



GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA BY SUDHA MURTHY: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

Sudha Murthy is a novelist, businesswoman and educator. She is a Kannada and English writer and a renowned philanthropist. By profession she is an Engineer and chairs the Infosys Foundation. She had participated in the Gates Foundation's public health care initiatives, she works on rural development projects, backs the effort to equip all government schools in Karnataka with computer and library resources, and founded the *Murthy Classical Library of India* at Harvard University.

Her contribution to the world of literature is noteworthy. To name a few books among her many books, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, *Mahaswetha*, *Dollar Bahu*, and *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk*, have made significant contribution to literature. The reader gets easily connected to her interesting stories, due to her graphic delineation which she derives from her vast experience of philanthropy.

Even if Sudha managed to strike the ideal balance between her spiritual self and the technological world, there are still people battling all around her. This is shown in the connection between *Shrikant* and *Shrimati* in the novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*. It is based in Hubli, Karnataka, and emphasises the sweeping tide of global capitalism and its huge tentacles that engulf the entire planet, filling modern man's existence with a rising sense of powerlessness and frequently leading to unhealthy and broken relationships. The focus of the current research is on how the ostentatious outlook of her spouse causes her to revert to her previous self-interested and ambitious state. In this book, Sudha also explores the negative aspects of love marriage and the challenges experienced by the female characters' families.

Key words: - *global, love, sacrifice, dedication, conflict, perseverance.*

Sudha Murthy is a teacher, social worker and author. Wife of N.R. Narayana Murthy, the co-founder of Infosys, Sudha, has worked tirelessly to give back to the society, has supported movements to give all the facilities to the government school students and participated in rural development programmes. She has a vast experience of philanthropy and is one of the few Indian feminists who are still active. The beauty of Sudha's writing lies in her ability to connect with the reader with her simple but vivid language, which bring her characters to life. Sudha has written numerous books on self-realisation and charity in her fictional works. Some of Sudha's popular works are, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, *Dollar Bahu*, *Rana* and other stories. *Gently Falls the Bakula* is a simple story of a couple, happily married and living in Karnataka. Sudha depicts in the novel the predicament of all those women who

allowed family commitments and responsibilities to overpower their own aspirations.

Gently Falls the Bakula is the story about a young couple Shrikant and Shrimati. They fall in love and eventually get married. Things change when Shrikant climbs up the corporate ladder to the peak of success, whereas his married life slowly descends to worst. Sudha has graphed superbly straight way the decline and the book brings a simple but heart-touching story of the couple and also the events that shake their family life.

This paper is about the problems faced by the protagonist of the story, Shrimati which every Indian woman will feel accustomed to, in one or the other way. It deals with the old stereotype mentality of male dominance, submissiveness of women, gender disparity and lastly, the women empowerment. Sudha loudly wants to emphasise the need of giving equal importance

to work and family. Every story does not have a happy ending, or is not like fairy tales! There are stories in real life which have a sad ending, when the love dies and feeling of sacrifices and ego develops between two partners.

Shrimati Deshpande, the protagonist of this novel, is a slim and tall girl with a wheatish complexion. The novel revolves around Shrimati Deshpande who studied in the Model High School, Hubli. She was one of the best students in her class, intelligent but also an introvert. As she could easily win any competition, everyone was jealous of her. Shrikant Deshpande and Shrimati Deshpande were classmates from the first standard and were neighbours. They always compete with each other in school. Shrimati always surpasses Shrikant and all others in her class in studies. Shrimati was once teased by her classmates with Shrikant Deshpande. This was the first step to get them into a relationship. Their families are also rivals for years. Shrikant is a tall and handsome young man. Shrimati was a simple girl who always wore Bakula flowers in her hair. The Bakula tree plays the main role to bring them close and fall in love with each other. The Bakula tree which was between their houses for years not only bloomed with bunch of flowers but also bloomed love between them.

