

## **‘Gently falls the Bakula’ by Sudha Murti - An analysis.**

**Devi Viswaraj**

*Student of M.A English@ IGNOU.  
Corresponding Author: Devi Viswaraj*

---

Date of Submission: 04-03-2019

Date of acceptance: 20-03-2019

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Sudha Murti is an Indian writer, engineer and philanthropist. Her contributions to the literary world are numerous with a hand full of novels such as *Gently falls the Bakula*, *Mahaswetha*, *Dollar Bahu*, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* to name a few. Her novels are known for the detailed portrayal of characters and the external factors influencing them. She became the first female engineer at TELCO but kept the literary aspirations safe within her. If she could balance the two perfectly, there are others struggling between the spiritual self and technical world around them. The major characters in the novel are Srikanth and Srimathi. The novelist keenly observes them and moves through their inner mind to see how industrialization changes their aspects to life. When the early part of the novel is set in Hubli, a village on northern Karnataka, the second half is set in Mumbai, the technological capital of Indian.

The difference in culture between Hubli and Bombay is portrayed throughout the novel. When Hubli represents a rural village full of rumors and superstitions, Bombay represents an industrial city where human relations are valued on the basis of profit and loss. The Hubli community is very much narrow-minded that they can't think beyond their beliefs. The Smartha, one who worshipped Shiva cannot consider marrying a Vaishnava, a Vishnu devotee. The society is very much patriarchal in nature. The male head of the family decides all the matters and the women were always in the background, suppressed, and subservient, irrespective of their age. The novelist is comparing them to torn Banaras saree. They cannot think of a wife calling her husband by his first name. When Srimati calls Srikanth, who was of her same age as Shri after the marriage, they think it as wrong. The fight between Srimati's grandmother Rindakka and Srikanth's mother Gangakka is not because of any strong reason. The novelist says that Rindakka doesn't require a reason, because she disagreed with everything. The superiority of mother-in-law is depicted through Rindakka who always uses pungent words at Kamala, the only earning member of the family. As an educated woman and obedient daughter-in-law, Kamala never said anything back to her. Kamala considered her life as her fate and lived as a silent but earning woman. She raised up her daughter Srimati with this idea and so Srimati also doesn't raise her voice against her mother-in-law despite her harsh, unpleasant behavior towards her. Srimati also considers it her duty to repay the loan taken by her mother-in-law.

There are many instances in the novel which shows the superstitions associated with the village life. While Sharada takes a vow to distribute special pedas if Srimati comes first in final exams, Vandana, another friend is willing to perform special puja for Railway Eshwar. The elder community is also superstitious. When a telegram comes, Gangakka prays to God to forgive her for using rancid ghee as offering and promises to use good one if the telegram informs good news. In the later part of the novel, Gangakka says that she had a dream and in that dream, Lord Mylaralinga appeared before her and reminded her about the offer she has made when Srikanth was a child. Here, she is using her superstitions to torture her daughter-in-law.

Prof. Mike Collins is an important character in the novel. He is a great historian from U.S. through the one day trip with Srimati; Mr. Collins found that she is an amazing student with the right aspect towards history. Right from the beginning of the novel, the novelist focuses on her love for history. When Srimati rejected his offer to do research abroad in the name of marriage, he could easily find out the role of culture behind this. At this point, the novelist draws the cultural difference between Hubli and U.S. When Dorothy, his daughter is giving importance to education, Srimati is going to get married at an early age and Collins knew how the familial structure of India strongly holds back women to house. Through the one day trip, he was able to identify the historical sense of Srimati. He knows he couldn't alter her desires and so he sends her history books as wedding gifts. Throughout the novel, we can see him as a guide who brings her back to her education, who makes her identify her potential. As a man of education, he knew the need to encourage a capable student. He sheds light towards her inner soul and makes her identify the path of her life.

From the beginning of the novel itself, readers are attracted towards the calm, saint like nature of Srimati. She can be compared to the Bakula itself. The novelist says that even when the flower dry and become brown, its mild fragrance remains. Even when she got the first rank, she was not too much happy. Maybe her fascination towards history and Ashoka made her like that. But, in course of time, her adjustable nature forces her to sacrifice her dreams. Out of her love for Srikanth, she kept her desires to study aside and worked for his success. The first instance of her priority to marriage is seen when she rejects the proposal from Prof. Mike Collins to do her research in America. When she was about to think of research after one year, Gangakka wrote them about the necessity to repay a loan which was just her idea to take money from them. Even though Gangakka treats her badly, she chooses to do any work to repay her false loan. Even after repaying the loan, she was not able to continue her studies because of Srikanth's transfer to U.S. At U.S, she got the opportunity to travel with Dorothy, the daughter of Prof. Mike Collins. The journey with Dorothy, who is an ardent researcher, enriched her mind. Here, for Srimati, her husband is her first priority and she is learning something either for him or during the time when she is not necessary for him. When she is considering him as her first priority, he is making use of her for his own personal merits. He wants her to be the perfect hostess for his guests, which would eventually help him to build up his business. In the later part of the novel also we can see that Srimati learns basic computer operations because it is essential for helping Srikanth. When he finds the urgent need for a personal secretary at home, he identifies that none other than Srimati will be the best choice. Thus, the first rank holder becomes the personal secretary of the second rank holder.

