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## Sudha Murthy, The Epitome of Feminism: Breaking Shackles of Patriarchy Through Her Writings (Gently Falls the Bakula and House of Cards)

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### **Abstract:**

*Since time immemorial, India has witnessed a patriarchal society where men have played the role of sole decision makers in the society and females were agonised at the hands of patriarchy in the orthodox society. Many feminist movements came into existence to fight the plight of females in which the female writers played a pivotal role to highlight the issues faced by females and make them aware of their rights and encourage them to speak for themselves. Sudha Murthy is one such eloquent writer who writes fiercely to strengthen the status of females in the society and to enlighten the society about the importance of females in building a healthy society to live in. This paper elucidates the role of Sudha Murthy in liberating females from the stereotypical bondages of the society through her writings with reference to her novels, House of Cards and Gently Falls the Bakula by analysing the portrayal of female protagonists in these novels set in the Indian orthodox society.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Sudha Murthy, Orthodox society, Plight, Female writers, Stereotypical bondages, Patriarchy.*

### **Introduction:**

Sudha Murthy is one the most eloquent female writers who has empowered the feminist movement through her writings by portraying her female protagonists in such a way that they set a path of enlightenment for her tribe. Most of her novels are set in orthodox Indian society with a tinge of modernism, where the female protagonists are at par with their male counterparts and sometimes even better but for the sake of keeping their family and marriage intact they suppress themselves to an extent where they are considered docile eventually they break all the barriers and stand up for themselves and their happiness. A female can be suppressed till she allows herself to suffer but when

the water crosses the bridge she gets the unfathomable courage to stand for herself and her true spirit which is buried deep in her bosom, blurred by the patriarchy, evolves.

As rightly said by Maya Angelou:

**You may shoot me with your words, You may cut me with your eyes, You may kill me with your hatefulness, But still, like air, I'll rise. (21-24) -Maya Angelo's Still Rise-**

Sudha Murthy doesn't write in an outrageous tone, intended to harm the norms of the society rather she believes in the piousness of the institution of marriage and her protagonists put in all the efforts to keep the happiness of their family and the sanctity of their married life intact.

Her protagonists are neither too submissive nor too rebellious, they abide by the virtues and are confined in the limits of society. They thrive to establish themselves as an individual having a set of perception and identity as an individual in the set paradigm of societal norms, respecting the expectations of people around her.

According to a social psychologist, **Peter Weinreich**,

**"Identity is a structural representation of the individual's existential experience, in which the relationships between self and other agents are organised in relatively stable structures of time... with the emphasis in the socio-cultural milieu in which self relates to other agents and institutions. (Weinreich and Saunderson, 2003, p1)."**

Sudha Murthy very beautifully depicts the life of an average Indian woman tied up in the shackles of patriarchy struggling to show her existence in the male dominant society, which makes it relatable for all the females despite their social status, whether they are working independent women or the housewives taking care of family and household chores. The writing style of Sudha Murthy is simple and easy to understand which allows her readers to connect with what they read. This paper throws light on the contribution of Sudha Murthy in catalysing women empowerment through her writings, with special reference to her novels: Gently Falls the Bakula and House of Cards.

#### **Review of Literature:**

Gently Falls the Bakula (2008) and House of Cards are the novels written by Sudha Murthy which are the primary sources for this research paper. These novels are analysed thoroughly developing a strong perception towards the emotional needs and the rights of females.

D. Nivetha (2018) in "Quest for Identity in Sudha Murthy's Novel Gently Falls the Bakula" threw light on the pursuit of individuality and self respect in Gently Falls the Bakula. Conclusion drawn is that every woman strives to attain freedom and a sense of individuality in the society more than her husband's money or status in the society. Similarly, Dr. Jabeen R. Siddiqui in "Patriarchal Dubiousness in Sudha Murthy's House Of Cards: An Overview" has analysed the whimsical and hypocritical chauvinistic attitude of males towards the females in the society The paper is a

conglomeration of agony, yearnings and deprivation of females and the insensitivity, prejudice, pretentiousness and unrealistic expectations of males in the patriarchal society.

