

Research Article

Conflict between Traditional Moral Values and the Social Pressures of Modern Corporate Life in Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*

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Accepted version published on 5 February 2026

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18494304>

Abstract: This paper examines the depiction of the conflict between traditional moral values in Indian society and the corrosive social pressures of modern corporate life in Sudha Murthy's novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*. Through the characters of Shrimati and Shrikant, Murthy illustrates how a professional approach can erode compassion, selfhood, and ethical integrity. The study shed light on the "dark side of corporate lifestyle" and the psychological toll of self-sacrifice, highlighting the protagonist's transition from a submissive traditional role to an empowered individual reclaiming her identity through education. This paper examines how the protagonist, Shrimati, adheres to traditional virtues—honesty, self-sacrifice, and emotional depth—while her husband, Shrikant, succumbs to the social pressures of the IT industry, resulting in a "materialistic realm" that ultimately dissolves their marital bond.

Keywords: Conflict; moral values; social pressure; corporate life; destruction



Introduction

Sudha Murthy's place in Indian Writing in English is incomparable. She plays an important role in Indian literature as a social writer, novelist and children's writer. She addresses most of the pressing issues relevant to the contemporary context in her novels. She also presents a prevalent situation in her uncommon style. Her debut novel, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, remains a critical touchstone of the complexities of modern life and the corporate sector. Marriage and the individual's place within a rapidly changing society. It serves as a critique of how the "materialistic world" can push individuals toward professional success while distancing them from their core human values and personal connections.

The Polarity of Ambition

The novel's opening in Hubli presents traditional social and moral values rooted in that society. Both Shrikant and Shrimati live there and demonstrate sincerity and mutual respect in their daily lives; however, the transition from Hubli to Bombay affects Shrikant more than Shrimati. They follow separate paths shaped by contrasting desires and ambitions. Shrimati is deeply rooted in ancient Indian culture, whereas Shrikant's fascination with the corporate sector compels him to distance himself from his family. This means that a human-machine replaces Shrikant's traditional grounding. He works like a machine and adopts a "profit and loss" perspective on every walk of life, including his marriage. He treats Shrimati as his business receptionist for his guests. "For him, she had undergone so much opposition, criticism and nastiness from her in-laws. She had even given up her career, only because she really loved him." (Murty 117) Shrimati's journey serves as a guiding star for many women because, while she fulfills her dreams, she fulfills her duty as a sincere wife. She sacrifices her aspirations only for the sake of her husband's name and fame in the technical world. She also assumes social and familial responsibilities. Shrikant knows the sacrifice of his mother, but he is unable to understand the real sacrifice of Shrimati, who, in a very odd situation, strongly supports him :

Shrikant, however, believed that his mother had made an extraordinary sacrifice for him. On the other hand, all that Shrimati had done was merely the duty of a wife, and there was nothing special about it. (Murty 131)

Emotional Alienation and Objectification

Murthy delineates the character of Shrimati, who is a lovely and selfless girl. For the sake of her husband, Shrikant, she gave up her time, education, and the ability to make her own judgments. For Shrikant, she is nothing but a passive, obedient spectre. When her husband is out at work, she is devoted to serving and awaiting return. Shrikant, her spouse, on the other hand, works diligently to improve his technical skills and quickly rises through the company's ranks. He sets up his own business. In the process, he neglects his wife's contributions to his progress. He had no concern for Shrimati's feelings. She sacrifices her job for her husband just as the Bakula flower fills the air with its sweet scent.



Shrimati eventually realises her life has become "dismally empty" in the pursuit of Shrikant's professional goals. "A house is made up of just 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" (Murty 152). She was very disturbed in her life while living with Shrikant, who does not take care of her in her unwell state. He decided to leave for his business tour abroad despite her wife's illness. At that time, she could not endure the high temperature and breathing problems. She was sleeping all alone in the well-decorated bedroom. She was thinking inwardly and says, "If I die, no one would even know. What kind of a life is this? It was so empty, so lonely despite all the wealth that Shrikant had earned!" (Murty 106). In this connection, Mishra observes that Murty's works frequently explore the theme of alienation, highlighting how the emotional and intellectual isolation of female characters can lead to a gradual sense of self-neglect (Mishra 55).

Shrimati's position is likely to be Nora Helmer in Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. Nora is the heroine of that play. She was pleased and playful before her marriage. After her marriage, she suffered greatly at the hands of her husband, Torvald. Shrimati also suffered greatly at the hands of Shrikant in silence, but when her patience was exhausted, she decided to leave the house. She firmly asserts her will and says, "Shri, I am leaving, and I don't have any plans to return. I am handing over all the responsibilities of the house to you" (Murty 160).

Conflict in Ethics

Shrimati, from the beginning of the novel, sticks to the traditional values assigned by the society in which she lives. She always tries to preserve Indian culture. She met with Professor Collins in America, interacted with him, and told him about the sacredness of Indian culture :

'Come on, Shrimati! Don't call me Sir. Call me Mike.

In America, we address everyone by their first name.'

