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Women Empowerment in Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*

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Abstract

*This article explores *Gently Falls the Bakula* by Sudha Murthy as a realistic fictional novel that delves into Women's empowerment and intricately weaves identity and self-discovery. The narrative intimately follows a female protagonist's journey as she courageously navigates the intricacies of marriage and societal expectations, asserting her rights and individuality. Murthy's poignant portrayal illuminates the complexities of a woman struggle to carve her identity beyond the conventional roles of wife, mother, and daughter, underscoring how societal norms often constrict and stifle her personal growth. Murthy passionately advocates for social equality and women's empowerment, compelling readers to introspect on women's challenges in their relentless pursuit of equality and personal fulfilment.*

Keywords: Identity, Empowerment, Individuality, Acceptance.

Introduction

Gently Falls the Bakula is a realistic fictional novel penned by Indian author Sudha Murthy and published in 2008. In this novel the story revolves around the lives of two characters, Shrikant and Shrimati, who start as classmates in school and eventually get married. The novel realistically describes the changes they experience when Shrikant climbs the corporate ladder to the pinnacle of success, and their married life gradually loses its allure and identity. This novel tells the straightforward but heart-warming tale of a couple and the events that honestly upended their family life. Sudha Murthy was born on August 19, 1950, in Shiggaon, North Karnataka. She is a Philanthropist, writer, and engineer from India. She is graduated from BVB college of engineering with a gold medal in her under graduation in electronics and postgraduate studies in computer science. She is the chairperson of the Infosys Establishment and a part of open well-being care activities of the entryway's establishment of a few shelters, taking part in country advancement endeavours and bolstered the development by supplying computers and library offices to all Karnataka government schools and has set up the Murthy classical library of India at Harvard University. She has contributed enormously to the development and advancement of advanced English writing. Her famous works are *Gently falls the Bakula* (2008), *Mahasweta* (2000), *Dollar Bahu* (2003), *The Day I*

Stopped Drinking Milk (2012), The Mother I Never Knew (2014), Three Thousand Stitches (2017), The Man from the egg (2017), Magic of the Lost Temple (2015).

In *Gently falls the Bakula*, the story opens with the two main characters, Shrikant and Shrimati, who live next door to each other in the unremarkable village of Hubli. Initially portrayed as fierce school rivals, after a certain point of time they liked each other. The families of Shrimati and Shrikant had a history of animosity despite living next door. However, their love continued flourishing, like the Bakula flowers on the tall Bakula tree between Shrikant and Shrimati's bedroom. After finishing school, Shrimati attended a nearby college to study History and literature, and Shrikant went to Bombay to pursue his higher studies in IIT. Their romance was chronicled in a series of love letters that they exchanged. Even though the families of Shrikant and Shrimati were at odds, they still got married. Professor Collins offered Shrimati a chance to study History in America with a scholarship and Shrikant was hired in Bombay. In order to move to Bombay with Shrikant, Shrimati had to turn down the opportunity to study abroad, while Shrikant accepted his job offer in Bombay. This eloquently illustrates the persistence of patriarchy across historical periods. The only reason Shrimati gave up her love for History was to marry Shrikant. Now that he was working in a corporate setting, Shrikant was concentrating only in his development, and he took Shrimati for granted. Shrimati was feeling terrible and alone in the bustling city of Bombay, and she was also receiving lousy treatment from Gangakka, Shrimati's mother.

Due to his corporate job, Shrikant was constantly fatigued and needed more time to maintain his marriage. Shrimati never would have guessed that her understated, lovely, and modest life in Hubli would give way to days of loneliness and despair in Bombay. Also, as the days went by, Shrikant's love for Shrimati got diverted due to his concentration in his career and it leads to argument and fight between both. Shrimati was tired of her dreadful life in Bombay and decided to look after her first love, History, because her second love, Shrikant, was diminishing. She contacted Professor Collins, who had proposed to offer her a scholarship to study History at an Asian university in America. Eventually, Professor Collins proposed the same offer to her, but this time, Shrimati decided to follow her dreams to identify who she was and what she wanted to be. The story classically ends with Shrimati leaving India and Shrikant being unable to change anything about it. The Bakula flower signified that the love between Shrimati and Shrikant had fallen gently; as the title says, *Gently falls the Bakula*. The novel is a tale of a failed marriage due to a lack of time, communication, and self-pride. Shrimati chooses to empower herself by pursuing her PhD in history which signifies how important it is to follow our dreams. Though the story ends sad, the novel justifies the title.

Quest for Identity

Shrimati and her neighbour Shrikant fall in love and they decided to get married but both their families are rivals so Shrimati's mother was so worried about her daughter's decision as she thought they her mother in law will not accept her and will ill-treat her but Shrimati was strong and bold in her decision and she persuaded her mother and happily married Shrikant so Shrimati proves an empowered women who makes her own decisions After marriage Shrikant swiftly climbs the corporate ladder and begins his career at an IT company. Shrimati gives up her academic aspirations to follow him closely and to fulfil her role as a corporate leader's spouse, and he works tirelessly to become the best in his field. Ten days after their marriage, she and her partner moved to Bombay, where they were leading a happy life.

