



Research Paper

‘Shrimati’s March Towards an Authentic Existence in the Novel Gently Falls the Bakula by Mrs. Sudha Murty.’

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ABSTRACT:

In this research paper Shrimati Deshpande, the female protagonist of the novel ‘Gently falls the Bakula ‘ by Mrs. Sudha Murty is the focus of study and analysis. Shrimati’s journey through the years is followed meticulously and her efforts to move towards an authentic existence are highlighted. Shrimati’s reaction to her life events and her inner emotional turmoil is critically analysed. The change of circumstances that compels her to question herself about the meaning and purpose of her existence are studied. Her existential angst, dread and despair are minutely examined and her journey from meek submission to self assertion is delineated. Her bold decision making skills are analysed right from opting for Arts stream even after getting first place in SSLC board to flying to US university for doing Ph.D discarding the elite lifestyle that her husband Shrikant gives her. Her thought process is discreetly studied when she thinks about the meaning and worth of her existence. She finally makes a judicious choice out of the various options available in front of her. In this paper Shrimati Deshpande’s journey towards an Authentic Existence is described.

KEY WORDS: Authenticity, Authentic Existence, Essence, Self Creation, Freedom and Responsibility, Existential Crisis.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Mrs. Sudha Murty is a versatile, bilingual writer writing in both English and Kannada. As the Chairperson of Infosys Foundation, she is a great motivational force for the new generation and she continues to make a difference in the world by her pen and philanthropy. Her celebrated novel ‘Gently Falls The Bakula’ is a thought-provoking piece of writing that focuses on marital discord of ambitious couples. Shrikant Deshpande and Shrimati Deshpande are young, brilliant and strong human beings who have their own definitions of happiness and success.

The female protagonist of the novel Shrimati Deshpande goes through the **existential crisis** in her career and marital life. She wants to do something that will make her happy and satisfied. She enters the process of self-actualization, and wants the joy and satisfaction of using one’s potential and innate powers to the optimum level.

Authenticity: This is an important concept in the **Existential theory** of criticism. This is a process of **self-creation**, of rebuilding one’s life by taking stock of one’s strengths and weaknesses. This includes self-analysis, working on one’s weaknesses and sharpening one’s talents and skills by conscious efforts and moving towards one’s dream life. It means waking up to one’s potential and latent talents, the awakening stage in the life of a human being when he gathers himself up from a storm and decides to rearrange and reshape his existence. In this process a person suddenly feels some strong inner voice guiding him through the storm, showing him the way, and fountains of positive energy ooze out from that unseen power that helps to make the right moves. In this paper the female protagonist, Ms. Shrimati Deshpande creates her own essence and moves towards an **authentic existence**.

CONTENTS:

Background of the female protagonist:

Shrimati Deshpande is a young and intelligent girl who always puts a Bakula flower in her hair. Her father Shrikant Deshpande is an irresponsible and extremely lazy man who does not take up the mantle of

duties and responsibilities of his family. Her mother Kamala is a docile and introvert lady who works as a teacher in a school and pulls the financial load of the family. Shrimati's grandmother Rindakka is a domineering lady. " Shrimati grew up with a jobless father, a domineering grandmother and a timid, loving mother." "Shrimati grew up a bright, extremely accommodating but introverted young girl."

Shrimati's Achievements:

Shrimati Deshpande is a student of Model High School, Hubli, a small town in Karnataka. She is an intelligent student and wins the first prize in District level Essay Competition. She is passionate about the subject History and hero worships the Emperor Ashoka. She gets the first rank in SSLC board Bangalore which is an amazing achievement. She receives many prizes and accolades during the felicitation program in her school. She opts for Arts stream for pre university and joins BA with history as a major subject. Her clarity of vision is seen in the following sentences: *"I have a principle of my own. We should do what we really like. For two things in life it is very important for us to make our own decisions. 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. Other things like choosing a saree or buying a house can be reversed. But not these two things."* She passes her exams with flying colors and gets gold medals for her superb performance. She participates in Seminars of history, goes for visits and tours with her classmates and helps her teachers in preparation for their conferences. All the professors are happy to have such a brilliant student in the department. She enrolls for MA History at the University and enjoys the campus life.