### **Methodology:**

The novels "Gently falls the Bakula" and "The House of Cards" are used as the primary sources and the critical analysis is done by thorough reading of the novels. Few research papers on the themes of curiosity, doubts, prejudices, identity crises, love, hatred, isolation, jealousy, pursuit of self identity, patriarchal society, etc. are used as the secondary sources and the texts are scrutinised to get the essence of the theme of these novels.

### **Theoretical framework and Discussion:**

#### **Shrimati, Breaking Barriers of Patriarchy in Gently Falls the Bakula-**

The story is about the shattering of a beautiful marriage due to ignorance and indifference of the male counterpart. Shrimati, the female protagonist, was a very simple and sensitive person married to Shrikant who was a handsome and intelligent young man. Shrimati was even brighter than Shrikant but Shrikant underestimated her calibre. The gradual friendship led to their regular meetings which resulted in igniting the fire of love in their hearts.

Shrikant got admission in IIT Mumbai so he had to leave Hubli and Shrimati with a heavy heart, to pursue his dreams and ambitions. Shrikant proposed to Shrimati for marriage and after some opposition from both families, the wedding took place. They moved to Mumbai. Living in a new city without any acquaintances and with limited resources was a challenge for Shrimati. As Shrikant was usually busy with his office work, Shrimati decided to go on with her research work. She had to repeatedly postpone her desire to pursue a Ph.D. due to several hurdles that they faced and to support Shrikant in all his endeavours. Shrimati became indifferent to her feelings and her world revolved around Shrikant and his dreams and aspirations. During college and school Shrimati was considered much brighter than Shrikant but now she has completely underestimated herself and with Shrikant's progress she could not be compared with him in any respect. Each step of the ladder that Shrikant climbed for success was made of Shrimati's dreams. Shrimati's intelligence faded with the grandeur of Shrikant's success. Shrikant never appreciated any of Shrimati's efforts and even failed to acknowledge her sacrifices and selfless love for him. Shrimati started feeling lonely as Shrikant was spellbound by his enormous success at such a young age and would only think in terms of profit and loss, but for Shreemati love, compassion and respect was above all these materialistic things.

**As Sudha Murthy says:**

**"Good relationships, compassion and peace of mind is much more important than achievements, awards, degrees or money."**

Having failed in all attempts to make Shrikant understand her vulnerability and realising she was the last on Shrikant's priority list, she decided to think about herself. She wanted to bring back the bright and brilliant Shrimati that had hidden under the shadow of grandeur of Shrikant and his success. Shrimati was now ready to break down the stereotype of being an obedient wife to a man who is indifferent towards her feelings. Shrikant didn't even notice the changed behaviour of Shrimati. He was unaware of the turmoil in Shrimati's mind and heart which was under the curtain of her calm persona.

When she broke the news to Shrikant, he was dumbstruck and could not comprehend what she was saying. He could not believe that Shrimati who is usually calm and obeys him, who does everything as per Shrikant's will, has taken such a huge decision of leaving him without even talking to him. Shrimati left without turning back. Shrikant was dumbstruck, he was still trying to collect the shattered pieces of his male ego. He had never thought Shrimati would leave him, he knew how much she loved him. He realised how he always abandoned Shrimati's feelings and expectations. More than that he diminished a bright star in his light of success who was worthier than him and more brilliant than him in all aspects. He suddenly acknowledged her worth in his life. He realised he was successful because Shrimati sacrificed her dreams. Hadn't Shrimati been supportive, he wouldn't have achieved whatever he had today. Shrikant was guilty on realising that Shrimati did all this selflessly putting her dreams and ambitions at stake, without even asking for anything in return but it was bygone now. Shrimati is not going to return.

