



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**CRUMBLING CONJUGAL RELATIONSHIP IN SUDHA MURTHY'S *GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA***

Dr Madhulika Panda

(Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Basic Science and Humanities, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar.)

Email: madhulika.15@gmail.com

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10213>

ABSTRACT

Gently Falls the Bakula is a fine novel authored by Sudha Murthy. It delineates an Indian love marriage in which the marriage fails because of soaring materialistic ambition and selfish interest. Written nearly thirty years ago, Murthy's first novel remains startlingly relevant in its scrutiny of modern values and work ethics. The present paper seeks to depict a married couple's life and the female protagonist's struggle to save their crumbling conjugal relationship. Shrimati, a sacrificing beloved becomes an equally devoted wife, but Shrikant remains completely engrossed in fulfilling his ambition, without even realizing his wife's contribution to his success. The marriage loses its way as ambition and self-interest take their toll.

**Article history:**

Received on : 03-6-2023

Accepted on : 14-06-2023

Available online: 30-06-2023

Keywords: Conjugal relationship, Selfless devotion, Selfish interest, Compromise



INTRODUCTION

Sudha Murthy is one of the finest contemporary Indian writers who writes both in English and Kannada. She was the recipient of the prestigious R.K. Narayan Award for literature and the Padma Shri in 2006. Her novels are thoughtfully crafted and well articulated set of literary works which have gained wide acclamation at different national and international platforms. *Gently Falls the Bakula* is a wonderful saga of an Indian love marriage in which ambition and selfish interest make the husband –wife relationship stand at crossroads.

Sudha Murthy's novels mostly hover over problems faced by Indian married couples working in the corporate sector. Her themes range from love, commitment, marital relationship to ambition, craze for success and problems arising from these. Her heroines are real women, facing real problems. *Gently Falls the Bakula* is one of the most popular of Murthy's novels that delineates a husband –wife relationship, a relationship that has blossomed with time, but loses its way due to selfish interest and materialistic ambition.

DISCUSSION

Shrimati is described as "a slim, tall girl, with a wheatish complexion and good clear features. She always wears a string of bakula flowers in her hair. Shrimati was one of the brightest students in her class"(4). Shrikant is Shrimati's rival in the class. "He was a tall, fair and handsome young man, he was known for his strong determination to be the best" (5). Shrimati tops in the matriculation examination, but chooses Arts and later takes up History as her career. She has a very clear mind about what she wants in life. For her, we should choose what we like,

at least in case of career and marriage because these decisions cannot be reversed. Shrikant, being extremely ambitious qualifies the IIT entrance examination and joins IIT Bombay. He aspires to become a software professional and start a business of his own and earn money and name in India. They are strikingly contrasting characters. Probably that is the reason for the strange attraction between the two. "Holding a bakula in his palm, Shrikant wondered why he was fascinated by this tiny flower. The flower was neither as beautiful as a rose nor had the fragrance of a jasmine or champaka. And yet, it was always very special to him. It held an inexplicable attraction for him"(19). The attraction grows and in spite of estranged relations between their families, Shrikant and Shrimati enter the wedlock.

They start their married life in a very tiny apartment in Bombay. Her wants being limited, Shrimati manages the household with the meagre income, taking care of Shrikant in every possible way. When Shrimati decides to pursue her dream of doing a Phd in History, the onus of repaying Shrikant's education loan falls on her and she willingly takes up a job in a small company. "When you are mine, your loan is also mine. It comes as a package. I cannot say I want only my husband. His joys and difficulties are also acceptable to me"(77). When she is ardent about registering for PhD, Shrikant has to move to Delhi. So Shrimati again compromises her passion and moves with Shrikant. She plays a wonderful personal secretary to her husband, taking care of his documents and entertaining his guests at the corporate parties. Though she dislikes the vanity of such parties, yet carries out her duty as a devoted wife.



