



INDIAN NEW WOMAN IN SUDHA MURTY'S NOVEL: GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA

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ABSTRACT:

The woman in late 19th century started revolt against the old stereotype male dominance, traditional setup, submissiveness of woman, woman empowerment, gender disparity and mean mentality. These women believe in self-dependence and liberalism over stereotypically feminine ideas of traditional woman. They are depicted as a 'New Woman'. The term New Woman was originally coined by the writer Charles Reade in his novel, 'Woman Hater' which was published in 1877, in Blackwood's Magazine. Henry James a British-American writer popularized this term by portraying his heroines as an educated and independent woman in his novels.

In 21st century Indian woman are still dominated by the patriarchal traditional setup. Therefore Indian woman novelist of present scenario raises the issues of new woman in their fiction. Writers like Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Amulya Malladi, Preeti Shenoy and Sudha Murty emphasis on the issues of woman in their writings. Sudha Murty is an iconic figure in India; she is an Indian businesswoman, the chairperson of the Infosys foundation, author, educator and philanthropist. In the literary arena she contributed in English and Kannada language. The present study proposes to explore 'Indian New Woman' presented in the novel 'Gently Falls The Bakula'. The protagonist Shrimati is a meritorious student but for her love she sacrificed her dream. She is tortured by her mother-in-law, sister-in-law and neglected by her husband. She realize that she lost her love, identity, freedom and value so she revolt against traditional setup of marriage life and find out the meaning to her life.

Key words: - *New Woman, Identity, Freedom, Dominance, Traditional Setup, Submissiveness.*

INTRODUCTION :

The term New Woman was originally coined by the writer Charles Reade in his novel, 'A Woman Hater' published in 1877, in Blackwood's Magazine. This term was popularized by British-American writer Henry James, by giving representation to the heroines of his novels. These emerging new women's of Europe and United States oppose the institution of marriage, wants financially independence, breaks traditions in sexual relations, struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival. They were feed up by rules and regulations of patriarchal society and don't wanted to be rubber dolls.

From the time immemorial there was matriarchal culture in India but after the advent of Aryan and many foreign invader's, the ancient matriarchal culture disappeared and patriarchal culture appeared in India. In the patriarchal culture woman's where dominated, exploited

and tortured by the men. The female activist Kamala Bhasin defines patriarchy in her article *What Is Patriarchy?* Kamala comments thus:

"Patriarchy refers to male dominance, power relationships in which men rule women, and a society in which women are subordinated. This societal system promotes the idea that males are superior to women and that women are their property. Patriarchy is a system that subjugated women in the domestic and public realms." (Bhasin 3)

The present Indian society is built on the idea of patriarchy, in which we observe the male dominance without any question and naturally put woman in a lower position. In this regards, we observe what Simon de Beauvoir rightly says: "History has shown us that males have always retained in their hands all concrete power; since the first days of the patriarchate, they have deemed best to keep a woman in a state of

dependency, their codes of law have been put up against her; and thus, she has been established as the other.” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 171)

Even in 21st century Indian woman are still dominated by the patriarchal traditional setup. Indian woman novelist of the present scenario have has their lion’s share in the world literature. These Indian woman writers pen down many issues of New Woman in their literary offspring. Because of their contribution in the realm of literature, many untold, unknown sagas, pain agonies and issues were discuss by these novelist.

Sudha Murty is one of the prolific writers among this bunch, who contributed in the arena of literature in Kannada and English language. She is an Indian businesswoman, the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, author, educator and philanthropist. In the novel, ‘*Gently Fall the Bakula*’ Sudha Murty deals with the old stereotype example of male dominance, submissiveness of women, women empowerment, gender disparity and mean mentality of men. The present paper focuses on the issues of women protagonist Shrimati. She is a meritorious student, from the middle class family. She falls in love with her classmate as well as neighbor Shrikant. Though their parents oppose their marriage Shrimati and Shrikant get married. Sudha Murty tried to explore us that though we are the part and parcel of 21st century caste and class are the issues as per as the marriages are concern.

