision-making (Victor et al., 2005). Pooran Mausi's situation is emblematic of this growing social fragmentation—despite her unwavering love for her family, she remains an afterthought in their lives. The failure to inform her about a relative's death is not an isolated incident but rather a symptom of a larger cultural shift where the elderly are seen as peripheral figures rather than integral members of the household. This neglect is not always intentional but stems from a broader societal tendency to prioritize immediate family and professional commitments over intergenerational relationships. Jotwani's narrative



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