Srimati's love for history is mentioned in many parts of the novel. The novel begins with an essay written by her. From the beginning itself, the novelist takes us to her mind. When the other students opted for science subjects, she was sure about her decisions. She took history as her main subject and excellent in it. Her acquaintance with Prof. Mike helped her a lot in her studies. Mike was interested in her love for history. She was very much fascinated by the life and ideas of Ashoka. She also had the desire to name her sons as Ashoka, Adityavikrama and Siddhartha Gautama. She expressed her desire to Srikanth even before marriage and he agreed. But, the irony is that she didn't get either sons or love from her husband in her married life.

Industrialization had changed Srikanth totally. When he was shifted from Hubli to Mumbai, his whole sense changed. He became an industrial man, viewing everything on the basis of profit and loss. Earlier, he used to talk her about his company and other business matters. His love and affection towards her disappeared. Srimati remembers how they used to spend time together during his holidays. Now, he began to consider his own culture as inferior. It was not possible for Srimati who was a very ardent student of history. He also learned that he can insult her by attacking what she admires and so he belittles her hero Ashoka. He wants Srimati to hide her emotions and be a smiling hostess for his high class business guests. He wants her to praise the guests and to aid for the growth of his company. Here, he was not finding her true value and she was forced to change according to his needs. The instance at which she falls ill shows her attitude towards him. She did not want him to cancel his business deals and so she requests others not to inform about her illness to him. He, on the other hand, did not enquire about her situations. When the doctor asks about someone to stay with her, Harish, his assistant replies that they could arrange a private nurse at any cost. At this stage, Vandana, her friend compares her own situation with Srimati's. Even though Vandana is not married to a high class family, her husband and in-laws are very much caring. When Vandana is remembering the day of her pregnancy, the novelist suggests that wealth and status cannot help always.

The letter written by Ravi is very much important in the novel. Ravi is their school friend and he describes his opinion about Srimati in his letter. Ravi's description about her clear thinking and wise decisions forces her to analyse how her situations changed in these years. She wondered whether she really deserved all of Ravi's compliments. When Srimati is elated by Ravi's letter, Srikanth doesn't even think of reading the letter. Readers can easily understand how much Srimati changed herself. The ideals for which others praised her failed to aid for her growth.

The novelist portrays the life of high class women as well. During the party, Srimati happens to come across wives of other business men. They are involved in gossips and are interested in ornaments and clothes. They also invite Srimati to the diamond jewellery exhibition. Srimati was not interested in materialistic things like ornaments. She is a simple woman. Other wives advise her not to be a perfect housewife. They express their attitude that when the men are going for business trips the women should enjoy their freedom. Srimati was brought up by her mother as a simple girl so, she cannot accept their ideas. Sudha Murti portrays the materialistic attitude of various characters throughout the novel. The conversation between the ladies at the party is not genuine. It is just for the sake of the business. Srimati's argument with Dolly Lynes shows her love for history and her increasing frustration. As an ardent student of history, she cannot accept it when Dolly says that American history is great. She expresses her refusal to the Idea firmly. Srikanth, who is always thinking about his business benefits cannot accept the attitude of Srimati. This leads to the argument between them, and Srimati explodes all her frustrations. She was tremendously hurt by his words against the value of Indian culture.

Srikanth's mother Gangakka is a gossip loving typical Hubli mother. Her altercation with neighbors is described by the novelist. She is very much superstitious. Like every village mother, she is happy to boast about the success of her son. She thinks that her son can get a job in their place so that she can live with him. She did not like him staying away from her. When Srikanth informs her about his desire to get married, she suddenly starts searching for a suitable daughter-in-law. She says that they are looking for a good graduate girl, but not for money. All the people who knew her know that what she actually wants is money. She further adds that even if an adjusting girl comes with just a coconut, they are satisfied. She rejects the marriage proposal from Sheenappa and others with various reasons, but her true reason is money. When Srikanth married Srimati, Gangakka did not get enough money. She tortures Srimati throughout her life because of this. Gangakka wanted her daughter-in-law to be simple but her daughter could wear the best of sarees and loads of gold ornaments. She further mocks Srimati that gold ornaments will not suit for her complexion. She doesn't enquire about Srimati in her letters to Srikanth and she is not even willing to stay with them in Bombay. Her daughter Rema is also like her. They thought alike and spoke alike despite their age difference.

The characterisation of Vandana is also important in the novel. Vandana is a typical south Indian girl. She was not keen on her career. The society considered a young man with a good job and without family commitments eligible for marriage. Pramod was such a man and since their horoscopes matched, their marriage was fixed. Soon after the marriage was fixed, she lost interest in studies and she started day dreaming. Srimati was able to maintain her friendship with Vandana since both of them were married of to Bombay. Vandana was married to a middle class family, but she got loving husband and in-laws. When Vandana was sitting beside Srimati who was admitted in hospital because of high fever, she remembers how her husband cared her all the time.

Throughout the novel, we could see the decline in the value of Srimati. From the first rank holder, she falls to be the wife of a businessman. Srikanth, on the other hand had a big leap from the second rank holder to the most successful businessman. The novel beautifully portrays the problems faced by middle class village women on the wake of industrialization.

#### WORKS CITED

- [1]. Murthi, Sudha. *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Penguin Books, 2008

Devi Viswaraj. " 'Gently falls the Bakula' by Sudha Murti - An analysis.". *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 03, 2019, pp. 08-10.