
The Paradox of Progress: A Critical Analysis of Meritocratic Empowerment and Feminine Erasure in Sudha Murty's *Gently Falls the Bakula*

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Abstract:

The intersection of ancestral heritage and contemporary professional aspirations creates a profound psychological battlefield in Sudha Murty's *Gently Falls the Bakula*, where the 'Feminist Dilemma' is articulated through the progressive erasure of the feminine subject. By interrogating the domestic friction between Shrimati's classical altruism and Shrikant's neoliberal ambition, this study explores how traditional virtues, when rigidly enforced without reciprocity, undergo a process of commodification that reduces the woman to a functional, yet invisible, peripheral entity. Leveraging the botanical metaphor of the bakula flower, the narrative illustrates a 'meritocratic feminism' that necessitates a radical break from the domestic locus to achieve genuine self-actualization. Through a scholarly lens grounded in theories of cultural hybridity and affective labor, the research argues that Sudha Murty's work functions as a 'critical traditionalist' manifesto, advocating for a sophisticated synthesis of past wisdom and modern agency. This research paper demonstrates that true empowerment in the post-globalized Indian context is predicated on the courageous reclamation of individual dignity over the atomizing pressures of material success and the stagnating mandates of unyielding tradition.

Keywords: Critical Traditionalism, Neoliberal Ambition, Feminine Subjectivity, Cultural Hybridity, Existential Crisis

Introduction

The ethical framework and creative outlook of Sudha Murty are profoundly anchored in the heritage and metaphysical traditions of the Indian subcontinent, an orientation significantly fostered by her formative years within a Brahmin milieu. This foundational exposure to ancestral principles functions as a primary architect of her ideological perspective and literary aesthetics. Throughout her corpus, Murty manifests an abiding reverence for the Indian spirit, artfully weaving these sociocultural threads into the tapestry of her fiction. In doing so, she occupies a dual role: acting as a nuanced decipherer of domestic customs for local readers and a sophisticated cultural diplomat for the international community. Her narrative technique frequently interrogates the intricate tensions and dialogues between historical continuity and contemporary evolution, a thematic preoccupation that achieves its most refined expression in the textual landscape of *Gently Falls the Bakula*.

The Disembedded Domesticity: Global Capitalism and the Erosion of Ancestral Ethics

Within the narrative confines of *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Sudha Murty orchestrates a profound investigation into the friction between individualistic strivings and the preservation of domestic equilibrium, illustrating the corrosive potential of contemporary desires on the stability of human connections. Although the prose maintains a deceptive minimalist clarity, it is heavily fortified by the philosophical underpinnings of classical Indian literature, specifically the Epics, Puranas, and Vedas, which Sudha Murty integrates to anchor her discourse within a distinctively indigenous sociological framework. The trajectory of the protagonists, Shrikant and Shrimati, serves as a symbolic microcosm of the middle-class struggle to mediate between the homogenizing forces of global capitalism and the retention of ancestral ethics. While Shrimati emerges as a site of classical virtues such as altruism and affective labor, Shrikant functions as a personification of the atomized, competitive drive characteristic of the modern technocrat. This dichotomy reflects what Anthony Giddens identifies in *The Consequences of Modernity* as the radical "disembedding" of social relations from local contexts, where the pursuit of abstract institutional success often necessitates the abandonment of intimate, traditional commitments (Giddens 21).

The Paradox of Progress: Ethnographic Realism and the ‘Feminist Dilemma’

Sudha Murty’s authorial voice is further emboldened by her dual identity as a philanthropic practitioner and a global traveler, leveraging her ethnographic observations from the Infosys Foundation to map the disparate socio-economic topographies of both the

hinterland and the metropolis. This intimate familiarity with the lived realities of farmers and corporate elites alike allows her to render a highly authentic portrayal of the existential crisis facing those trapped between the psychological sanctuary of tradition and the seductive promises of material advancement. In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, this experiential depth is manifest in the depiction of the ‘Modern Indian Woman’ who must negotiate a path through the conflicting demands of self-actualization and patriarchal duty. As Radha Chakravarty notes in *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers*, such narratives often explore how women's identities are continuously reconfigured at the intersection of “national, local, and global forces, highlighting the emotional labor required to maintain a sense of self amidst shifting social paradigms” (Chakravarty 45). Eventually, Sudha Murty utilizes this domestic drama to provide an incisive commentary on the internal contradictions of Indian modernity, where the quest for progress often demands an invisible, gendered sacrifice.

