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Shrimati on a Voyage of Self Discovery: in Sudha Murthy's 'Gently Falls the Bakula'

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Abstract

Sudha Murthy is one of the finest Indian writers with an international reputation. Sudha Murthy's '*Gently Falls the Bakula*' is an attempt to study the identity, self-discovery and voice against female oppression and women's problems. The present article deals with a woman's ability to claim her rights and individuality in marriage and grow into a human being as a future woman. In her *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Sudha Murthy tells the story of a female protagonist who struggles to earn what she is. Identity is a state of mind that is conferred by interaction with peers and acceptance in society. A woman's identity crisis is one where she struggles to achieve her fullest sense as a human being against the forces of society that chain her and reject her as a being compared to the man. Earlier, the woman sought her identity as wife, mother and daughter in the relationship. But now the woman wants to stand on her feet as a complete human being equal to the man in the society. This paper depicts how Murthy tried to spread social identity and self-discovery among people through her novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*.

Keywords: identity, self-discovery, oppression, individuality, acceptance

Introduction

Feminism represents one of the most important social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times. Feminism challenges the male-oriented nature of society and long-accepted stereotypes and gender roles on women. It deals with the marginalization of women; women being reduced to a secondary position. The masculine culture has come to be identified as active, dominant, audacious, rational and feminine from systematic opposition, and the systematic opposition to such traits identifies the woman as passive, familiar, timid, emotional and conservative.

Sudha Murthy being a woman penetrates deeply into the inner mind of depressed women based on her feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings to light their issues which are the result of psychological and emotional imbalance of Indian women in a male dominated society.

Sudha Murthy is one of the most important women writers of India, she is the recipient of R.K. Narayan Award for Literature and Padma Shri in 2006. She has contributed greatly to the growth and development of modern English literature. She reveals the supernatural experiences of women that have been hidden for centuries in their own subjective and concrete way, which encouraged the world to respect women. The benefits that we get from reading Sudha Murthy's books not only gives pleasure but also gives useful messages to the readers. Her writing inspires everyone to become better human beings. After all, words have the same power as the thoughts that shape our attitudes.

Women and women's issues have thus become the central concern of Sudha Murthy's novels. Upon reading '*Gently Falls the Bakula*', one can sense her feeling that innumerable pairs undergo social and psychological problems; to find a solution to this, as an ideal, it is the woman who has to make many compromises, even sacrifices, even though she is equally talented and educated as her partner. At times, she must quit her job and become a shadow without complaint to fulfil family duties. '*Gently Falls the Bakula*' was Sudha Murthy's first novel written in Kannada three decades ago and recently translated into English. The book records sensitively, how marriages fall apart as ambition and selfishness take their toll. The novel is remarkably relevant in its analysis of modern values and work ethic.

Gently Falls the Bakula is the story of a marriage that loses its way as Ambition and selfishness take their toll. This novel is a beautiful story about the ideologies of family conflicts, Orthodoxy, mother-in-law and sister-in-law hating daughter-in-law, and confusion regarding educational qualification. Shrimati the protagonist by becoming dutiful, devoted, honest and affectionate wife, she enabled her husband to reach the pinnacle of glory in his IT profession.

Shrimati sacrificed all her practical desires and dedicated her life wholly to her husband, but Srikanth was unable to recognize her feelings. When she could not take it anymore and lost the ability to endure, she decided to live her life as an individual regardless of the society.

The Quest for Identity

Shrimati falls in love with her neighbor Shrikant and the two get married. Srikanth joins an information technology company and rapidly starts climbing the corporate ladder. He works tirelessly and rises to the pinnacle of his industry, while Shrimati abandons her academic aspirations and becomes his direct shadow, quietly fulfilling her duties as the wife of a corporate leader. After ten days of marriage, she moved to Bombay with her husband and was leading a happy life. Although Mrs. was physically far from her mother-in-law, Gangakka had to find some other way to annoy her. She demanded more money which forced Shrimati to join a company as she did not bring any dowry. Gangakka no longer taunted about the dowry as Shrimati was earning, now it was a matter of having children. Shrimati remembers her mother-in-law referring to her as a barren woman.

