

LITERARY ENDEAVOUR

UGC Approved Quarterly International Refereed Journal of
English Language, Literature and Criticism

UGC Approved Under Arts and Humanities Journal No.44728

Special Issue on
* WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: CHANCES AND CHALLENGES *



Print ISSN : 0976 - 299X

Online ISSN : 0976 - 299X

Volume X

Special Issue : 2

January 2019

Chief Editors

• Dr. Ramesh Chougule • Dr. P. Jeyappriya • Dr. K. Muthamil Selvi

Registered with the Registrar of Newspaper
of India Vide MAHENG/2010/35012

ISSN 0976 - 299X

ISSN 0976 - 299X

www.literaryendeavour.org

INDEXED IN
GOOGLE SCHOLAR
SCOPUS
EBSCO PUBLISHING

Owned and Published by Sou. Bhagyashri Ramesh Chougule,
At. Laxmi Niwas, House No: 26/1388, Behind N.P. School No: 18, Bhanunager, Osmanbad,
Maharashtra - 413501, India.



ISSN 0976-299X

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THE CONFLICT OF SELF IDENTITY OF WOMEN'S INDIVIDUALITY AND
SOCIETY IN SUDHA MURTHY'S NOVEL *GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA*

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Sudha Murthy was born in 1950 at Karnataka. She did her MTech in Computer Science and is now the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. A Prolific writer in English and Kannada, she has written novels, technical books, travelogues, collection of short stories and non-fiction pieces, and four books for children. Her books have been translated into all the major Indian languages. Sudha Murthy was the recipient of the R.K.Narasimhan Award for Literature and the Padma Shri in 2006, and the Atinabbe Award from the government of Karnataka for excellence in Kannada literature in 2011.

Sudha Murthy's third novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* published by Penguin Books India New Delhi in 2008. This is her first novel in Kannada, she written about three decades back. It is extremely well received by the readers.

In the preface she has mentioned,

"I had not seen the corporate world from close and only imagined how it functioned. But now, in real life, I have seen it all. I am aware that industrialization, technological progress and scientific advancement are necessary and bring prosperity to our country, but they have their own short comings. They create a whole set of problems, sociological and psychological".

This novel is set in North Karnataka in the 1980. Even today, this plot can happen in any part of the country. She has chosen Hubli and Bombay as the setting for her novel. These two places are very dear to her heart, since she grew up in one place and in the other, she has enjoyed working there. *Gently Falls the Bakula* is the story of a marriage that loses its way as ambition and self interest take their toll. It raises a question what is important, a successful career or a happy marriage? The theme here dominates more about a woman who suffers lot after marriage and searching her identity in the society and tries to show her individuality in husband's house.

The novel presents an absorbing story of Shrikant and Shrimati. In the small town of Hubli, Shrikant discovers that he is attracted to his plain looking but charming neighbor Shrimati, who always does better than him in the school exams. Shrikant too

falls in love with the amiable and handsome Shrikant. The two get married out of their intense liking for each other. The first phase of their marriage life marks by their spirit of sacrifice and dedication to each other. Their life in the beginning makes them to live so simple and easy. Each one of them is anxious to make adjustments for the other. Initially, they look as if they were made for each other. Shrimati has given up her studies in History to manage the house. She manages the family finances without bothering Shrikant about it a bit. She saves money from her daily expenses and has sent some of it to her mother in law Gangakka at Bhandiwad. Though Gangakka despises her, Shrimati reciprocates with a noble heart by sending her money regularly.

Shrikant joins an IT company and starts rapidly climbing the corporate ladder. He works relentlessly and reaches the pinnacle of his industry. While Shrimati abandons her academic aspirations and becomes his uncomplaining shadow, silently fulfilling her duties as a corporate leader's wife. Sudha Murthy believes in the traditional family structure in India in which parents and close relatives have an honourable place.

Gouramma in *Dollar Bahu*, Radhakka in *Mahabhweta*, Rammamma in *House of Cards* and Gangakka in *Gently Falls the Bakula* have handled the cases of their son's marriages. Gouramma in *Dollar Bahu* tries to rule her son's life but soon became wise. Rammamma in *House of Cards* never comes to her son though she does not hesitate to take money from him. Radhakka in *Mahabhweta* keeps her distance from her son Anand after a year of his marriage. All this shows the wisdom that reigns in the life of old people in India. They are greedy; they like to collect and save it. But they never allow money to ride their destiny. Sudha Murthy's novels send a clear message that human relationship is of prime importance and must be maintained at all costs. Life is an art of co-operative existence and interdependent dealing between the members of the family and society.

The second important theme of this novel is new woman's continuous struggle to find and maintain her own identity in the rapidly changing scenario.

India. Writer's dedication of the book "To all those women who allowed family commitments and responsibilities to overpower their own aspirations" (8) summarized the subject matter of this novel. Women in India have been expected to willingly surrender themselves to the man made maxims of culture, traditions, conventions and identity. Women in the past did not mind it as it meant security coverage for them. Social workers like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Dhondo Keshav Karve and political activists like Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar helped Indian women to cross the threshold of their houses and take up jobs in offices and private sectors. Liberalization of Indian economy and internationalization of opportunities opened up new vistas for girls. Education and training that they acquire make them competitive. Clash between man and woman seem to have started at this juncture.

