

Self-Realization In Sudha Murty's Gently Falls The Bakula

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<p>Keywords: Women empowerment, Self-realization, Patriarchal constraints, Economic equality, Societal expectations, Cultural ethics.</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>Sudha Murty, a multifaceted personality, is well-known for her contributions to social work, literature, and philanthropy. She skillfully combines her technical proficiency, social awareness, and storytelling ability to create fiction that appeals to readers from a variety of backgrounds. She creates relatable characters and events in her literary creations. She communicates strong social and moral lessons that are inspiration to the modern youth. Her work evokes emotions, accurately captures Indian experiences and viewpoints, and encourages readers to think about themselves and their emotional processes. A new generation of writers and social activists are inspired by her writings. The novelist explores a variety of themes, including social justice, women empowerment, education, and personal development. The writer presents the human condition, revealing the struggles and success of ordinary people, especially in rural India. Her stories frequently highlight the importance of empathy, compassion, and selflessness. She constantly encourages readers to re-evaluate human values and priorities. In addition, her works celebrate the power of love, family, and friendship, emphasizing the importance of relationships in our lives. Her first novel, Gently Falls the Bakula, highlights the love story of Shrikant and Shrimati. Initially, the couple support and encourage each other for their personal growth and development to succeed over hardship. The novel focuses on the problems of social class and inequality, the transformational power of love and friendship, and the process of personal development and self-discovery. Sudha Murty crafts an interesting story that examines human experience and advocates readers to value their relationships. This research paper delineates how Shrimati, the protagonist of the novel undergoes the process of self-realization and finally establishes a unique identity of her own.</p>
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Introduction

Sudha Murty, a prolific Indian writer; writes a lot both in Kannada and English. She has written travelogues, non-fiction books, short stories, novels, and technical books. In 2006, she received the Padma Shri and the esteemed R.K. Narayan Award for her literary contributions. Her novels are well-written, intelligently constructed body of work that has received worldwide praise on both national and international stages. Her books typically address the real-life issues that Indian women encounter when they get married and how they handle with those intricate circumstances. Her female characters are clever, strong, and committed to their marriage. They also take efforts to keep their failing marriages together.

Majority of people believe that India's rich cultural heritage maintains the country's social, political, cultural, economic, and psychological integrity. However, it seems that the institutions that together comprise the culture of modern society are easy to severe shocks that could lead to the conclusion, if not entirely disintegration of socio-cultural institutions. These shocks stem from

psychological manifestations of self-interest and ambition that go beyond the boundaries of various social and cultural ethics.

Sudha Murty's debut novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*, written in 2008, is the story of Shrimati's transformation from a devoted and selfless wife to a strong, independent woman. Shrimati and Shrikant live next door to each other, with a Bakula tree encircling their homes. Despite the enmity between their families, they fall in love with each other and tie the knot. The brilliant and talented Shrimati sacrifices her ambition for her ambitious and power-hungry husband, Shrikant. However, towards the end of the novel, she decides to break things off with him so that she can achieve her goals. The narrative starts with the declaration of the school results and ends with a wonderful day that symbolizes the life of Shrikant and Shrimati. In the novel, Murthy has skillfully portrayed the distress that comes with contemporary work ethics and lifestyles. Ambitious and career-focused Shrikant joins an IT company after his marriage. Shrimati gives up her personal ambitions and stays at home to take care of her family and support her husband as he succeeds in his career and climbs up the corporate ladder. Shrimati as Shrikant's personal secretary also performs the duties of a devout wife in an effective way. Unfortunately, Shrikant fails to realize how much his wife has helped him to succeed.

As Shrimati gradually learns to comprehend her husband's mentality, she feels that something is missing in her life. She finds herself being transformed into an ornamented, emotionless doll. Finally, she decides to explore her identity and accordingly, she leaves the house. She finds it difficult to live with artificial standards:

I must breathe in pure air. I refuse to be your shadow in life. I'm looking for happiness for myself. Shri, I wouldn't have to endure such loneliness. If I hadn't been perceptive and intelligent, I could have delighted in your wealth. As I considered my life to date and my objectives, I came to understand what I wanted (GFB 161).

Shrimati's esteem is determined by people's opinions and societal expectations, and is marked by feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. However, as she navigates through intricate situations, her self-esteem develops, and consequently she becomes stronger, more independent, and more resilient. She develops a sense of self-worth, recognizes her own strengths and abilities, and learns to trust her own decisions. Eventually, Shrimati emerges with a more positive and empowered sense of self. She faces challenges with confidence. This change in Shrimati is a testament to her growth and development as she breaks free from the constraints of societal expectations and creates her own path.