Shrimati's mother-in-law Gangakka was physically apart but had to find a way to annoy her. Because Shrimati was her rival's daughter and Shrimati was compelled to work for a company to settle Gangakka's debt. As Shrimati holds a degree she comes forward to work in a company and

because of that she was able to settle her mother in law's debt. Gangakka shifted her attention from mocking for the dowry to focusing on not having children as Shrimati began to earn. Shrimati recalls her mother-in-law calling her a woman unable to have children. Shrimati understood that affection and love could not be purchased or taught. The genuine expression of love ought to originate from the heart. It makes no difference if the individual is intelligent, attractive, or wealthy. In her case, she continued to hope that one day, things would change even though it was a pointless exercise. Shrimati experienced the fatigue of a weary traveller seeking a desert oasis. She was unwilling to acknowledge that Shrikant did not love her. Shrikant only cared about himself and his life goals. She served as his secretary at home. While it was a full-time job for him, there was no time for his personal secretary Shrimati. The prevailing reason was making him more and more enraged every day. Matrimony represents a social agreement between two individuals and a transcendent combination of their hearts, thoughts, and aspirations.

At one point, Shrimati read a letter from Ravi, a friend of Shrikant's from the US, who told that he was amazed by her clear thinking and her intellectual decisions. He also said "She knew what she liked and she did exactly that". (GFB, P 103) She discovered that in the same letter that, "I also remember, the other hand of yours, who is behind your success. She has been unassuming, undemanding and totally submissive to your needs and to your achievements". (GFB, P 102) Shrikant's friend Harish, from an IT company, wondered how Shrikanth would have succeeded quickly and he himself told that someone who have a wife like Shrimati who never demanded anything will definitely succeed.

Sudha Murthy gives her female characters an obstacle to overcome to become resilient and carve out a niche for themselves. Being aware of her Indianness, her protagonist stood out for her ability to accept, adapt, and absorb her own culture. At last, Shrimati realised that Shrikant values his career over hers. In Shrikant's life, Shrimati merely takes a fun job as a private secretary. She understands that their relationship has lost all love, affection, and meaning and that she is not responsible for it. At this point, she is accountable for her role. She gave Shrikant complete control and authority to treat her in this way, to give up on her, and to take her for granted by sacrificing everything for him and his professional success. She has nothing now when she looked back. Her existence is meaningless. She finally got an intention when she says

"A house is made up of four walls. But a home is where there is love, affection and a meaningful relationship. When that was not there it was only a house and the best thing was to get out of it". (GFB, P 152)

Shrimati is devastated by the ocean's depths when she discovers how different their tastes, interests, and perspectives are. Rather than focusing on Shrikant, she now chooses history as her future. Here is how Shrimati explains, "Shri, I loved history and I loved you. In fact, once upon a time I loved you more than history. But when you lost your finer sentiments, chasing the success in the world of business, I was left alone with nothing other than history...you knew your goal. Now, I am also clear about my goal and I want to achieve it". (GFB, P 162)

Shrimati sacrificed her professional desire and dedicated life to her husband wholeheartedly. But Shrikant's inability to spend time with her or at least to recognize her service to him shattered all her dreams of a happy family life to pieces. Her single mind devotion left unnoticed by her husband, so she took a hard decision to get away from him, not ready to live with the immaterial things. Shrimati realised her mistakes and she thought its high time for her to empower herself and she dauntlessly tells to Shrikant that she is going to pursue her PHD in America with a scholarship and she told him that she is not taking anything with her as she doesn't bring anything while marrying him.

No one in this male dominated society would appreciate her step but Shrimati had left him without even bothering about what people would think. She had acted on what she felt was right and decided to follow her dreams as an empowered woman. Murthy has portrayed a strong woman finding her own identity.

Conclusion

Shrimati's persona has managed to break free from the confines of her culture and self-identity. However, this draws Shrikant's character closer to the world of materialism. Sudha Murthy eloquently depicts the impact of culture on a person's life in the novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*. Researching her position and considering her next move are the things that Shrimati does when she feels irritated, disappointed, restless, and, most importantly, whenever her expectation is dashed. She ends her time alone and longs to be someone else and to be free of the bonds imposed by her family. The journey through life is portrayed as one of learning and unlearning experiences, overcoming countless barriers and hurdles to try one's patience and resolve. In the case of Sudha Murthy's protagonist, these limitations aid in decision-making. It was a difficult decision, but she found the strength, direction, and meaning to pave a new path. Though it takes constant work, realizing our worth enables us to reaffirm our commitment to our values. Understanding and suffering are necessary on the journey of self-discovery. Here, the protagonist finds the courage to face a fresh dawn.

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