

THE BOLD, DETERMINED FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SUDHA MURTHY'S NOVELS: A REAL PORTRAYAL OF THE PRESENT INDIAN CORPORATE LIFE

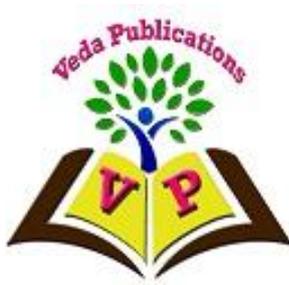
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ABSTRACT



Sudha Murthy's novels portray the life of urban technocrats who fall victims to the consumerism and prestige. Life is like a conquering and they fail to live life in its real meaning. Her female protagonists are also very strong, determined and highly intelligent. Unlike the stereotyped, helpless women, whom we always see in films or novels, they represent the real Indian women. When money and power overrules a person, the family shatters into fragments. In the corporate families, women are the silent sufferers who always abandon their own dreams and aspirations for the success of their husbands.

In her novel *Gently Falls The Bakula*, Sudha Murthy, an ingenious Indian writer focuses on realistic problems faced by women in the modern society. She talks about Man-Woman relationship and how the single minded ambition of one partner can spoil a beautifully nurtured relationship. This paper reflects on the educated woman's role as a wife in love marriage, her submissive life who faces the problem of loneliness and turns to be subservient to her husband's egotistic tendencies tantamounting to realize her freedom as an independent woman. Murthy projects the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands through Shrimathi and Shrikant.

Keywords: *Indian Women, Marriage, Loneliness, Ambition, Egotistic Tendencies.*

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Sudha Murty is one of the most significant woman writers in India, she was the recipient of the R.K. Narayan Award for literature and the Padma Shri in 2006. *Gently falls the Bakula* was Sudha Murty's first novel written three decades ago in Kannada, and translated into English recently. The book records in a sensitive way, how marriages disintegrate as ambition and self-interest take their toll. The novel remains remarkably relevant in its analysis of modern values and work ethics. Manu, the first law giver in our Hindu tradition, himself has assigned a high status and dignity to woman. His dictum is an evidence of this: "*Yatranaryastupujyante, ramantetatradevata*"(III,56), which says, "God exists where women are respected" but very few women in our state exercise their freedom; most of them are either oppressed or neglected to a secondary position. Determined to rebuild her life against all odds, she become a revolutionary woman.

"For success there is no odd and even hour. Every minute is precious" Says Shrikant Deshpande, the workaholic, technocrat in Sudha Murthy's, *Gently Falls the Bakula*. Sudha Murthy explores the life of educated rich urban who think money making is the only aim of life. Her novel, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, portrays the step by step development of two class mates, Shrikant Deshpande and Shrimati. After the industrialization, we have achieved technological progress and scientific advancement, financial independence and all other facilities but what we lost in this progress is the foundation stone of our life, our family. As the chairman of Infosys, Sudha Murthy knew all these things than any other individual. The story sets in Hubli, a small village in north Karnataka.

The story opens with the background of a school where Shrikant and Shrimati study. Both were neighbours, equally talented and intelligent while Shrimati is a little bit more brilliant than Shrikant. Shrimati took History and Shrikant got admission in IIT Bombay. Soon they realized the relation was more than friendship. She was very special to him. They met under the old bakula tree and there was always a string of bakula flowers on her hair. The smell of the flower is so nostalgic to Shrikant that throughout the story bakula plays a very important role. Shrikant marries Shrimati without the permission of their families and were shifted to Bombay, a mechanical

city with no human relationships. His people were greedy and they wanted a bride who was richer and younger than Shrimati. The wedding ceremony was simple but Shrimati was contented. Just like a typical Indian bride, Shrimati wanted to win over her mother-in-law. So she helped her in the kitchen. But Gangakka didn't want Shrimati to enter into it.(page 70)

At first they lived in a small single bedroom apartment at Bandra. Shrikant was hardworking; sometimes he would work even at night. Gradually she became one among the people in the crowded trains. Shrimati got a small job to pay money for her mother-in-law for the loan that was taken for shrikant's study. After sixteen months she resigned her job. Shrikant became the manager and she explains the story of Bhamati to her husband. Bhamati signifies all those women who sacrifice their youth for the betterment of their husbands. Shrimati wanted to enroll for her Ph.D but he was shifted to Delhi. Many unexpected things happen in life and Shrikant's boss was extremely happy with his performance in Delhi and he was promoted as a project manager and sent to Los Angeles, USA. They were shifted to America and life got totally changed. She had been in touch with Professor Kollins. In USA, she was fascinated by the market, the roads, the people and everything. Soon he became the General Manager and came back to India, life was at its peak, a new car and driver, three bed room flat facing the sea at Bandra. Shrimati was amazed, for everything was beyond her imagination. Shrikant had become extremely busy and was touring a lot. He travelled twenty to twenty – five days a month. His life revolved around his company, nothing else.