Many Indian girls since nineteen ninety two have taken advantage of the available opportunities to educate and train themselves in various fields. Some of them have surpassed their male counterparts in families. Such girls acquired positions of significance in industrial and service sectors, which unfortunately give birth to the conflict of interests in their personal lives with their families. Women's new role posed Shakespearean dilemma of "to be or not to be" before them. They have to opt for one of the two lives—professional or family. Though they are capable of carrying out both the roles efficiently, but they are expected to choose one of them.

As Shrimati is physically far away from her, Gangakka has to find out other ways to trouble her. Though Shrimati invites Gangakka to Bombay many times, she refuses to go (123). She refuses to stay she would get bored there. Besides, it is Shrimati's house, after all." (9) Sarcasm in Gangakka's tone shows her utter dislike for Shrimati. Though Gangakka has accepted her as Shrikant's wife, she has refused to accept her as her daughter in law.

Shrimati allows her husband Shrikant to grow in all directions without thinking about her own aptitude, vocation and convenience. But when it become unbearably too much, when it extinguishes the burning fire of life in her, she has to take revolutionary decision of leaving her husband in order to save her from being scared. Shrimati has to face the wrath of her mother in law right from her marriage with Shrikant. She is envious of Shrimati. All these days, Shrikant is only her property. She could not bear the fact that now he also belongs to Shrimati. Gangakka's happiness is inversely proportional to Shrimati's.

Novel portrays the painful journey of Shrimati's life from selfless love for her boy friend to a disillusioned wife of a multimillionaire. She makes every possible adjustment to maintain the healthy relations with her husband. She works restlessly, saves money through haggling in the market, to please Shrikant's mother and sister just to save Shrikant from petty bickering and to provide him with the necessary peace of mind. Shrimati is a name of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth for Shrikant in the beginning. All her attempts to gain and sustain human relations with her own man failed miserably for her.

Marriage captures her in a cage which has provided her security without liberty. She looks after Shrikant's wellbeing by providing him teas, snacks and food on time. She takes up a job in export import firm against her own liking just to be able to reduce the financial load on Shrikant. She agrees to postpone a birth of a child till Shrikant settled down in life (124). In short, she has dissolved all her personality into Shrikant's personality. "Over a period of time, he required someone at home too, who was smart, reliable and able to take responsibility, intelligent and obedient. Shrimati soon became extremely efficient personal secretary that Shrikant Deshpande wanted at home. Shrikant did not have to create an official position for her. She believed that Shrikant was doing a great job and it was her duty to help him." (10)

Shrimati could get married with Shrikant only after Nagamma's approval. Horoscopes are matched, marriage ceremony with all traditions are arranged. Shrimati is impressed by Shrikant's academic records and by his riches and physical beauties. She does not even know about his physical property. She thinks that equivalence in their educational levels would bring equivalence in their relations as well. It does not happen in reality which resulted into their separation. Shrikant continues to advance from one position to another position at the cost of his wife's happiness. When she has to choose between her career and her home she opts for her home. "Shrikant reasoned, "Either I reject my offer to go to Delhi or you stay alone at Bombay to do your Ph. D. If I go to Delhi, I can come here only once a month. No Shri. Neither option is acceptable. I don't want you to forgo your promotion by rejecting this offer, nor do I want to stay alone. We will stay in Delhi for one year and I will take up my studies next year." (11). This assurance serves as an example of Shrimati's continuous willingness to sacrifice her interest for Shrikant so that he can succeed in fulfilling his objectives. She believes that her career can wait a bit for the future. After all she has never construed her different from Shrikant. The same Shrimati break down when Shrikant ignores her in his personal and

professional life. He has no time to talk to Shrimati after he has been promoted to managerial position. This makes Shrimati desperate. She has lost the sympathy of her parents by getting married with Shrikant against their wish.

Wikipedia describes depression as, "Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity that can affect a person's thoughts, behavior, feelings and sense of well being. People with depressed mood can feel sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, ashamed or restless. They may lose interest in activities that were once pleasurable, experience loss of appetite or overeating, have problems concentrating, remembering details or making decisions and may contemplate, attempt or commit suicide. Insomnia, excessive sleeping, fatigue, aches, pains, digestive problems or reduced energy may also be present."⁽¹⁴⁾ This description is a clear reflection on Shrimati's mind.

Educated girls in India nowadays have limited liberty to choose their own husbands within the family parameters. Nothing much beyond that could take place without giving rise to some controversy. Married girls of the modern times do not differ much from the married girls of the previous times. They are prepared to cook and attend to their husbands. "Shrimati willingly has accepted to play second fiddle to Shrikant in the beginning, which has pampered a husband in him. His changed attitude surprised her. Like other Indian wives, she waited for a change in him. She hoped that she would regain her Shrikant of the past. But all was in vain". (128).

Though she has disappointed with Shrikant, she does not think about extramarital relations with a revengeful intention to teach him a lesson. Husband in India in the first half of the twentieth century in most cases was considered to be an image of God. Girl's education and jobs changed the hitherto honoured traditions. Husband today is no more an incarnation of God to be worshipped and venerated. Relationship has come down to mundane level. Changed status of the relations has been reflected in Sudha Murthy's novels. Irony of modern Indian life is that it has become a victim and victimizer simultaneously. Shrikant is a victim of Indian ethos to be rich which forced him to victimize his own wife and mother later on. Ram in JaiWimbkar's *A Joint Venture* always said, "I believe that one ought to move on before one gets into a rut"⁽¹⁵⁾ This statement applied to Shrimati's sudden decision to leave her husband before she has perished.

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Murthy Sudha, "Gently Falls the Bakula", Penguin books 2008.