



The Price of Independence: A Woman's Journey to Freedom in Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interference of family in modern life through the 'Family System Theory'. An attempt is made to analyse Sudha Murthy's bestseller *Gently Falls the Bakula* which traces the journey of an Indian woman from Ms. to Mrs. Shrimati Deshpande. Sudha Murthy is greatly revered for being a prolific writer, facilitating the education of poor children and being one of the brains behind Infosys, one of India's leading IT Company. Sudha Murthy has made a profound impact on Indian society through her writing.

The novel '*Gently Falls the Bakula*' is the story of a marriage that loses its way as ambition and self-interest take their toll. A woman named Shrimati, leaves her academics and becomes her husband's uncomplaining shadow, silently completing her duties as a perfect wife in the society.

According to 'family system theory' family relationship is quite complex with no families exactly alike. However, family system theory suggests that all families fall into the same model of the emotional system. This article picks instances from the novel where all the emotional failure happened in the life of 'Shrimati'. It tries to trace the journey of Shrimati Deshpande from Ms. to Mrs. through 'family system theory' to prove the family interference in the life of Mrs. Shrimati Deshpande.

Keywords: Family theory, Gender discrimination, Emotional failure.

Introduction

"Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family."

(Anthony Brandt)

Over the years researchers have found the necessity to develop theories of behaviour that are specific to family settings. These theories have been developed by people from a variety of areas of study, from family

therapists to gerontologists to child development specialists. Such theories include Family Systems, Family Development, Life Course, Social Exchange, Ecology and Feminism.

Family systems or family theories focus on the dynamic interactions among family members, describing changes in typical patterns of parent–child relationships and the characteristics of family interactions that enhance or disrupt development. When understanding the family, the Family Systems Theory has proven to be very powerful. Family Systems Theory claims that the family is understood best by conceptualizing it as a complex, dynamic, and changing collection of parts, subsystems and family members. Much like a mechanic would interface with the computer system of a broken-down car to diagnose which systems are broken (transmission, electric, fuel, etc.) to repair it, a therapist or researcher would interact with family members to diagnose how and where the systems of the family are in need of repair or intervention. Family Systems Theory comes under the Functional Theory umbrella and shares the functional approach of considering the dysfunctions and functions of complex groups of people.

Family relationships are very complex with no families being exactly alike. However, Family Systems Theory suggests that all families fall into the same model of the emotional system. Bowen’s family systems theory (FST) is a concept of looking at the family as an emotional unit derived from Bowen’s study of the family. Psychiatrist Murray Bowen developed the Bowen family systems theory which is a relationship system the family exhibits as the interlocking concepts of familial development and behaviour are carefully analysed. Depending on the specific human relationship systems and how the emotional systems operate the Bowen family systems theory suggests these behavioural patterns can lead to either balance or dysfunction of the system or both.

According to Dr. Bowen’s theory and study of the family, even for disconnected families, Bowen family systems theory suggests that one’s family unit, family of origin, or family center overall still has a profound impact on their emotions and actions.

Dr. Bowen showed through his study of the family in his theory that perhaps humans evolved to be interdependent on family or family centre to promote cooperation among families for essentials like shelter. Bowen family systems theory suggests there will always be one person in the family unit who “absorbs” the bulk of the emotions of one’s family, whether it be in a traditional or non-traditional family. Regardless of how one’s family's emotional system operates or their human relationship systems, Bowen’s theory stresses the importance of families working together in a better way.

In the novel, Mrs. Shrimati Deshpande takes up all the emotions of her family and abandons her academic aspirations, and becomes her husband’s uncomplaining shadow, silently fulfilling her duties as a corporate wife. Sudha Murty says that “usually, people who are sensitive need more time to understand the real world.” This is clearly proven by the author Sudha Murty through her novel, *Gently Falls the Bakula*.

Sudha Murty was born on 19 August 1950 in Karnataka. A writer, philanthropist and entrepreneur, Sudha Murthy is greatly revered for being a prolific writer, facilitating the education of poor children and being one of the brains behind Infosys, one of India’s leading IT companies. She has written novels, technical books,

travelogues, collections of short stories and non-fiction pieces, and four books for children. Her books have been translated into all the major Indian languages. Some women are born to inspire. Be it Mother Teresa, Sarojini Naidu or Kalpana Chawla, women have always been a source of motivation and a catalyst for social change. One such name is Sudha Murthy who has made a prominent impact on Indian society.