The prose style adopted by Sudha Murty is distinguished by its translucent economy, an absence of artifice, and a profound affective resonance. By utilizing a sequential chronological structure in *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Murty ensures high legibility for a diverse readership while maintaining a concentrated focus on the interiority of her protagonists. The trajectory of Shrimati, moving from a state of muted endurance toward a transformative reclamation of the self, strikes a powerful chord with audiences, particularly those negotiating the restrictive mandates of a phallogocentric social order. This capacity to articulate subtle emotional shifts with empathetic precision constitutes a foundational pillar of Sudha Murty’s literary efficacy. As Naila Kabeer suggests in her discourse on empowerment, the journey toward self-realization often begins with the “cognitive shift of recognizing one's own agency within a constraining environment” (Kabeer 435). In this textual landscape, Sudha Murty serves as a chronicler of this internal revolution, illustrating that the most significant sites of resistance are often found within the quietude of the feminine psyche.

The narrative serves as a poignant critique of the contemporary preoccupation with vocational advancement, articulating the corrosive influence of such fixations on domestic stability and psychological health. Rather than resorting to didactic moralizing, Sudha Murty employs a technique of empathetic realism, allowing the reader to navigate the internal ethical crises of the characters with a sense of nuanced intimacy. This thematic focus on the repercussions of untethered ambition positions Sudha Murty as a ‘critical traditionalist’ a thinker who maintains an unwavering commitment to the foundational virtues of altruism and humility while simultaneously championing a rationalist adaptation

to the exigencies of the modern era. As Amartya Sen explores in *The Argumentative Indian*, “the synthesis of tradition and modernity in the Indian context is not an act of blind adherence to the past, but an active, intellectual engagement where ‘internal traditions’ are used to interrogate and shape the direction of contemporary change” (Sen 112). Consequently, Shrimati’s evolution from a state of domestic subordination to one of profound self-actualization acts as a testament to the supremacy of psychological resilience over systemic constraints, validating the continued pertinence of ancestral ethics within a globalized framework.

Liquid Intimacy and the Bakula Metaphor: The Labor of Feminine Self-Abnegation

Furthermore, the friction between historical continuity and modern disruption is fortified by Sudha Murty’s ethnographic observations of India’s shifting economic paradigms. Witnessing the rise of the ‘neo-millionaire’ class and the subsequent erosion of communal values, she utilizes the novel to juxtapose the affective warmth of the rural hinterland against the cold, transactional nature of the urban technopolis. This widening rift between India’s agrarian heritage and its corporate future serves as the essential backdrop for the protagonists’ emotional trajectories, mirroring the broader societal dislocations produced by globalization. The ‘Feminist Dilemma’ identified here is a struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self amidst these tectonic cultural shifts. In her analysis of Indian women’s agency, Saba Mahmood suggests in *Politics of Piety* that “agency should not merely be understood as resistance to tradition, but as a ‘capacity for action’ that is often realized through the very ethical and cultural norms a subject inhabits” (Mahmood 15). In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Shrimati’s growth reflects this sophisticated adaptation; she does not merely discard her past but recalibrates her traditional virtues to survive and thrive within the complexities of contemporary reality.

