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FEMINISM IN SUDHA MURTHY'S NOVELS: REFERENCE TO 'GENTLY FALLS THE BAKULA' &
'HOUSE OF CARDS'

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ABSTRACT

The feminist literary criticism of today is the product of the women's moment of the 1960. It has its impact all over the world. Many organizations raise the question on the male dominated society. The impact of the moment has its influence even on literature. Virginia Woolf in her book 'A Room of One's Own' (1929), Jane Austin books like 'Pride & Prejudice' etc reveals the feminist characteristics. Even in India, Feminism has its impact.

Sudha Murthy is an Indian Social Worker & a prolific writer in Kannada & English. Murthy began her professional career as a Computer Scientist & Engineer. She is the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. She offered contribution to the orphanage centres and even offered amount for the development of various schools in Karnataka. Her contribution in literature is vivid. Her novels reveal the feminism in her. Through her different characters, she expresses her opinions clearly and openly.

Key words: feminism, the role of theory, the nature of language, symbolic description .

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The Sanskrit sloka describes woman as a loyal maid to her husband, as a minister in the king's court, care taker like a mother, romantic like Rambha, a pardoner like goddess of earth, beautiful like Lakshmi, the goddess of learning & also as a perfect duty minded. From our mythology, we understand that woman plays a key role in the whole world. She is multifaceted.

We have four Yugas. Of all the yugas, Kaliyuga is known for sin and evil. Corruption, violence, atrocities and many have been ruling the world since the beginning of Kaliyuga. Women in this yuga are ill-treated, tortured and dominated. We cannot deny the fact that women in India have made a considerable

progress after independence, but they still have to struggle against evil and masculine forces. The true empowerment for women awaited still. Many women organizations sprouted to protect the rights for women. But the true freedom is assumed only when she is treated equally with men

In literature, the feminist literary criticism has become one of the core concepts. The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the women's moment of the 1960's. Even Before the women's moment, the thought and action of feminism possess in the classical & traditional books. They had diagnosed the problem of women's inequality and tried for solutions through their writings. These books include Virginia Woolf's fiction, Jane Austen's novels and John Stuart Mill's feminist writings. The women moment in 1960 was basically a literary moment. It realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital as to combat & question the male dominated society and to regain the authority & respect. Feminist criticism gained momentum from 1970. Many discussions centred on these particular areas – the role of theory, the nature of language.

The role of theory: Three versions of feminism evolved on this. One is 'Anglo-American' version. This version of feminism has tended to be more skeptical and cautious. They maintain a major interest in traditional critical concepts like theme motif and characterization. They treat literature as a series of representations of women's lives and experience which can be measured and evaluated against reality. Second is English feminist criticism. It is different from American. 'It tends to be 'Socialist feminist' in orientation aligned with cultural materialism or Marxism, so that it is obviously unsatisfactory to try to assimilate it into a 'non –theoretical category.' In contrast to these the work of French feminism is more theoretical. They took as its starting point the insights of major post structuralists, especially Lacan, Foucault & Derrida.

The nature of language: There is a long-standing debate on the nature of language. A question arose whether there exist a form of language which is exclusively segregated for women. There are multi views on the nature of language. Virginia Woolf in her essay 'A Room of One's Own' suggests that language use is gendered. When a woman turns to novel writing she finds that there is no common sentence ready for her use. In 'Man Made Language' Dale Spender advances an argument that language is sexist because men have had power to determine the meanings it encodes, and these meanings embody men's perception of reality rather than women's. Their opinion reveals that language has become common property. But the most of feminists rejected the sloven language & designed their clean & pure language different from the male writings. As a matter of theory and practical experience, many feminists emphasized the language to the degree to which meaning is context bound and variable. For instance Jane Austen devised a perfectly natural, sharply sentence proper for her use.

The women's moment of 1960 has its influence on the Indian feminists. Among the few Indian feminists, Sudha Murthy is one. Sudha Murthy is an Indian Social Worker & a prolific writer in Kannada & English. Murthy began her professional career as a Computer Scientist & Engineer. She is the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. She has published several books, mainly through Penguin. The book 'How I Taught my Grandmother to Read' & other stories translated into 15 languages including Hindi, Marathi etc. Her other books in English:

- Something Happened on the Way to Heaven
- The Old Man and His God: Discovering the Spirit of India
- The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk
- Wise & Otherwise
- Gently Falls the Bakula
- The Accolades Galore
- The Bird with Golden Wings: Stories of Wit and Magic
- Dollar Bahu
- Grandma's Bag of Stories (children's fiction)
- The Magic Drum And Other Favourite Stories (children'd stories)

- House of Cards
- The Mother I Never Knew'(two novellas)
- Mahaswetha
- "The Magic of the Lost Temple"

Sudha Murthy novels reflect the characteristics of feminism. She doesn't directly question the male dominated society but she used her various characters in her novels to question the society. The heroines of her novels belong to the middleclass family. They are submissive, intelligent and sacrificing.

Gentle Falls The Bakula: The key roles in this novel are Shrimati & Shrikanth. Shrimati is a neighbor to Srikanth. They are from the same school in small North Karnataka town in Hubli. They are very competitive. Always Shrimati wins reward from her teachers. She receives appreciation from her friends and the teachers. Even Shrikant knows well that she is a good competitor to him. But strangely, he falls in love with her and she also responds to him. They two get married. After her marriage, she confines herself to a small world. She neglects to keep her career in track. She sacrifices her time, education and freedom of taking decisions for her husband sake. She kills her aspirations and becomes an uncomplaining shadow to her husband. She engages herself in serving and waiting for her husband's return from his business. On the other side, Shrikant, her husband develops his technical skills and rapidly climbs to the corporate ladder. He establishes his own industry. In the process, he neglects and forgets the contribution his wife has made for his growth.