Soberly dressed in traditional Indian attire, Sudha Murthy's philanthropic work has garnered global recognition. From becoming the first female Engineer in India to heading a company like Infosys, her seriousness towards making a change in society and her educational journey has played a significant role in her making. Some of Sudha Murthy's widely acclaimed books include *The Mother I Never Knew*, *Three Thousand Stitches*, *The Man from the Egg* and *Magic of the Lost Temple*. In 2018, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2019, she was conferred with the Padma Shri which is the highest civilian honour in India.

The thesis statement id that family interference is prevalent even in the life of 21st century individuals., thereby denying the human values and individual freedom that a person wishes to have in his/her life.

The Journey from Ms. to Mrs. Shrimati Deshpande

Gently Falls the Bakula by Sudha Murthy is an aesthetic love story of two different individuals -Shrimati and Shrikant. It delineates the problems faced by the protagonist of the story. Shrimati is a person who reflects the life of every Indian woman in one or the other way. The story can happen in any part of the country, even today, be it in a small village or megacity.

The story begins in the small town of North Karnataka, Hubli, where both approach life very differently from each other. Shrikant a tall, fair and handsome young man, known for his strong determination to the best in life, discovers that he is attracted to his plain-looking but charming neighbour Shrimati a slim, tall girl with a wheatish complexion and good, clear features, who always does better than him in the school examination. She always wore a string of bakula flowers in her hair. Bakula flower plays a strong role in the life of two people. After the result of tenth board examination, she scored the first rank in the state and followed by Shrikant at second rank.

Even though Shrimati and Shrikant had such a common cultural background and were neighbours their temperaments were different. Once their families had everything, but today they had nothing more than a huge ancestral house and a few pieces of land. They found it hard to maintain the old house, but they could not abandon it and live elsewhere. It was an issue of family prestige. From their forefathers time onwards, they fought like a cat and dogs, their mountain like egos was the main reason for the continued enmity.

Another bone of contention was that the two families belonged to two sects – one sect was named 'Smartha,' who worshiped worshipped Shiva and the other were Vishnu devotees, called Vaishnava. In the space between two houses, there was a Bakula tree. The bakula is about the size of a neem tree and has a lovely canopy of dark green leaves. The tree lives for at least a hundred years, the main speciality of the tree is the more it rains, the more flowers it bears. The bakula flower is very unusual – it is tiny, pale greenish – brown colour, and is

shaped like a crown. It has a divine fragrance. When the tree is in bloom, the flowers form a carpet on the ground beneath it. The bakula flower is a favourite of the gods too.

Shrikant's room faced the bakula tree. Throughout the year, the mild scent of the bakula wafted in through the window. He developed a special attachment to these flowers and he opposed his mother in cutting the tree. And he remembered many ancient stories that connected the bakula with the romance. In the olden days, when young men travelled far distances for many days, they would carry small objects in memory of their loved ones. The bakula flower was one such memento that these young men carried, because even though it would dry up, it would still give out the same fragrance, like the beloved's love. Without realizing it, Shrikant had come to associate the bakula flower with Shrimati. When they get closed, they choose the bakula tree in common for their daily conversation.

Later, Shrimati, Vandana and Sharada joined the arts college for History. While Shrikant, Ravi and Mallesh joined the science college. After two months, Mallesh feels the subject was hard and joined the commerce college. Everyone was shocked by hearing that even after getting the first rank, Shrimati decided to join the arts college because she believed that all should do what we really like. For two things in life, it is very important for us to make our own decisions. One is education. I believe we must study only that subject which we like. The other one is marriage, because partners remain with each other forever in life.