Indian culture is the heritage of social norms, tradition customs, belief system and ethical values. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in ‘*The Discovery of India*’ “Indian society and culture are like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reveries had been inscribed and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.” (Pathak) It indicates that Indian is so called modern. While selecting a

daughter-in-laws they never select a girl who is more educated than their son. Love marriage is not welcome in most of the families. In *Gently Falls the Bakula* also Shrimati is not a welcome daughter-in-law because of their love marriage. Her mother-in-law (Gangakka) and sister-in-law (Rama) always tease and blame her because she didn’t bring dowry. Gangakka frequently taunt Shrimati that she is from poor family.

Shrimati tries to win over Shrikant’s mother by helping her in kitchen but Gangakka avoids her presence by saying, “You have just married. You do not know our custom. So please don’t bother about cooking.” (GFB 70) Murty pointed out that how Gangakka treat her new daughter-in-law in the name of tradition and customs. It indicates that Gangakka is a very orthodox woman, she says, “I really don’t understand your custom. You call Shrikant by his first name and that too in a short form. We believe that if you address your husband by his name, you shorten his lifespan.” (GFB 70) And she criticize Shrimati’s mother for not taught her daughter all these manners and other good things but Shrimati didn’t react. In India a typical ‘Bahu’ is supposedly expected to be dumb not by birth but by choice.

Sudha Murty portrayed the character of Shrimati a typical Indian ‘Bahu’, who is submissive and ready to sacrifice everything for her husband and her family. Before marriage, when Professor Mike Collins advise her to do research in history and ready to help her for scholarship, a meritorious student Shrimati discarded her academic ambition of pursuing research from American University. Shrimati deny the proposal of Professor Collins only for the sake of marriage. Professor Collins commented that Shrimati, “Should not give up her studies but then, he thought, it was her decision and her life. Perhaps what she was doing was normal in India.” (GFB 51) In India women are always giving importance to marriage

rather than their studies. In Western countries women are emancipated as per as the issue of marriage is concern. Murty pointed out the argument of Professor Collins' daughter Dorothy, "Dad, why do we need to get married? Who says that the ultimate aim of a woman should be marriage? If marriage is only for togetherness, then aren't we together now? As soon as you get married, expectation rise and it may or may not be possible to meet all the demands. It could result in a divorce.... I am happier this way." (GFB 50)

After marriage Shrikant and Shrimati shifted from Hubli to Bombay. Shrikant achieve success in a short period and meanwhile he ignores his family responsibilities as a spouse. He spends a very little time with Shrimati and only talks to her while assigning a list of chores for her to do. It indicates that Shrikant is ambitious person and interested in name, fame, position and status. Shrikant forget that in his success Shrimati played a pivotal role she conducts all household tasks and serve as hostess for Shrikant's guests, as Mother Teresa says, "Love start by having to take care of the closest one-the one at home." But instead of appreciating her Shrikant took her for granted. Shrimati is searching for love and affection for which she has given up her career. But she realize that her scarifies and compromises are unacknowledged she find her life drearily vacant. Shrimati says, "Shri, if you consider that your time is more valuable than mine, if your work is more important than my inner happiness, I will allow you to go. You do your duties to your company because you are paid and given a status. What about my work? And what is my role in this marriage." (GFB 148)

In India most of the husband behave in the same manner as Shrikant behave with his wife Shrimati. While portraying an Indian new woman Sudha Murty pointed out that her female protagonist are not traditional woman

who are ready to sacrifice their entire life for marriage. Her heroine is in love but not ready to live on her husband shadow. She is an educated woman who can able to find out her own happiness and individuality. She used an education as a weapon to fight against her loneliness and depression. Shrimati decide to start her learning once again because she know that only education can overcome her struggle and able her to live in this materialistic society. She says, "Shrikant you knew your goal. Now, I am also clear about my goal and I want to achieve it. Shri, you are my guru. I learnt this from you." (GFB 162)

From the beginning of the novel we realized that Shrimati is always ready to scarify for the sake of her husband and family. Shrimati devoted her life for her family, though being ill-treated by her husband, mother-in-law and sister-n-law. Sudha Murty pointed out that Gangakka tortured Shrimati for not bearing children. This type of behavior is generally observed in India. Mother-in-law always treated their daughter-in-law in this way, being a woman she did not understand the problem of woman. Shrikant and Shrimati did not having children, it means only Shrimati is not responsible for not bearing a child. But in Indian society all the family blames woman for not able to bearing a child.