Symbolic meaning in 'Gentle Falls the Bakula': The life of women is closer to the flowers of the Bakula Tree. The Bakula tree lives for 100 years. The attraction to the tiny, pale greenish tree is flowers. It has a divine fragrance. Even when the flowers dry and become brown, the flowers shed mild fragrance. When the tree is in bloom, the flowers form a carpet on the ground beneath it. Women are like the flowers of Bakula. They sacrifice their career to their family members. They stand like a pillar which supports the roof of the house. They search their happiness in work, family and even in the success of her husband. They don't keep anything for their life. She burns herself like a candle & spreads light to her family.

Sudha Murthy conveyed this meaning symbolically. Just as the Bakula flowers shed fragrance around the place, Shrimati sheds her career for her husband. Shrimati, the heroine of the novel marries Shrikanth her classmate. She encourages him all the while without troubling him with her problems. Shrikanth knows about his mother & sister's behavior but he keeps silent leaving Shrimati to her headache. They deliberately insult her & taunt her. Even then, Shrimati serves her husband with single minded devotion. She is intelligent & talented, but never cares of her career. She always wishes his progress, and silently suffers her loneliness. She has part in every achievement of Shrikant. Without her constant support, he does not reach the highest position. But Shrikant's ego refuses to accept her share in his achievement. Always he feels that it is his achievement not hers. He treats her almost like a personal secretary who takes care of his work. Shrimati sees her husband achievements as her achievements. If Shrikanth recognizes her part, there will not be change in Shrimati. His dominating & egoistic nature makes her realize her mistake. She leaves her husband to his business and goes abroad to do PH.D. The male dominated society does not recommend the decision provided in the novel but few minutes' careful realization turn the readers to support the decision taken by Shrimati. Realization comes only with changes that occur in life. Shrikant realizes his mistake but it is too late. He understands that she will never return.

House of cards: It is a story of Mrudala, an ambitious young lady hailing from a small village town in Karnataka. A chance meeting with Sanjay, a young doctor brings twist in her life. They get marry and settle in Bangalore. The more she observes the life in the corporate world, the more she understands how selfish and materialistic people can be. She faces ups and downs in her life with sportive nature and lives each day with optimistic sense. In Karnataka, she worked in school with joy & had started her new life. She earned more than Sanjay. In the early days of her marriage, Sanjay gave his salary to Mridula and told her to manage the money. She kept accounts of each paisa. They were happy with the amount that they earned. On the other side, Sanjay's sister, Lakshmi is spendthrift. Her husband is normal clerk and earns money through bribe. They like to show off their wealth. They owns big house with all amenities and overpriced furniture. Later, there comes a twist in their

nature and position. Her troubles skyrocket when Sanjay quit his government job and keeps private practice. She stands with him like a backbone. She accompanies at every step she climbs. Both of them have taken loan to start a nursing home. She mortgaged her jewels to support her husband with money. She stands against of dissipating too much money. She does not travel by auto rickshaw and also shows little interest on her sari's. The nursing home they start went very well and the money starts to flow in abundance. With affluence, Sanjay's ambition to earn more & more moves him into corrupt practices. His quest for power, wealth and corruption affects their relationships. The husband & wife who are on the same track turn contradistinctive poles. Mrudula understands that Sanjay is no longer her loved Sanjay. She feels that she can no longer continue their relationships. She leaves him in Karnataka and reaches her village.

Comparison of the two novels: There is less dissimilarity between two novels. Shrimati and Mrudula hail from villages. One is having the aspiration to do research and the other is teacher. They dedicate their time to their family. Both are neglected and both leave their husbands at the end. But there is slight dissimilarity in their roles. Mrudula is unable to come out of her life. She accepts her husband again but Shrimati made her husband realize that one's lost is lost.

Mythology: Ramayana and Mahabharatha are the great epics in India. Trace back to that period will resonate the character of Sita, the heroine of the epic Ramayana. Sita is described as the daughter of the earth goddess Bhumi and the adopted daughter of the king Janaka. In a syamvara, she marries Rama, the prince of Ayodhya. Soon after her marriage, she goes exile with her husband and brother-in-law to the forest, from where she is abducted by Rakshasa Ravana, the king of Lanka. She is imprisoned in Ashokavana until Rama releases her. Rama refuses her after the war. To prove her purity, Sita goes into fire. God agni fears to touch her. It shows her purity and wholehearted love for Rama. Thereafter, they return to Ayodhya where they are crowned as king and queen. However, Rama risks her life. Subject to his duty, Rama abandons pregnant Sita. In the refuge of Sage Valmiki's hermitage, Sita gives birth to twins Lava and Kusha. She nurtures them and unites them with her husband. Rama and his people realize their mistake but Sita no longer wishes to rule the kingdom. She refuses Rama and his people, returns to her mother, the earth's womb.

The patriarchal society takes their dedication to their family as their duty but they should also realize that it is the duty of the male to show the equal contribution and affection towards the wife and their family. The domination of the patriarchal society is from age long. The character of Sita in 'Ramayana', Shrimati in 'Gently Falls the Bakula', Mrudula in 'House of Cards' and many other women are having similarities. Women are such. They are submissive, intelligent, humble and known for patience. Once they lose their patience and reacts, it is difficult even to touch their shadow.

Conclusion

Sudha Murthy lucidly describes her ideas in all her novels. She uses simple and clear words to express her thoughts. The modern readers baffle by the language of the traditional & classical writers but Sudha Murthy presents no such difficulty. Her language is remarkably free from hackneyed expressions. She is easily understandable and the readers never get puzzled with the words used in her novel. She breathed a new life into English and made it a suitable vehicle for easy understanding.

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