Shrimati's identity changes significantly as she progresses in her life. She becomes more self-defined and powerful rather than being defined by her connections and societal roles. She is initially identified as a responsible daughter, a faithful friend, a loving wife, and a peaceful member of the community. However, as she makes her way through her experiences and relationships, she discovers and asserts her own identity, independence, self-worth, confidence, originality, and autonomy. Through the process of self-discovery, she is able to free herself from societal norms and develop a dynamic and evolving identity.

Shrimati endures a transformational journey of self-discovery. Though she struggles with insecurities, self-doubt, and lack of freedom, through her relationships and experiences, Shrimati develops self-awareness, confidence, and independence, and eventually, emerges with a strong sense of self. Her transformation facilitates the readers to reflect upon their own identities and paths to self-realization. Sudha Murty gives her female characters the mental strength to overcome and carve out a place for themselves or establish their own space in the patriarchal society. Her protagonists are unique because of their capacity to accept, assimilate, and absorb their own cultures while being aware of their Indian identity. Shrikant strongly believes that it is with hard work he was able to achieve in his life. As Shrikant advances up the corporate ladder, the materialistic world's hedonistic viewpoints begin to consume him. Shrimati, who constantly stands by him in difficult circumstances and sacrifices her own career in order to further his, consequently suffers. She is extremely unhappy when he fails to recognize the sacrifices she has made. Earlier Shrimati had denied studying overseas for she was very much in love with Shrikant and wished to be with him.

In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, a Malayalam film about patriarchy, though the unnamed protagonist performs all household tasks, her service is not valued by anyone. Her spouse never permits her to travel whenever she has an opportunity to teach dance. She endures both physical and psychological pain. However, in the end, she overcomes them, defies conventions, and pursues her

goals. She ultimately experiences self-liberation, leading to a dramatic moment in which she dumps kitchen waste water in front of her husband. Likewise, Shrimati too frees herself from all bonds. She asserts: "I want to pursue my doctorate" (GFB 153). This reflects the changing roles and aspirations of modern women who seek to break free from societal constraints and assert themselves economically on par with men. Historically, women were often defined in relation to their husband's and relegated to subordinate roles. However, contemporary women are ready to challenge these patriarchal constraints and establish their own identities. In Indian culture, a woman's identity has traditionally been linked to her husband, and thus, she is often considered subordinate and reliant on him. This perspective perpetuates the view that women are decorative appendages who accompany their husbands and interact only with those approved by their spouses. Any independent association, especially with the opposite sex, is often stigmatized as 'immoral.' Though Shrimati decides to leave Shrikant, initially, she becomes a little worried about her beloved. However, it seems better for her to forget him for her bright future. She wishes to get the same freedom that Shrikant enjoys in his career. She desires to carve her own identity. This reflects modern women's changing roles and aspirations, which include expressing their desire to break free from social constraints and achieve economic equality with men. However, Shrimati has had a significant impact from the human ideals she has upheld in her life. In the final verbal exchange with Shrikant, Shrimati admits that she cannot live with "artificial values." She asserts:

I cannot live in this kind of an atmosphere with these artificial values. I require to breathe fresh air. I do not want to live as your shadow. I want to find my own happiness. Shri, if I had not been sensitive and bright, I wouldn't have had to suffer such loneliness. I could have enjoyed your wealth. When I was thinking about my life so far, what my goal has been, I have realized what I want. (GFB 6)

Accordingly, she breaks off her relationship with Shrikant, who shows little compassion for others. Shrikant never tries to take Shrimati's needs, ambitions, or dignity into account. He sees her as an obedient housewife. Shrimati's decision to depart gets prompted by her mother-in-law's persistent malicious insults and her husband's commitment to duty.

Conclusion

Thus, in *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Sudha Murty delineates the significance of man-woman relationship and also depicts how the self-centred attitude of Shrikant ruins his marriage life. Shrimati decides to break the sacrosanct bond of marriage without considering the opinion of others. Thus, Shrimati who sacrifices her job to become a dedicated wife, finally chooses to follow her dreams and pursues her Ph.D. in the U.S. With indomitable will and resilient spirit, she realizes her potential, asserts her individuality, and reveals the traits of "New Woman."

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