Shrimati started to feel quite lonely, one day she was shocked to see grey hairs on her head, the symbol of ageing. She wanted a baby and they consulted a doctor who commented that human body is not a computer. They have ordinary potency or "sub-fertile" condition. Shrimati felt utterly hopeless and helpless. The gates of her dam of sorrows broke open and tears gushed out as floods. All the children she had dreamt of would remain only dreams. (*Gently Falls the Bakula*, page 98). She remembered her in-laws' referring to her as a barren woman. But Shrikant consoled her. He was



very practical and said that nobody can expect their children will look after them in their old age. He was also planning to start a charitable trust for the needy children. The very thought that she wouldn't experience motherhood was hurting her deeply.

Shrimati soon became the extremely efficient personal secretary that Shrikant Deshpande wanted at home. She was obedient, understanding and helpful and believed that it was her duty to help him. She learnt the basic computer skills and was able to use internet. Soon they moved into a neo-rich circle with two drivers for her, a cook, and maid to help with the house work. Shrikant owned a brand new Mercedes Benz. Depression captured Shrimati. She started to think about death. Her life was so empty, so lonely in spite of all the wealth that Shrikant had earned. Not even a child for her company. At her surprise, Mr. Collins was visiting India for three months and he wanted to visit the monuments and historical places in India. Shrimati was delighted. She felt she had grown wings.

They travelled Delhi, Goa, Agra, Ujjain and Bombay. While going back, Mr. Collins advised Shrimati that people who are intelligent do not use it properly. Her life is fruitless and she should water it. The thirst for knowledge was the breath of Mr. Collins' life and there was no guile, deceit or manipulation or any other desire in him. He was very loving and caring and the one who could understand the feelings of Shrimati. Two guests of Shrikant were coming to India and Shrimati had to play role of a dutiful hostess, welcome everyone with a smile, and see that all are comfortable. Shrimati started to think more and more about history.

She lost her identity. She was just an obedient servant. She felt upset, yet she could not disobey the instructions. She was exhausted---mentally and physically. She wanted to get out of the house. The love, affection and sharing of ideas and dreams had disappeared from their life. He hardly talked to her about the company or other matters. Shrikant Deshpande was totally changed who was only interested in name, fame, position and status. He had forgotten his dear wife in his busy life. She did not want to disturb him and he worked all days of the week.

Shrikant ignored the changes in Shrimati. He never took it seriously. Every dinner, every conversation, every relationship was based on profit and loss. She was bored with the snobbish ladies who always talked of jewellery and sarees. Oneday in a party, she reacted furiously to their guest Dolly who insulted the history of India. Shrikant lost his control and he said that the world of business is so different from history. He could not understand what is there in India's history to boast so much about?

Shrimati became so furious that she replied violently and tried to convey Shrikant the past glory of India and how we Indians ignore it. She also told that like a step mother the industrialization had captured India with no love at all. They became two strangers living under the same roof. She again thought about history and Mr. Collins. It was the time for her to take a decision about her life, about her future. She realized Shrikant, whom she loved, cared and possessed had gone somewhere else. She felt she was searching for a path of love in the darkness, without torch. For Shrikant, emotions and sentiments were quite meaningless. When there is no business, no economic growth. There is nothing like power, power is like liquor. Shrimati decides to fly away, into the world of history, into the world of freedom. For Shrikant, she swallowed every poisonous insult, just to keep Shrikant happy. Shrikant was not ready to change his character. The novel ends with Shrikant looking back at his domineering self, and how cruel he was to his wife by not giving her due. He realises that he was the cause for her departure, but his professional nature gets the better of him, at the cost of his personal life. The bakula tree, whose flowers symbolised the love between them, had fallen, sadly.

Conclusion

Sudha Murthy presents the bold, intelligent Shrimati, who faces her life alone. Without any complaints, she accepts her fate, tried to do all her best to the happiness of others, her husband, the greedy in-laws and the guests. She even forgets her own life, her dreams and the right to become a mother. In her every sphere of life, she was perfect, a perfect daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and wife. Shrimati was never excited on her luck and the luxurious life. She was the same Shrimati, the village girl, who always liked the Bakula flowers and her



mother country, India. She showed Collins the past glory, the monuments, and the rich heritage of India. While Shrikant who was the follower of European culture, the victim of Industrial revolution, and the technocrat could not understand her. Sudha Murthy teaches that money is not the ultimate world of life. There are so many things which we cannot buy with money like love, relationships, caring, sharing and so on.

WORK CITED

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