However, Sir, you are older than I am in age and, more importantly, in knowledge. In our culture, addressing elderly people by their first name is considered rude. I can never do that.' (Murty 45)

Shrikant behaves rudely toward Shrimati solely for the sake of his business. He has no concern about the values rooted in his childhood. He forgot all Shrimati's goodness and always treated her as his business assistant. He has no respect for his wife's preferences, yet he has attacked her individual freedom.

"Don't talk about your worthless history. The world of business is so different from yours. History can not feed you. Don't behave like a historian at such parties. You should remember that you represent our company.... After all, what is there in India's history to boast so much about?" (Murty 125).

The story of Bhamati is highly significant to understanding the novel. Bhamati is a legendary figure who sacrificed her life for her husband's benefit. Shrikant appreciates Bhamati's character and traditional ideals, but he fails to recognise



Shrimati's sacrifice on his behalf. Shrimati likes the subject History, while Shrikant criticises Indian history. His transformation highlights how "ambition and self-interest" can erode core human values like compassion and loyalty. He says:

"Oh Shrimati, in today's society it is challenging to find women like Bhamati. They have changed so much." (Murty 83) It means that Shrikant's ironic dismissal of Shrimati's very real sacrifice. Murty chooses her characters from a middle-class background. They are either from the education sector or the service sector. Simultaneously, she integrates her characters into both conventional Indian society and the techno-modern society of India. The majority of young characters are engaged in professional and personal growth. The old characters are drawn to wealth but, in other ways, are unable to improve themselves. The modern world of technology results in conflict between the old and the new, ancient practices, customs, and conventions, and modern ways of living. (Parvathi. 537)

Self-Realisation and Departure

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Sudha Murthy uses the symbol of the Bakula flower as a metaphor for the fading relationship between Shrikant and Shrimati and for Shrimati's self-realisation. Shrimati's love is pure like the Bakula flower at the beginning, but her love also fades away as time passes because her loved ones do not measure her sacrifice. Murty writes, "The Bakula bloomed quietly in the garden, Untouched by the wind, its fragrance the last vestige of a love that had once seemed eternal" (Murty 57). Shrimati was not entirely discouraged in her life, like a fading flower, but she began her new life by rejecting Shrikant's corporate love. She realises that she can not live with this money-minded life partner. She wanted to regain her own identity in this new world. R. Kumar stated that Murty's use of natural symbols, such as flowers, in her novels often reflects the emotional and psychological states of her characters, providing readers with a deeper insight into their Internal struggles (Kumar 74). After a very long journey with Shrikant, Shrimati realises the true essence of Shrikant's corporate life. She says,

"This Shrikant Deshpande was only interested in name, fame, position and status. In building up his business, he had forgotten his dear wife. This Shrikant appeared strange to her. Where could she find her old 'Shri'?" (Murty 118)

Everything in Shrikant's life is measured solely by the profit-and-loss method. Every dinner, every conversation, every relationship was based on profit and loss. This indicates that Shrikant gradually shifts toward a hedonistic approach to the material world. Unknowingly, his flight deeply hurt Shrimati's heart, who always stands by him like a pillar in every critical situation. Although deeply disturbed and disappointed, she has maintained a strong commitment to human values that she has cherished throughout her life. She cannot give away the values of a person who never had them. At the end of the novel, her conversation with Shrikant shows her loyalty and love for her humanitarian perspectives. As she says,



"In achieving your position, you have lost your Shrimati. I cannot live in this kind of atmosphere with these artificial values. I require 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 would not 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 realised what I want" (Murty 161)

She tries to transform Shrikant, but in vain. Finally, her decision to leave the house and pursue a PhD in history signifies a rejection of corporate-imposed roles in favour of individual self-actualisation. When Shrimati left the house, Shrikant was caught in a whirlpool of thoughts. He also remembered Shrimati's sacrifice.

"Now he thought of Shrimati. What was her share in his achievement? She always wished him progress, silently and constantly suffered her loneliness. Actually, she had deserved a lion's share in his achievements. However, he never acknowledged it. Today she had broken his pride by rejecting his position, his achievements and leaving him." (Murty, 165)

Her struggles in life demonstrate that she is the modern Indian New Woman. Education is the most potent weapon to prove one's identity in a male-dominated society. Shrimati also reclaimed her identity to save her life from the rotten customs that prioritise family duty over individual human worth.

Conclusion

The tension between traditional morality and corporate pressures remains significant in *Gently Falls the Bakula*. Sudha Murthy threw light on the practical issues that contemporary women face in society. She also discusses how the commercial-minded husband violates a well-managed relationship. Shrimati always stands by Shrikant because she clutches the patch between traditional values and material pursuits. She also finds herself divided between the metropolitan scene and the rootedness of rural customs. The same contradiction is powerfully represented in Wise and Otherwise, where protagonists from rural backgrounds are confronted with the fast pace of the technoworld, as in Shrimati in *Gently Falls the Bakula*. It examines the complexity of marital relationships and the conflict between traditional and modern norms, offering painful insights into the evolving dynamics of female roles within Indian culture.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data sharing policy does not apply to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



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