The narrative arc commences in a provincial township in North Karnataka, where Shrimati and Shrikant experience a shared childhood as neighbors. Shrimati is characterized by an incisive intellect and a profound commitment to historical inquiry, whereas Shrikant is propelled by an inexorable drive toward professional eminence. Despite these divergent psychological orientations, their academic years culminate in a romantic union and subsequent marriage. However, Shrikant’s burgeoning vocational aspirations soon introduce a subtle yet pervasive dissonance into their domestic life, as his career begins to marginalize their affective bond from the very inception of their union. This prioritization of public achievement over private intimacy reflects what Zygmunt Bauman describes in *Liquid Love* as the modern tendency to treat human relationships as “consumer goods”, where “emotional investment is frequently sacrificed at the altar of

individual mobility and market-driven success” (Bauman 12).

Shrikant’s professional ascent is systematically subsidized by emotional dereliction; as he becomes increasingly preoccupied with corporate hierarchies, Shrimati facilitates his progress by relinquishing her own scholarly trajectory and personal aspirations. Murty writes, “Shrimati’s sacrifices were like the bakula flowers, silent, gentle, and unnoticed, yet essential” (45). This botanical metaphor elegantly captures the gradual atmospheric erosion of Shrimati’s autonomy, as she bears the burden of her concessions in stoic isolation. Through this evocative imagery, Murty underscores the pervasive and often unacknowledged ‘affective labor’ that women are culturally mandated to perform within the patriarchal domestic sphere. This dynamic aligns with the observations of Arlie Russell Hochschild in *The Managed Heart*, which posits that women often undertake the “emotional heavy lifting required to sustain familial structures, a labor that remains largely invisible yet foundational to the stability of the male career” (Hochschild 165). Consequently, the bakula flower becomes a potent symbol of the gendered costs of modern ambition, where the woman's selfhood is expected to provide the silent, aromatic backdrop to the man's public triumph.

Specular Erasure and the Sovereign Self: Dismantling the Patriarchal Social Contract

The progressive acceleration of Shrikant’s professional trajectory precipitates a corresponding deterioration in the couple’s affective bond. Within the high-stakes environment of corporate governance and strategic negotiations, Shrimati experiences an intensifying sense of erasure, becoming a peripheral figure in her husband's life. She reflects, “Shrimati was like a piece of furniture in Shrikant’s well-decorated life, present, functional, but forgotten” (GFB 63). This stark imagery elucidates the psychological taxation of a partnership subsumed by contemporary ambition, where the foundational elements of reciprocal esteem and emotional depth are discarded in favor of material prestige. As Shrimati becomes increasingly ensnared by the performative requirements of her marital role, her perceived invisibility necessitates a critical re-evaluation of the dividends of her self-abnegation. This condition mirrors Luce Irigaray’s critique in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, which posits that within patriarchal structures, “the woman is often relegated to a ‘specular’ function, existing merely as a mirror to reflect and enhance the man's social identity while her own subjecthood remains unacknowledged” (Irigaray 134).

Shrimati’s burgeoning internal dissonance eventually reaches a threshold where the erosion of her identity can no longer be ignored. Her ultimate resolution to sever the marital tie is not a product of ephemeral impulse but signifies a profound cognitive

awakening and a reclamation of the self. She interrogates her own existence, asking, “I gave up everything for him, but who am I now?” (GFB 56). This query represents the apex of her emotional evolution, as she recognizes that personal gratification and existential purpose are not secondary to domestic obligations. Shrimati’s transformation serves as a powerful emblem of individual agency and the imperative of reconciling ancestral expectations with personal autonomy. This transition aligns with Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion in *The Second Sex* that “to become a subject, a woman must move beyond the role of the ‘Other’ and define her existence through her own projects and aspirations rather than through her relationship to a man” (Beauvoir 725). Through Shrimati’s final act of departure, Murty validates the necessity of self-determination, suggesting that true integrity is found in the courageous assertion of one’s identity even when it necessitates the dismantling of traditional social contracts.