Shrimati's mother-in-law is the typical Indian mother-in-law who wants to give trouble and tried to pull up her leg. When Shrimati wanted to continue her higher studies, Gangakka bluffs to Shrimati that she had borrowed a huge sum of money from an uncle for Shrikant education and know she wants her son to repay the loan. Shrimati thought that this is an opportunity to win her mother-in-laws heart she give up her idea of higher studies and work for help to repay the loan. Murty portrayed the woman character of mother-in-law and sister-in-law who are scheming to trouble the bride.

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Murty portrayed the two character Shrimati and Shrimati's mother Kamala. Kamala is a working woman who earns money and feed the entire family. She is under command and control of her mother-in-law (Rindakka) and husband (Shrikantrao). Murty shows how Shrikantrao is egoistic though not earning a penny. In the patriarchal and male dominated society, after marriage women's desires and aspirations are corroded by men's egocentric and individualistic behavior. Pramod K. Nair, laments the plight of married women in India as follows: "Marriage places unnecessary burden on women and provides few benefits in return. Women's wants, needs and even their very identities are downplayed or erased in the Hindu setting due to ideas of purity, devotion to the husband, and motherhood. She has merged her sense of self with that of her family." (Nayar 131) Shrimati observe the behavior of her mother from her childhood and therefore after marriage she tried her best to win the heart of Gangakka. Kamala too suffers a lot in her life but remain silent. Shrimati is a modern "Indian New Woman" who raises her voice against the limits which society imposed on her. Murty explores the psychological trauma experienced by married women as a result of poor communication and miscommunication in the married life. Shrimati wants to talk to Shrikant very much. Shrimati longs for a conversation with Shrikant: "I want you to take a couple of days off and sit with me to talk over many things....I don't want your money. But I want your time." (GFB 131)

Shrimati analyzed her ten years of married life in which she gives up her own happiness and career opportunities for the sake of her family and husband. She suffers from emotional and psychological trauma as a result of having her feeling and desires stifled. At last she comes to the conclusion that her life lacks meaning. Shrikant earn money and power but lost

Shrimati, because emotionally he is far away from her. Shrimati thought that it is necessary to shape her life according to her own preferences by escaping the web of social ills that society has woven. She informed, "Shri, I am leaving and I don't have any plans to return. I am handing over all the responsibilities of the house to you. (GFB 160) Being an Indian New Woman, Shrimati reject the idea of becoming a pliable instrument in the hands of her dominant male counterparts and prefer to live life on her own term, which will give her identity, individuality and independence.

CONCLUSION :

In the novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*, the Bakula flower is the symbol of love between Shrimati and Shrikant. Shrimati always attaches Bakula flowers to her love letters. The novelist portrayed that the protagonist of the novel is very much devoted for her love. She scarifies her dream for the fulfillment of her love. But she realizes that, there is no more love, affection and meaning to their relation. Their love had fallen gently as the title says, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, because of the treatment she received by her husband, mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Shrimati tried her best to win the love and affection of her family member for that she suffer a lot but she don't want to blame anyone else for this. Murty observe that the conditions of Indian woman's are very pathetic in a traditionally conservative society, which does not give any weight age to the woman's desire. In India marriage is a backbone for men and women but a woman has to live a life of silent sufferer who is controlled by mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law and husband.

The New Woman of western culture values self-fulfillment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self-sacrifice. Likewise finally Shrimati realizes it is worthless to be a submissive house wife and she emerges as a strong Indian New Woman who is well

aware about the power of education. In modern India woman are empowered by education and economic independence. Shrimati breaks the barrier which stereotype society imposes on her. She shows that education is one of the powerful weapons for woman who wants to overcome or fight against the struggle in their life. Thus, Shrimati come out from the cage of marriage, rotten custom and rituals and liberate herself to live her life as per her wish. Murty pointed out that, how the protagonist of her novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Shrimati overcome all forms of oppression and became 'Indian New Woman'.

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