Marital Journey:

She gets married to her childhood friend, Shrikant Deshpande and happily begins her new life at Bombay. She adjusts herself to the changes and challenges of her new life. She decides to pursue Ph.D but a letter from Gouramma upsets all her plans. Gouramma, her mother in law asks Shrikant to repay a loan of Rs. One lakh that she had taken for his education from his uncle. One lakh rupees is a huge amount for both of them. So Shrimati drops the idea of doing PhD and takes up a job to repay the loan. She feels it her moral responsibility to partake of Shrikant's load of duties and responsibilities. She sends a fixed amount to Gouramma every month and when the last installment is sent, Shrimati leaves the job and thinks of enrolling for Research. She is eager to pursue her love for history but Shrikant Deshpande, her husband gets transferred to Delhi. She has the unpleasant option of staying back in Mumbai and continuing with her research. In that case Shrikant would come to meet her only once a month. Or there is another unpleasant option of asking her mother in law to come to Mumbai to keep her company. Either Shrikant forgoes his promotion or she drops her idea of doing research. She faces the existential angst, dread and despair.

She examines the pros and cons of all the possibilities and finally decides to go to Delhi with Shrikant. It is only a matter of one year so she postpones her decision to do research by another year. She starts compromising and her priorities are always pushed to the lowest rung.

After spending one year at Delhi she again starts thinking of her love for history. But Mr Shrikant Deshpande is posted at a Project Manager at Los Angeles, US for three years. The company was to take care of all the expenses of Mr. and Mrs. Deshpande for three years. So Shrimati again drops the idea of research and joins Shrikant to US. She gets used to her new lifestyle in Los Angeles and has started enjoying her new life. But a sudden phone call from Shrikant's India Office upsets her plans once again. Shrikant is asked to report to India office immediately. He leaves for India and Shrimati is supposed to stay back and complete all formalities in US and then return to India after three months.

Shrikant gets another promotion in India, he is promoted to the post of General Manager. After three months Shrimati returns to India and is thrilled by Shrikant's success and prosperity. They move into the rich circle and they upgrade their lifestyle. Shrikant becomes busier and more engrossed in his work. He works 24x7 and his life revolves around deadlines, meetings and conferences. He is always preoccupied with his work and he constantly thinks about new plans, projects and policies.

Shrimati Deshpande wants to spend time with her husband, talk to him on various topics, discuss about their life and times as they did during their college days. But now her 'Shri' is engrossed in his career and has hardly any time to communicate with his wife. Shrimati starts feeling suffocated in this new lifestyle. She has to accompany Shrikant at five star restaurants for business dinners and parties. The fake smiles and ulterior motives of high class society people frustrates her further.

Even after ten years of marriage they have no children. She starts feeling lonely amidst the hustle and bustle of her new elite, affluent and aristocratic lifestyle. She speaks to Shrikant about her needs and problems but he fails to understand it's gravity and seriousness. Shrimati Deshpande consults a famous gynecologist and both of them undergo several tests. The test results show average potency and doctor clarifies that it might take little longer for them to have children. This is another shock for Shrimati as she remembers her mother in law's cruel taunts and remarks " a barren woman". Her emotional world is shattered as her dreams of naming her sons

after historical figures would no longer come true. Shrikant dismisses the idea of adopting a child as he believes that someone else's children can never become their own. She sinks into depression as she is sick of playing second fiddle to her husband. She feels sick, shattered and is engulfed with feelings of rootlessness, worthlessness and alienation.

