

Sudha Murty: *Gently Falls the Bakula* (Penguin Book, 2008, Rs. 150)

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Sudha Murthy is a well-known name in literary circles. Apart from being the wife of N R Narayan Murthy, the legendary software entrepreneur who founded Infosys, Mrs. Murthy has created an identity of her own as a writer. The novel, *Gently falls the Bakula* was written more than three decades ago. In fact it was Sudha Murthy's first Kannada novel. It was translated and published in English in 2008 by Penguin.

The story is about a bright young man and a girl, who know each other from their school-days. In fact, they are class mates and both have broken record in the Bangalore SSLC Board as Shrimati stands first and Shrikant stands second. In the beginning, Shrikant is not happy as Shrimati has proved herself better than him. Soon after the rejoicings of success, they meet in the train going to their relatives. During this journey, they get a chance to know each other and promise to become friends. They decide to meet under the Bakula tree. Though, they are neighbours, their families are always in feud. After High school, Shrikant takes admission in Science College. He graduates from IIT-Bombay and joins a software firm. Shrimati who is extremely brilliant, chooses history which is uncommon for a bright student, but achieves her best in it. Their friendship continues and they fall in love. At the end of her masters, Shrimati drops her career interests and chooses to be a wife of Srikant. Srikant's mother, who is a greedy woman, is in search of a rich bride but Shrikant is interested in Shrimati, so they get married in spite of a family feud. They come to Bombay.

In the beginning, Shrimati manages her house and lives at home. After a year, she feels bore and wants to pursue her studies, but a letter from her mother-in-law spoils all her plans. Like a villain of a Bollywood movie, she writes to Shrikant to return which she had taken as a loan for his studies. In fact it is a trick to tease Shrimati. Shrimati as a faithful wife decides to work to pay the loan and thus shatters her plans of studies. In spite of all this everything appears rosy to her in the beginning. Later she feels like a bird in a golden cage when Srikant for his career interests ignores her and more so mocks at her skill in history as a useless knowledge. But she not only endures but also encourages him in his career for a long time. After almost half a decade of marriage, she realizes that her husband has become too focused on his career and has no place for family matters or to think about her. Eventually, she takes a decision that leaves their family life shattered. One fine day decides to end her endurance and moves out to take care of her life and interests.

Shrikant is so workaholic. He is not much interested in giving the blessing of motherhood to Shrimati. He does not want to adopt a child nor is he interested in taking any medical treatment. His mother Gangakka leaves no chance to insult and torture her daughter in-law. Shrimati is not feminist but she has not been able to make herself a machine like Shrikant. Besides she is not overambitious. She merges her identity with that of Shrikant. She easily manages his house and other affairs so he is touching the heights. Even his friends know that he is successful only because of Shrimati. He does not understand the "sacrifice" of Shrimati who inspite of being sharper than him, leaves her career pursuits. For him, there is no limit. He does not understand the emptiness which is in the life of Shrimati. This is a picture of today's