The Restoration of the Sovereign Self: Intellectual Awakening and the Morality of Care

The narrative’s structural pivot is catalyzed when Shrimati receives a formal invitation from her former mentor to undertake doctoral research in history. This academic prospect serves as a vital spark, reigniting her dormant intellectual fervor and compelling a visceral confrontation with the magnitude of her previous self-abnegation. Shrimati’s internal dissonance achieves a poignant clarity as she interrogates the moral validity of her own aspirations. Sudha Murty writes, “Is it wrong to want something for myself?” (GFB 82), a query that articulates the pervasive silent crisis experienced by women trapped between the rigid mandates of communal duty and the burgeoning drive for individual autonomy. This threshold of introspection functions as a transformative catalyst, signaling the transition from passive endurance to the initial stages of cognitive self-empowerment. This psychological shift aligns with Carol Gilligan’s theories in *In a Different Voice*, which describe “the developmental move from a ‘morality of care’ centered on self-sacrifice to one that integrates the self as a legitimate object of concern and ethical consideration” (Gilligan 149).

Shrimati’s eventual resolution to sever her marital ties constitutes a radical assertion of intrinsic value, serving as a symbolic victory of subjective agency over the homogenizing force of social conventions. Sudha Murty captures the gravity of this exodus, stating, “Shrimati walked out of the house, not with anger or regret, but with the quiet strength of a woman who had found herself again” (GFB 98). This manifestation of serene fortitude is the definitive emblem of her metamorphosis, reinforcing the novel’s central philosophical premise: that the dialectic between historical continuity and

contemporary progress must be mediated through the lens of individual dignity. Her departure is not an act of destructive rebellion but a restorative retrieval of the 'sovereign self'. As Martha Nussbaum argues in *Women and Human Development*, "true flourishing requires that a woman be treated as an 'end in herself' rather than a mere instrument for the realization of others' goals" (Nussbaum 2), a principle that Shrimati finally embodies as she navigates her path toward intellectual liberation.

The Existential Vacuum: Corporate Atomization and the 'Third Space' of Identity

Conversely, Sudha Murty utilizes the character of Shrikant to present a devastating critique of a modernity characterized by hollow materialism and the atomization of the self through corporate competition. His regression from an affectionate companion to a vacuous, self-interested executive underscores the existential bankruptcy that frequently attends unbridled vocational ambition. Sudha Murty observes, "Success can buy many things, but it cannot buy the warmth of a companion who truly understands you" (GFB 112), a sentiment that highlights the profound human deficit incurred when professional milestones are elevated above affective bonds. This critique mirrors Jean Baudrillard's analysis in *The Consumer Society*, which posits that in a world dominated by social prestige and material signifiers, "individuals often lose the capacity for authentic, unmediated human connection, replacing emotional depth with the performance of status" (Baudrillard 61). Shrikant's isolation thus serves as a cautionary tale of the spiritual erosion inherent in a life where the 'route' to success has completely severed its 'roots' in empathetic relationship.

The narrative functions as a rigorous interrogation of the restrictive parameters of tradition, specifically the systemic requirement of feminine self-abnegation as the primary lubricant for domestic stability. Shrimati's trajectory illuminates the imperative for a nuanced equilibrium between ancestral heritage and contemporary progress, suggesting that authentic advancement is found in the synthesis rather than the rejection of these forces. Sudha Murty posits that an uncritical adherence to either the rigidity of the past or the relentless momentum of the future results in an existential vacuum, as neither extreme can sustain the holistic well-being requisite for human flourishing. The title, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, is laden with symbolic resonance; the flower serves as a metaphor for Shrimati's unobtrusive, altruistic disposition and her deep-rooted cultural alignment. Much like the flower that descends in silence, Shrimati's identity is obscured by the shadow of Shrikant's vocational triumphs, signifying the erosion of traditional ethics under the weight of globalized ambition. However, the gentle fall also suggests a transitional grace; her eventual departure is not a failure of character but a transformative movement toward self-

empowerment. This narrative structure reflects Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'Third Space' of enunciation, where the collision of tradition and modernity creates a new, "hybrid site for the construction of identity that is neither entirely beholden to the past nor fully subsumed by the present" (Bhabha 53).