Existential Crisis:

Shrimati ponders over her role and importance in her house, she works as secretary to Shrikant, completing his instructed tasks and playing the role of a charming hostess of the parties he hosts. She is financially well off, with a successful husband who has no bad habits, he does not smoke, drink, or womanise. But her emotional needs of companionship, understanding, care and concern are not fulfilled by her extremely busy husband. She thinks over this, "What had happened to Shrikant now? The love, affection and sharing of ideas and dreams had disappeared. He hardly talked to her about the company or other business matters. The only time he spoke to her was to assign a list of chores for her to do. For him she had undergone so much opposition, criticism and nastiness from her in laws. She had even given up her career, only because she really loved him. But Shrikant was not the same person she knew before their marriage..... This Shrikant appeared a stranger to her. Where could she find her 'old' 'Shri'?"

He travels 20 to 25 days in a month and visits many countries. He is physically not available, mentally preoccupied with his plans and projects; emotionally attached only to his career. Shrimati realises the change in his behaviour as he climbs the corporate ladder. He dismisses Shrimati's views and attachment for history as impractical, bookish, outdated and unimportant. This indifference from Shrikant pushes Shrimati further into depression.

March towards Authentic Existence:

When she realises that her position in her husband's life has deteriorated she starts thinking about the way to get out of her turmoil. She has many options in front of her. She can continue to be the charming hostess of the parties that her husband hosts, she can rejoice and enjoy the material comforts of her home, she can go back to her mother's place but that would mean more tension for her mother. She does not want to trouble or bother anyone with her tensions. She wants to do something that will make her happy and increase her self esteem and self worth. She decides to be a student once again as only in that role she can regain her lost confidence.

She contacts Prof. Collins, her professor whom she met at the University and writes to him about her intention to do research in his university. He arranges for her research in his university. Shrimati is delighted with this new development in her life. "She felt life had opened a new door for her. This time, she was making a decision with her head, not with her heart. Sitting in the balcony, she daydreamed about being in a university campus, reading in the library, studying in the classrooms, discussing in the seminar hall. In such places, only knowledge is respected. There is no business talk or pretensions. There is no profit, no loss. How beautiful her life would be!" After a long time she feels at peace with herself.

When Shrikant returns from his three week US tour, Shrimati breaks the news of her decision to him. She explains to him the reason behind her decision. She clarifies that she doesn't want a divorce as it is just a legal permission and document to remarry. She has no such intentions. She does not seek fame or fortune, she wants to lead a life on her own terms. "I cannot live in this kind of an atmosphere with these artificial values. I require to breathe fresh air. I do not want to live as your shadow. I want to find my own happiness..." Her self-esteem is hurt in Shrikant's company. She laments that, "I was your valuable, glittering ornament in the social circuit. I no longer want to be that. I want to live the way I want..."

Now finally she comes out of her depression and wants to live life on her own terms. She is aware of the consequences of her decision and actions. She has freedom to choose her path and she takes complete responsibility for her actions. "Now, I am also clear about my goal and I want to achieve it. Shri, you are my guru. I learnt this from you. Whenever something new people call it a revolution in the perspective of history and only later appreciate its significance. A running man cannot change his direction all of a sudden. In physics you call that inertia. I know that if I leave now, it is very natural for society to talk about me. But let me not worry about that. A person can live only by his own faith. He needs to travel on his own path, whether it has stones or thorns. He cannot take some other path, even though it is smooth and rosy, and that is exactly what I am doing today.." These are the words of a strong, confident and a wise woman named Shrimati.

She leaves Shrikant in a rainy day of Shravan and crosses the seven seas to live a life where self-respect, self-esteem and self-confidence will give her health, hope and happiness.

II. CONCLUSION:

Shrimati Deshpande ,the female protagonist of this novel marches towards her dream life. By virtue of her knowledge, hard work and determination, she decides to pursue PhD in a foreign land and boldly crosses the seven seas to do something that would give her joy and satisfaction. She experiences existential angst,dread and despair and ultimately creates her own essence. From frustration, depression and self -pity she triumphantly marches towards self- confidence, assertion and puts herself on the top most priority. Disregarding the social conventions and family restrictions, she moves towards an authentic existence and finally stands up for herself. She turns over a new leaf and she marches with more confident steps, now there is joy and satisfaction at every step of the road. Finally the horizon is resplendent with enthusiasm, hope and happiness!

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