



## Breaking the silence: An exploration of Shrimati's resilience in Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*

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### Abstract

The novel *Gently Falls the Bakula*, written by Sudha Murthy, portrays the consequences faced by young couple Shrimati and Shrikant and their separation. This study focuses on the protagonist Shrimati. She is a resilient figure whose resilience shaped and molded her, to create her own identity with the aid of education. Despite societal pressures, she moves on from her marital life and attains her identity through her education. The paper analyses the inner transformation of Shrimati, portraying her evolution as a symbol of resilience, strength, and enlightenment. Despite being undermined and isolated in her marriage, she does not succumb to despair. Instead, she draws upon her inner strength to challenge traditional gender roles and carve out a space of self-fulfillment. The study applies Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to trace Shrimati's psychological and emotional growth from basic survival and security to the realization of self-actualization through her decision to pursue higher education.

**Keywords:** Resilience, self-identity, needs, enlightenment, relationship

### Introduction

"Chains don't hold a marriage together: it is threads, hundreds of tiny threads that sew people together through years," says Simone Signoret (Quoteresearch). A marriage is all about understanding and accepting each other's feelings and wishes. Indian society emphasizes marriage as a fundamental element and the relationship between a husband and wife as a crucial subject. The novel *Gently Falls the Bakula* written by Sudha Murthy in a simple language addresses issues of a woman in an Indian family set-up. Her other works like *Dollar Bahu*, *Mahashweta*, *The Old Man and his God*, *House of Cards* and *Mahashweta* focus on the rebel of women in marital life. Every relationship needs meticulous care and attention. A strong relationship needs efforts from both sides. In this fast-moving world, people fail to nurture their relationships. This results in disheartening separations. *Gently Falls the Bakula* is one such narrative. This paper focuses on the resilience of the protagonist, Shrimati in her quest for self-identity.

The story *Gently Falls the Bakula* revolves around Shrikant and Shrimati. Shrikant and Shrimati, who were passionate lovers got married soon after their college. When they moved to Bombay, they led a joyful life in the beginning. Though Shrimati loved history, she sacrificed the dream of doing a Ph.D., and she went for a job. She did a mechanical job. Her sacrifice and resilience made them lead a peaceful life without suffering. Shrimati was very supportive to Shrikant in all aspects. Because of Shrikant's dedication, he evolved into an accomplished businessman. Shrimati assisted his business, and she became an extremely efficient personal secretary for Shrikant. As time passed, she started feeling isolated at her home. They did not have children, as he didn't give much importance to his personal life. While she tried to insist this, he did not bother and took her for granted. She was a dutiful wife and profusely devoted her life to him and even hosted his business events. She then realized that her sacrifices were in vain. She gave utmost care to organize everything for him. As a wife, she did her

duty in a righteous way, while he was not inclined to prioritize her.

Shrimati lived as a shadow. She questioned the worth of her sacrifice. She once happened to read a letter from Ravi, Shrikant's friend, mentioning her as unamusing, undemanding, and totally submissive to Shrikant's needs and achievements. Moreover, he mentioned that she is always clear in what she wants; that's why she chooses history even after scoring good marks in school. These thoughts of Ravi about her triggered her mind. Ravi's letter turned into a catalyst for her further decisions. She realized that she needed to create her own identity. With a clear thought, she decided to leave Shrikant to go to the USA to do her Ph.D. with scholarship. It is evident that she needed to withstand on her own without her husband's help.

Shri, I loved history and I love you. In fact, once upon a time I loved you more than history. But when you lost your finer sentiments, chasing the success in the world of business I was left with nothing other than history... you knew your goal. Now, I am also clear about my goal and I want to achieve it. (Murthy162)

Resilience is the key for Shrimati to create her own identity. She knew that her in-laws would speak ill of her, but she was not concerned about all those things. She wanted to be an empowered woman. She did not want to be the shadow of her husband as before. The pain to create her own identity brought her reawakening. She had no one to speak within her home, especially during the time when she was ill. She was strong enough to get out of her marriage because of all the sorrows she had in isolation. She thought her husband would understand her sadness, but he was immersed in his own business.

The pains incurred by Shrikant prompted her to think about her self-worth. She wanted to value her own self and she wanted to equip herself. She understood that empowering herself would lift her and create her identity. She left her husband, and in spite of all the societal pressures, she was not worried because of her endurance. If she had not been resilient, she would have regretted it for the whole life. Her

endurance helped her to fight for her dream. She loved Shrikant more than history. She underwent trauma; she was no more ready to swim in the sea of pain again by living together with him. Her resilience guided her to come out of the trauma.

Maslow's theory, hierarchy of needs can be applied to study the character Shrimati in this novel. Maslow proposed this theory in 1943 in his work *Motivation and Personality*. He proposed five kinds of needs that are required for every person. All the needs are arranged in a hierarchy. Every individual should attain the lower level before attaining the higher level. Physiological needs are the basic human survival needs, which include food, clothing, and shelter. Safety needs include physical safety, financial stability, health and protection. Love and belongingness needs refer to interpersonal relationships, love, friendship, and social connections. Esteem needs are of two categories: the desire for respect from others and self-respect. Self-actualization need is the highest level of Maslow's theory, representing the realization of self-fulfillment and personal growth.



(McLeod)

While applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to the character Shrimati, it is evident that she attained the physiological needs, the first in the hierarchy. Shrimati is safe with physical safety, financial stability, health, and protection, as she is under the care of Shrikant. Thus, she attained the safety needs, the second in the hierarchy. In the initial stages Shrimati was very happy with Shrikant, but in later days, as Shrikant was fully involved in his business, he didn't bother about her feelings. Despite all her sacrifices, she felt alone even though he was around her. Shrimati lacked love and care from Shrikant. Her in-laws also showed hatred from the beginning, and this started creating conflict within Shrimati. Thus, the love and belongingness needs, the third in the hierarchy were not met properly by her.

Esteem needs are the fourth in the hierarchy. Shrimati attains respect from others because she was the wife of a millionaire. Despite all her compromises, she did not have her own identity, and she was neglected by Shrikant, which resulted in dejection. The absence of her priority made her think about her self-respect. Self-actualization is the fifth in the hierarchy. She felt that her desire was unfulfilled, and her self-growth was stagnant. She sacrificed history to marry Shrikant, but the dejection caused by her husband made her think about her potential. Her courage brought her resilience. She walked out of her marital life to pursue her

education, and by her courageous decision, she attained the fourth and the fifth levels of needs in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

In conclusion, *Gently Falls the Bakula* by Sudha Murthy is a powerful portrayal of a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-discovery. Through the character of Shrimati, the novel highlights the emotional void that can exist within a marriage that lacks mutual respect and understanding. By applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it becomes evident that Shrimati's journey is not merely about breaking away from a loveless relationship, but about reclaiming her sense of self and striving towards self-actualization. Her resilience, patience, and inner strength enabled her to rise above societal expectations and personal trauma. In a society where women's sacrifices are often overlooked, Shrimati's story serves as an inspiring reminder of the importance of self-worth and the courage it takes to follow one's dreams.

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