The Spectator's Epiphany: Individualization, Re-Vision, and the Hybridity of Tradition

Ultimately, the novel offers a profound meditation on the intricacies of the modern human condition, utilizing the friction between Shrimati and Shrikant to advocate for a recalibration of personal fulfillment alongside communal values. Sudha Murty challenges the binary opposition of the old and the new, urging a future where individual dignity and collective welfare are mutually reinforcing. In this landscape, the emotional fabric of the marital bond is depicted as being vulnerable to the corrosive influence of unchecked professional desire. As Shrikant's vocational stature expands, the reciprocal respect that once anchored the partnership undergoes a process of disintegration, replaced by the transactional coldness of the corporate ethos. Shrimati, initially a bastion of traditional self-sacrifice, is consequently propelled into an existential crisis of subjecthood. Sudha Murty captures this widening chasm with the observation: "Shrikant's dreams were growing, but so was the distance between them" (GFB 65). This metaphor vividly illustrates how the vertical ascent of one partner can precipitate a horizontal alienation within the intimate sphere. Such a portrayal aligns with Ulrich Beck's analysis in *Risk Society*, which highlights how the 'individualization' of modern life often forces a conflict between the pursuit of a private career and the maintenance of shared, affective commitments, "leaving women to bear the primary burden of this social dislocation" (Beck 105).

Central to Shrimati's trajectory is a profound psychological conflict between the prescriptive mandates of her social milieu and an intrinsic quest for existential gratification. Her identity has historically been anchored in the conventional feminine paradigm of the domestic locus, defined by unswerving loyalty, altruism, and the role of the foundational supporter. Sudha Murty reinforces this through a potent botanical allegory, likening Shrimati's devotion to the bakula flower: "Shrimati was always there, just like the bakula tree, its fragrance ever-present yet never acknowledged" (GFB 52). Just as the olfactory presence of the bakula is naturalized and eventually ignored, Shrimati's emotional labor and ethical fortitude are rendered invisible, despite being the vital scaffolding for the marital unit. This metaphor serves as a devastating critique of how traditionalism, when devoid of reciprocity, facilitates a systematic suppression of the individual. As Judith Butler explores in *Gender Trouble*, "the repetitive performance of gendered roles often

congeals into a perceived essence, making it difficult for the subject to envision a life outside the established domestic script” (Butler 45). Consequently, the rigid interpretation of tradition leads to an ‘emotional erosion’ where the woman’s contributions are treated as inherent biological functions rather than significant personal sacrifices.

As the temporal distance from her initial aspirations increases, Shrimati’s alienation from her role as a passive custodian reaches a critical threshold, where her subjecthood is effectively eclipsed by Shrikant’s public triumphs. Sudha Murty articulates the psychological wreckage of this domestic displacement through Shrimati’s introspection: “It seemed that Shrikant’s world had expanded so much that there was no place for her in it anymore. She had become a spectator in her own life” (GFB 76). This transformation from a participant to an observer within her own existence highlights the existential vacuum produced when a life is lived exclusively for the benefit of another. However, Shrimati’s narrative is ultimately defined by resilience rather than victimhood. The academic invitation from her former mentor to pursue a doctorate in history acts as a symbolic ‘return of the repressed’ intellectual self, forcing her to confront the staggering cost of her self-abnegation. Sudha Murty captures this epiphany: “The years spent in silence, supporting Shrikant, had taken away something precious from her. Was it too late to rediscover herself?” (GFB 89). This scholarly opportunity transcends professional advancement; it represents what Adrienne Rich terms “re-vision” (Rich 35), the act of looking back with fresh eyes and entering an old text from a new critical direction to reclaim a lost identity. Thus, the PhD offer becomes a vehicle for intellectual emancipation, allowing Shrimati to dismantle the ‘spectator’ role and re-emerge as the primary architect of her own destiny.