### **Mridula and her quest for Freedom and Respect in The House of Cards**

Sudha Murthy's novel, House of Cards depicts the true difference between a house and a home. A house is made of bricks and walls but it is the people who live in that house that make it a home. Mridula was a young girl, joyful, enthusiastic and full of life. She belonged to an affluent family, yet she was down to earth, simple and humble. Sanjay was a doctor in the government hospital and his family was in no way equivalent to Mridula's. Sanjay met with an accident when he was a child due to which one of his arms was shorter than the other. He was nevertheless charming, talented and a brilliant doctor, who did his job sincerely.

An accidental meeting of Mridula and Sanjay made them friends which led to their marriage. Mridula was a government school teacher in Aladahalli and took transfer to Bengaluru after marriage. She supported Sanjay in all ups and downs of his life. They had a son named Shishir. Sanjay did his job with utmost honesty but soon became the victim of corruption and partiality in the government hospital due to lack of connections and money to pay the bribe.

Alex was Sanjay's colleague and a good friend who hailed from Goa. He always insisted Sanjay to leave the Government hospital and start practise of his own as that is the only way to mint a

lot of money and have a good life. Sanjay always denied Alex's proposal, but after being ill-treated in the hospital and being falsely accused of something that he didn't do he accepted Alex's proposal and started a nursing home with Alex. Mridula supported his decision wholeheartedly and during initial days Mridula's income was the only source of income to support them. Eventually the nursing home flourished and Sanjay became a renowned Gynecologist in Bangalore. Sanjay who once was honest and disciplined now weighs everything with money. The relationship or the person did not matter to him over money. He had tasted the respect and attention that comes with power and money. He became ignorant of Mridula's feelings. Sanjay and Shishir often mocked Mridula for being naive and too honest. It would hurt Mridula, but both of them didn't bother about her feelings. Mridula would look after all the finances of the nursing home but she was unaware of the secret finances that Sanjay looked after which was mostly the black money. It was kept hidden from Mridula as he knew she would never approve of it. Mridula's innocence is rightly quoted by Sudha Murthy in the novel:

**"Usually, people who are sensitive need more time to understand the real world."**

**(House of Cards, Sudha Murthy)**

Mridula once came across the scam done by her husband and was deeply hurt. She was deceived by her own husband. Sanjay felt there was nothing wrong in what he did, this even added to Mridula's vulnerability. She suffered depression, even then Sanjay's behaviour towards her didn't change. Sanjay provided Mridula with all the luxuries of life ignoring her emotions and mental breakdown.

**"Every woman wants to change her life but no man understands how. He showers his wife with gifts that he likes but not with what she wants."**

**(-House of Cards, Sudha Murthy)**

She felt suffocated in the house and the marriage of twenty-five years seemed worthless. She decided to move out of this house and the marriage. She took transfer to Aladahalli and left Sanjay on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary forever, breathing freely after a long time of her married life.

### **Conclusion:**

The female protagonists of Sudha Murthy's novels are often found struggling around the themes of curiosity, doubts, prejudices, identity crises, love, hatred, isolation, jealousy, etc. The females spend most of their lives catering to the needs and expectations of the family and society and during the process she loses her true self, her ambition and her career. It is very difficult to find women who are very blunt about their success. Ask any woman she is doing close quarter battles every day. The difficulty is she is not battling enemies, it is very difficult to fight with your own people. Sudha Murthy through her writings has celebrated every woman who is fighting that battle but not getting an award for it. The females who are fighting those battles yet keeping their families

together, keeping their dreams alive are genuinely big heroes. The words from 'House of Cards' are apt in this regard:

**“In a male-dominated society like ours, all the important decisions are made by a man, including choices about what his wife wants. Every woman values her freedom to choose—much more than her husband’s money or position.”**

It is impossible for a retrospective mind to neglect the thought of all the gentle females who are trapped in a demonic house with a stereotypical environment and the painful harsh treatments. Sudha Murthy works as an inspiration to break down all the social evils and norms made to outcast females in the patriarchal society. Her writings are like the little hands which contribute to breaking the shackles of orthodox society.

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