Shrimati loved the college more than the school. It had an excellent library and she could borrow the best books from there. Later, both would meet every day near the bakula tree and talk about various things. Shrimati gathered the bakula flowers while Shrikant would talk about his college and his dreams. Two years of pre-university passed without any difficulties and Shrikant attended the entrance exam for IIT, Bombay. Shrikant and Ravi got the admission. He would have to stay for five years in Bombay. Shrikant and Shrimati were sad because they would not be able to meet in the morning. They decided to write letters to each other and share every little bit with each other and Shrimati in her letter placed the bakula flower as a memory of their meeting. Time flies by Shrikant got job in a reputed company in Bombay and he is in love with the city. He describes the city as mechanical with no human relationships. We have to struggle to get even an ordinary thing in Bombay, including basic entertainment. Meanwhile, Shrimati was helping the scholars in the library working on PhD. She was in deep love with history and got a golden opportunity to meet the professor Collins, whom she admired very much. She spends a week with the professor as part of a visit and he offers her with a scholarship in their university. But she firmly rejects that because of her love for Shrikant and informs him about their marriage. Later, Shrimati and Shrikant get married after a great struggle with the family.

They both settled in Bombay and Shrikant starts working in his IT company and starts rapidly climbing the corporate ladder in a short period of time. Shrimati was so happy with the success of her husband. But her mother-in-law along with Rama starts to ask money for their needs through a plan. But unfortunately, Shrimati is forced to be a part in this plan and needs to help her husband to meet the amount. So, she decided to go for a job in a small import-export company in the fort area of downtown, Bombay. It was not a kind of work that she wishes

to do but with the sake of the situation she does it for her beloved one. After completing the instalment amount to Gangakka, she decided to resign the job.

Neither, Rama nor her mother realized that this money cost of the bright young Shrimati's future. To help her husband she extended her Ph.D. for later. It was three years since they were married and now, Shrimati was keen to enrol for her Ph.D. But around that time, Shrikant was posted to Delhi. Shrimati was sad. She did not want to part with Shrikant nor loss the Ph.D opportunity. Shrikant reasoned, "either I reject my offer to go to Delhi or you stay alone in Bombay to do your Ph.D. If I go to Delhi, I can come here only once in a month". (Murthy 83) Again, for her husband she decided to stay in Delhi and will take up the Ph.D. in the next year.

After a very long time, Shrikant was one of the prominent persons in his field in India and abroad. He becomes the general manager of his company. While Shrimati abandons her education and becomes his shadow, and silently fulfilling her duties as a perfect wife. She has to listen to the curse from her mother-in-law, for not having a baby and always blaming her for some or the other reason. So, she asked Shrikant to visit a hospital for a check-up but Shrikant was not a person who believes in such things. He always wants to be professionally in the peak but unknowingly he is losing the personal life.

Gradually, Shrimati becomes all alone in the house. Shrikant was busy with his work not concerned about his wife. She always sits in the balcony watching the sea and waves. And she starts to realise the loneliness and her duty in her life. She decided to open up about her feelings to Shrikant but he has no time to listen her. During that time, one day, while talking to her old professor, she starts examining what she has done with her life and realizes it is dismally empty. After a great self-struggle, she decided to do her Ph.D. in US so for that she needed to part with her loved husband. All these years, she played a role of a personal secretary in doing all the duties for her husband. But now it's time to think for her duty in her life. Finally, she leaves home.

Life in a Nest

"Family and God – that is what's important. Money, cars, those are things that come and go." (Fabrice Muamba)

This novel portrays the life of an Indian woman named Shrimati, who loves her husband blindly and sacrifice her whole life for him. She unknowingly plays the role of a personal secretary as a full-time job without pay. It is known that individual freedom inherently has personal rights and liberties that cannot be stripped away from them. The individual has freedom of speech, freedom of choice and freedom of opportunity. The individual is liberated from any oppression or coercion from the state. In Shrimati's life, she lacks freedom of choice. If she had taken a strong decision then she would have reached the pinnacle level in her career just like Shrikant.

Even Shrikant and his family members like Gangakka (mother-in-law) and Rama (his sister) were a part in this crime. They stopped her from fulfilling her dream. Shrikant, for his mere professional growth he insisted Shrimati to accompany him all along. That is; when he got the first transfer to Delhi, Shrimati was keen to enrol for the Ph.D. but she gave more significance to their relationship and she dropped the decision and thought to

take admission for next year. Human values are the core values that make up one's personality and define how he/she act in life. These values are very important as they make up us and what guide us through life. The values that we hold determine who we want to be as well as how we live our lives and the decisions that we make on an everyday basis. Without these values, our lives would become chaotic and there would be no meaning behind any of the things that we do or say.