Shrimati topped the school in tenth standard board exams. Shrikant hoped to beat her but she secured the first position in the entire board and Shrikant stood second. Shrikant was disgusted when he heard about Shrimati's result. He managed not to cry. "Men were not supposed to shed tears in front of others" (GFTB 021). This shows the egoistic and male dominance of Shrikant, which made him think that his rival should get less marks than him. Shrimati was quiet as always, even after getting the first mark in the board examination. She did not talk any ill about Shrikant to her friends. Instead, she encouraged him once she got a chance to talk to him in the train alone without

their friends and any disturbance. Shrikant congratulated her by shaking hands. He realized Shrimati was different from his family members' perspective. Shrimati got a good place in Shrikant's heart and the negative perspective of Shrikant towards Shrimati has also changed. Very soon Shrikant falls in love with Shrimati and they get married despite stiff opposition from their families. Shrikant enters the corporate world of business in Bombay and the couple leaves Hubli and start living in city. It is in Bombay that life changes drastically for the two. Through the growing rift between the two, the writer highlights the conflict between India's traditional past and the impact of the west. Shrimati's calm and cool temperament, her humility and gentleness, her passion for history, and her reverence for India's rich and glorious past shows that she has imbibed the Indian spirit of virtuosity, peace, sacrifice and love. Her admiration for King Ashoka, for his virtuosity, the brave Vikramaditya, and also for Siddharta for his love, compassion and sacrifice shows her deep roots in Indian culture and tradition.

Shrimati thought, "For two things in life it is very important for us to make our own decisions. One is education... The other one is marriage" (GFTB 027). She was like a typical married woman who sacrificed everything and anything for their husband. She could decide what to study and whom to marry but she could not choose her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Gangakka, mother of Shrikant did not like her and did not allow her inside the house. She acted as a perfect mother-in-law in front of her son. Shrimati was abused verbally for not having children and also for not bringing dowry. Although, Gangakka never asked her son about not having children but she abused Shrimati for the same. For the sake of the family, Shrimati had to work in a small import-export company. She had to repay her mother-in-law's debt. She could not pursue higher studies in history for

being a sincere wife to her husband and as a faithful daughter-in-law. She left her job after repaying the debt. Her colleagues advised her not to leave the job for the sake of her independence, but she did not realize the real sense of it then. At the end of the novel, she felt sad and thought that everything she had done to her husband was a waste of time.

Being extremely humble, Shrimati takes all the bitterness into her and silently supports Shrikant in his journey of success. Her sacrifices and selflessness are similar to that of Bhamati, a character from one of the Indian legends about a sage named Dharmashastra and his wife Bhamati. Before their marriage, Shrimati had narrated the legend to Shrikant about Bhamati's sacrifices. Dharmashastra married the young Bhamati, but never bothered about her and remained buried in books and writing. After finishing a book that he had long been writing he noticed Bhamati who had grown old and did not recognize her. Bhamati explains to him that she had been living with him since last forty years. He was astounded and as a mark of respect to her, he had given the title "Bhamati" to his book. This was the recognition she got for her sacrifices. She tells Shrikant, "Bhamati signifies all those women who sacrifice their youth for the betterment of their husbands. Nobody remembers that sage's name but Bhamati stands out." (GFTB 83)

But, Shrikant's reply to Shrimati on this was, "Oh Shrimati in today's society it is very difficult to find women like Bhamati. They have changed so much." (GFTB 117-118). Unfortunately, Shrikant is totally unaware of Shrimati's sacrifice and devotion for him, which are no less than that of Bhamati's. This conflict between the two shows the vast difference between the old and the new value system. Shrikant criticizes Indian history and Shrimati does not like the artificial gestures of friendship and hospitality of Shrikant with his American clients, the lavish

parties and his business manoeuvres. She believes in the ancient Indian culture that values honesty and money is not the top priority. Shrikant has succumbed to the growing tide of commercialism. The love for money, status and business blinds him and he fails to realise the worth of his love, his wife Shrimati. She tolerated this negligence for ten years, waiting for him to change, but in vain. This propelled her to take the hard decision of forsaking him and walking out of his life to fulfil her dream to pursue Ph.D. in history.

The Bakula flower signified the love between Shrimati and Shrikant. It had fallen gently as the title says *Gently Falls the Bakula*. We can say that the novel is a tale of a love marriage which gradually shatters due to selfishness of a husband who doesn't respect the needs of his dedicated wife, in the madness of climbing the ladder of success. Shrikant pursues his dreams at the cost of his wife and so she walks out of his life and marriage. Though, the story ends at a sad note, the end of the novel totally gives justice to the title. Sudha deftly portrays the modern women, who always are ready to become sacrificial goals by claiming their roles as successful wives, submissive life partners, victims of societal expectations in the garb of marriage wedlock. But Shrimati breaks the shackles and takes a harsh decision and realizes the urge and opportunity to fulfill her long cherished dream of pursuing higher study, which she had sacrificed at the altar of her husband's career and marriage.

Marriage, may be love marriage or arranged marriage, is after all a give and take relation, where mutual respect is the baseline. Being Indian, the women may be submissive, but they should uphold their self-respect, if taken too much granted. This is the garb of the paper.

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