Shrimati’s resolution to vacate the marital space constitutes a definitive act of self-emancipation, representing a categorical dismissal of the passivity that characterized her domestic tenure. This juncture of profound self-assertion allows her to emerge from the periphery of her own sacrifices, reclaiming an autonomous identity that had been systematically subsumed. Sudha Murty captures the gravity of this transition with lyrical precision: “Shrimati stepped out into the night, not with a feeling of anger, but with the calm certainty of a woman who had found her own voice” (GFB 104). This exodus is both a literal departure and a symbolic repudiation of the sociocultural mandates that equate feminine virtue with perpetual self-abnegation. While Sudha Murty critiques the vacuous materialism of Shrikant’s professional sphere, she simultaneously interrogates the restrictive nature of traditionalism when it is utilized as an instrument of suppression. This internal and external dialectic suggests that the ‘Feminist Dilemma’ lies not in tradition

itself, but in its rigid enforcement. As Sudha Murty posits, “It is not tradition that is oppressive, but the way it is interpreted and enforced. We must learn to adapt it to our changing realities” (GFB 110). This perspective aligns with Homi Bhabha’s conceptualization of ‘cultural hybridity’, which argues that “the survival of tradition in a globalized world depends on its ability to be rearticulated and translated within new historical contexts, rather than being preserved as a static artifact” (Bhabha 55).

The Autopsy of Ambition: Liquid Modernity and the Invisible Fragrance of Sacrifice

Ultimately, Sudha Murty’s narrative serves as a clarion call for a harmonious reconciliation between ancestral wisdom and contemporary aspiration, particularly for women navigating the ‘dual burden’ of modern life. Shrimati’s journey underscores the philosophical necessity of equilibrium, suggesting that existential peace is predicated on the ability to bridge the temporal chasm between the past and the future. Sudha Murty encapsulates this imperative, noting, “One must learn to strike a balance between the past and the future, for only then can we find peace in our hearts” (GFB 121). However, the novel also provides a sobering portrait of the human cost incurred when this balance is ignored. As Shrikant’s professional eminence expands, the ‘emotional fabric’ of the partnership undergoes a process of attrition, illustrating how the neoliberal focus on individual triumph can effectively dissolve the bonds of reciprocal understanding. This disintegration of intimacy reflects what Zygmunt Bauman identifies in *Liquid Modernity* as “the precarious nature of human bonds in an age of ‘fragmented lives’, where long-term commitments are often destabilized by the volatile demands of the global market” (Bauman 162). Through the diverging paths of Shrimati and Shrikant, Sudha Murty illustrates that true progress is not measured by material acquisition, but by the preservation of individual dignity and the capacity to nurture affective relationships amidst the turbulence of change.

The narrative in *Gently Falls the Bakula* serves as a poignant autopsy of a marital bond eroded by the corrosive influence of unbridled ambition. Sudha Murty encapsulates this structural decay with the evocative line, “Shrikant’s dreams were growing, but so was the distance between them” (GFB 65), a sentiment that functions as a microcosm for the broader sociological shift where professional milestones are prioritized over affective stability. This domestic attrition places the entirety of the emotional burden upon Shrimati, whose identity is systematically subsumed by the ‘supportive wife’ archetype, a role deeply entrenched in the Indian cultural imaginary. Her labor, characterized by unswerving loyalty and the suppression of personal intellect, is naturalized through the potent botanical metaphor of the bakula tree: “Shrimati was always there, just like the bakula tree, its fragrance ever-present yet never acknowledged” (GFB 52). This imagery illustrates how

tradition, when weaponized as a tool of domestic convenience, renders feminine sacrifice as invisible as an ambient scent, essential yet overlooked. As Arlie Russell Hochschild notes in *The Managed Heart*, the “emotional heavy lifting required to sustain the male career often leaves the woman in a state of ontological invisibility, where her presence is felt only through its functionality” (Hochschild 165).