She had a great respect and love towards his family, they never gave it back. Gangakka who always curse her for many reasons such as not to bring dowry, not having a baby, and having a wheatish complexion. The main reason behind these issues was that Shrimati belongs to the enemy family and Vaishnava community-worshipping Vishnu. Dysfunction in one spouse will pressure the other to think or act in certain way, exerting control over their partner and if any family tension arises, the subordinate partner may experience high levels of anxiety. This can be traced through the life situations of Shrimati that even though she was not interested in any of the party events or welcoming the official people, she was forced to do so by her partner, for the sake of his professional growth. For that, as a partner she is forced to be a part in all the events that concerns her husband. Due to the love and loyalty towards her partner she used to do so. Being emotionally cut off often cause unresolved attachment issues and can cause tension among familial relationships. This had happened with this couple too. While Shrimati feels lonely in her home spending all the day alone by sitting in the balcony and watching the waves, Shrikant was fully busy with his professional life – leaving home at eight in the morning and returning at nine. Even after that he spent time to read the business magazine for a long time. He never spends time with his wife. She lives her life as an object to fulfil other's needs.

Shrimati realised the truth that she had only enjoyed the company of Professor Collin and Dorothy and her subject- History. Shrimati is a person who gives more importance to the human ethics and values. She never believed in material world. Deep inside she is a human who loves to travel and enjoys learning the historical figures of the places. She admires the historians like Ashoka, Vikramaditya and Siddhartha Gautama a lot. She loves to read a lot and wish to work on history more. So, finally she realised the things in her. She needs to achieve heights like Shrikant, who is determined on his work. Therefore, she decided to break up with Shrikant and move to US to pursue her Ph.D. with the help of professor Collin and Dorothy. Because of her educational performance, she is eligible for a scholarship from the foreign university and with the help of Dorothy she finds a place to stay. Finally, like an eagle she flies towards her dreams. She spread her wings to pursue her dream and fought with the inner mind and at end she listens to the words of her heart and flies high.

Conclusion

Like any other woman, Shrimati also had dreams about her life. But she gets married and all went into a dig of sorrow and emotional attachments. The title of the novel indicates the family interference in a woman's life, where she struggled with the name - Mrs. Shrimati Deshpande for a long time. She had to face many difficulties throughout this stage of her life such as depression, loneliness, family pressure and insecurity not to achieve what she actually wanted in her life. It can be said that, Sudha Murty constructs a character called Shrimati because it is the life of many women in our country. Many people can relate with their situation and could help

them to handle the situation properly. In majority of the cases, women are the support system of men to rise in their professional life but it does not co-relate with a single point in the stages of women's life.

The title talks about the family life in the modern world, where all need to support each other and share a quality time with their beloved ones. It is lacking in the modern society; all are busy in meeting their financial stability of life. But, in certain cases failure to meet the same leads to many issues with the partner. This happened in the life of the couple. Shrikant is a person, determined to achieve the peak in his professional life whereas, Shrimati, wishes to lead a happy life with her partner. For that, she left all her dreams and happiness.

But, at the point where she received a letter from her professor Collin, she realised her duty to herself. And she took a strong decision in her life like her husband said earlier, 'Shrimati is more intelligent than him and she can decide what she want. The decision to move on to pursue her dreams' (Murthy 162). She loved history and Shrikant. In fact, once she loved Shrikant more than history. But he lost his finer sentiments, chasing his success in this world of business. She was left with nothing other than history. Now, she was unable to live in this environment with artificial values. She needed to breathe the fresh air. She is not a woman who wants to live as a shadow to her husband. She needs to enjoy all sort of happiness because she is a bright and an intelligent girl.

In conclusion, it illuminates the complex interplay between personal aspirations and familial obligations within the context of marriage. Through Shrimati's transformation, the novel prompts us to contemplate the delicate balance between individual fulfilment and the expectations imposed by society and traditional family roles. It serves as a poignant reminder of the significance of maintaining open lines of communication and nurturing the individual aspirations of family members in order to foster a harmonious and fulfilling family unit.

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