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 (Nisha and Manju, 2017). Shrikant, in his race for corporate success, pays no heed to family. Shrimati grows more and more lonely. She pines for motherhood which does not come her. Her husband's negligence and her inability to become a mother further aggravate her loneliness.

Shrikant fails to realise Shrimati's contribution to his success where as Ravi, a friend of his, acknowledges her importance saying, "Shrimati has been unassuming, undemanding and totally submissive to your needs and to your achievements. Shrikant, without her, you would not have been what you are" (102).

Shrimati feels that Shrikant is no longer the same person she had fallen in love with. He has drastically changed in his race for money and corporate success. Describing Shrimati's helplessness, Murthy writes, "For him she had undergone so much of opposition, criticism and nastiness from her in-laws. She had even given up her career, only because she loved him. But Shrikant was not the same person she knew before marriage. This Shrikant Deshpande was only interested in name, fame, position and status. He had forgotten his dear wife. He appeared a stranger to her" (118). Shrimati wanted to ask, "Shri, where have you gone? Where have I lost you?" (135)

Shrimati starts feeling a vacuum in her life. She realises that she has been doing nothing all these years. She is so frustrated with Shrikant's indifference to her interests that she starts losing her very often

and gets annoyed with even trivial matters. When she lashes out at Shrikant with harsh words, Shrikant cannot take it as that is quite unusual of his wife. "In that instant Shrikant felt that they were two strangers living under the same roof" (129). It is difficult for him to comprehend the reason for Shrimati's discontentment as she has all the comfort and the freedom to act according to her will as her mother-in-law does not stay with her. Shrikant fails to realise that he has lost his finer sensibilities in his mad race, and that is what has created a mental barrier between the two. The greatest gift one can give the loved ones are time, attention, love and concern. When one fails to show or receive these qualities, the marriage life becomes futile (Punithaashree and Keerthi, 2017).

When a home becomes a house, made up of four walls and a roof, it is difficult for sensitive people like Shrimati to stay there any longer. Shrikant's callousness, her own passion for history, her discontentment as a businessman's spouse, her childlessness, all these compel her to leave the house and Shrikant. She decides to go to the US to pursue Doctorate in History and fulfill her long cherished dream. As Norah Helmer in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, she says to Shrikant "Shri, I am leaving and I don't have any plans to return, I am handing all the responsibilities of the house to you". (160) Consequent upon, Shrikant feels that she has taken his spirit away with her and thinks his loving flower Bakula, gently falls from his life (Revathi, 2015).

Shrikant cannot believe his ear as this was not the Shrimati that he had been married to. Shrimati had been used to carrying out instructions and lending him support in everything that he did. And now she



has decided to abandon him and leave the house forever. After her departure, when Shrikant ponders over what has gone wrong, he too regretfully realises that Shrimati had always been selflessly devoted to him, but he has never realized her importance nor has he appreciated her contribution to his success.

CONCLUSION

Sudha Murthy has wonderfully depicted an Indian marriage and its problems after the advent of the software industry. Her characters are real people facing real problems of the contemporary corporate sector. Through her novel she has tried to send a message that marriage, as an institution, thrives on the commitment and sacrifice of both the spouses. It would finally lose its way if one of the two people became obsessed with his or her individuality and tried to take the other person for granted.

REFERENCES

- Murthy, Sudha. *Gently Falls the Bakula*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008. Print.
- Nisha. A and J. Manju. "The Bold, Determined Female Characters in Sudha Murthy's Novels: A Real Portrayal of the Present Indian Corporate Life." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature* 4.4 (2017): 140-143. Print.
- Punithashree, K.S. and G. Keerthi. "Unparalleled Sacrifice Vs Single-minded Perseverance with Reference to Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*." *Pune Research: An International Journal in English* 3.4 (2017): 2-5. Print.
- Revathy. M. "Over-Ambition and Self-Interest Leads to Alienation in Marriage (With Special Reference to Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*)." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 20.4 (2015): 74-76. Print.
-