The Ethics of Self-Care: Reconciling Ancestral Roots with Modern Routes

The deepening of Shrimati’s existential crisis signifies the psychological taxation of modernity, which frequently elevates material accumulation over interpersonal intimacy. As Shrikant’s professional world expands, Shrimati’s internal landscape contracts, leading to the painful realization that she has become a “spectator in her own life” (GFB 76). However, her narrative is not one of static victimization but of burgeoning resilience. The arrival of an academic opportunity, an invitation to pursue a Ph.D. in history, acts as the catalyst for her self-reclamation, forcing her to confront the profound question: “The years spent in silence, supporting Shrikant, had taken away something precious from her. Was it too late to rediscover herself?” (GFB 89). Her subsequent decision to leave the marriage is an act of serene defiance and profound self-assertion. Sudha Murty describes her exodus with a singular dignity: “Shrimati stepped out into the night, not with a feeling of anger, but with the calm certainty of a woman who had found her own voice” (GFB 104). This movement aligns with Carol Gilligan’s developmental theory in *In a Different Voice*, which posits that “a woman’s transition toward maturity often involves a shift from an ethic of self-sacrifice to an ethic of self-care that recognizes the self as a legitimate object of moral concern” (Gilligan 149).

Ultimately, *Gently Falls the Bakula* functions as a sophisticated meditation on the necessary reconciliation between historical continuity and contemporary aspiration. Sudha Murty avoids a simplistic rejection of the past, suggesting instead that the oppression of tradition lies not in its essence but in its rigid, unthinking enforcement. She advocates for a flexible reinterpretation of heritage, asserting, “It is not tradition that is oppressive, but the way it is interpreted and enforced. We must learn to adapt it to our changing realities” (GFB 110). The novel posits that true fulfillment is predicated on an equilibrium where ancestral wisdom and modern freedoms are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. Sudha Murty concludes this philosophical inquiry with a call for balance: “One must learn to strike a balance between the past and the future, for only then can we find peace in our hearts” (GFB 121). In the context of Martha Nussbaum’s “Capabilities Approach”, Shrimati’s journey is the realization of the “capability” for practical reason and affiliation, “the power to plan one’s own life and live in a relationship of mutual respect,

rather than one of mere instrumental service” (Nussbaum 78). Through Shrimati’s renewal, Sudha Murty illustrates that the ‘roots’ of the past need not hinder the ‘routes’ of the future, provided the individual retains the autonomy to navigate their own path.

Conclusion

In summary, *Gently Falls the Bakula* orchestrates a sophisticated and multi-dimensional interrogation of the intricate dialectic between ancestral continuity and contemporary disruption. By mapping Shrimati’s psychological trajectory from a state of domestic self-abnegation toward a terminal point of self-actualization, Sudha Murty delivers an incisive critique of both the atomizing pressures of neoliberal success and the asphyxiating nature of traditional gender mandates. The narrative posits that authentic progress is not found in the totalizing victory of one force over the other, but in the radical ability to reconcile these antagonistic pressures through a harmonious equilibrium that preserves individual agency. Through the contrasting lives of Shrikant, whose vocational ascent results in emotional alienation, and Shrimati, whose traditional virtues initially bind her to a secondary status, Sudha Murty exposes the profound affective taxation of this cultural dichotomy. This tension reflects what Anthony Giddens describes as “the struggle for ‘self-identity’ in the late modern age, where individuals must navigate a “reflexive project of the self” amidst the collapse of traditional certainties and the rise of globalized demands” (Giddens 75). Rather than offering a reductive resolution, the novel functions as an ethical call for introspection, urging a synthesis that respects both cultural heritage and the inherent right to personal renewal. Ultimately, Shrimati’s journey serves as a timeless meditation on the human condition, asserting that true fulfillment is predicated on the courage to dismantle restrictive societal expectations in favor of a life that prioritizes emotional connectivity and existential dignity.

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