Shrimati knew that love and affection could not be taught or bought with money. The true feeling of affection should come from within the heart. It does not matter whether the person has wealth, intelligence or beauty. In her case, although it was a fruitless exercise, she still hoped that someday things would change.

Shrimati felt like a weary traveler in search of an oasis in the desert. Her heart did not want to admit that Srikanth did not care for her. Srikanth was living only for himself and his ambitions. He was using her as a personal secretary in the house. There was time, at least for his official secretary, but for him it was an all-time job. His anger was increasing day by day due to the prevailing reason. Marriage is not just a social contract between two partners, but a transcendent union of two minds, two hearts and the different aspirations of two individuals.

Once Shrimati read a letter from her friend Ravi from U.S., in which he had mentioned about Shrimati,

“When I think of Shrimati, I continue to be amazed by her clear thinking and her wise decisions... She knew what she liked and she did exactly that”. (p.no.103)

In the same letter she also read 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”. (p.no.102)

Shrikant's IT company friend Harish thinks about, how Shrikanth would have succeeded in a short period and the answer was simple.

“Someone like Shrimati, who never ever demanded anything from her husband, was rare”. (p.no.142)

Sudha Murthy creates a problem for her female characters and makes them strong enough to fight against it and carve a niche for herself. Being mindful of her Indianness, his ability to tolerate, adjust to and absorb her own cultures is what marked her protagonist in particular.

Finally, Shrimati learns that Shrikant loves his career more than her. Shrimati just becomes private secretary for fun in Shrikant's life. She realizes that there is no more love, affection and meaning to their relationship, and that Can't blame anyone else for it. She is responsible for her position now. She gave all the power and authority to Shrikant to treat her like this, to give up on her and take her for granted by giving up everything for him and his success in his career. now, when she is looking back, she has nothing. Her life is empty.

“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.” (p.no.152)

Once Shrimati realizes that their interests, preferences and insights differ, her grief runs as deep as the ocean. She now decides history as her future instead of Shrikant. Shrimati explains thus,

“ 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.” (p.no.162)

Bakula as a Symbol of Love

Srikant remembered many ancient stories related to bakula with romance. It seems that in the olden days, when young men travelled far and wide for many days, they would carry small objects in memory of their loved ones. The bakula flower was such a memento that these young men took with them, because even if it withered, it would still give off the same fragrance as the love of a beloved. Without knowing this, Shrikant had come to connect bakula's flower to Shrimati. It is true that they rarely spoke to each other, but it was equally true that there was a strange attraction between them.

The novel ends with Srikanth witnessing his domineering self, and how cruel he was by not giving his wife her due. He realizes that he was the reason for her departure, but his vocational nature gets the better of him at the cost of his personal life.

Bakula tree, whose flowers are symbols of love between them had tragically fallen.

Conclusion

The conflict between the emotional and rational aspects of culture has led Shrimati's character to break out of the cultural framework and create her own identity. On the other hand, it has pushed Shrikant's character towards the materialistic world. Sudha Murthy through her novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* has clearly portrayed the influence of culture in shaping the life of an individual. Shrimati who becomes annoyed, dissatisfied, restless and above all at every opportunity where her anticipation was clearly deprived, begins to research her position and thinks about making the next decision. She puts an end to her solitude and yearns for identity and freedom from the clutches of family shackles.

Life is depicted as a journey with learning and unlearning experiences of facing innumerable obstacles and hurdles to test patience and willpower. These constraints help us to make a decision as seen in the protagonist, portrayed by Sudha Murthy. Her choice was tough yet, she gathered courage, purpose and meaning to forge a new horizon. Knowing our true worth is a tireless task, it helps us to strengthen our values and passion. Self-discovery is not an easy ride and requires pain and understanding. The protagonist here gathers courage and face a new dawn.

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