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Cultural Bonding, Women Empowerment  
and Ecofeminism in Sudha Murthy's Novels

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to study the cultural bonding, women empowerment and ecofeminism in Sudha Murthy's novels. The traditional and cultural environment of India is rich and varied. Indian women are a blend of charm and firm, who protect the Indian culture and still establish their own identity. Sudha Murthy's novels depict women as preservers of culture and nature. Sudha Murthy is a prolific and realistic writer. She writes in the background of Indian English literature. The works of many recent Indian Writers like Anita Desai, Mahashweta Devi, Sashi Deshpande, Shoba De, Jumpa Lahiri, Arundati Roy and Sudha Murthy have been enjoyed to a great extent by many readers. Sudha Murthy writes in a simple and lucid style. Her works carry a lot of historical influences and a strong cultural bonding. Her novels make a lasting impact in the minds of the readers which make them think and rethink. The paper presents in the way in which women are portrayed, how women struggle for identity and finally liberate themselves in this male dominated society. The study of the research concludes that today's new Indian women are ready to accomplish their aspirations, yet

preserving Indian culture and protecting nature. Sudha Murthy's novels bring out to the world the characteristics of Indian women – a blend of charm and firm.

Keywords: Indian English Literature, Sudha Murthy, Nature, Cultural Bonding, Women Empowerment.

### Introduction

Sudha Murthy is a prolific writer, a technocrat and a philanthropist. Her writings are based on true life facts. Her writing makes the readers feel and the very description of the scenario draw the reader's attention. Sudha Murthy's style is simple and elegant and creates a lasting impression in the minds of the readers. Sudha Murthy is the recipient of the R.K. Narayan award for literature and the Padmashri in 2006. She writes about feminism, the need for women empowerment. She gives the power to her charming women characters to aspire what they want to achieve. Her novels are unique and fascinating. They are concerned with cultural bonding, beauty of nature, importance of love and trust above all material gains. Her novels give importance to culture and tradition. She has published Dollar Bahu, House of cards, Mahashweta, The bird with Golden Wings, Wise and otherwise: A Salute to life, The Old Woman and His God, The Day I stopped Drinking Milk, Changing India, sweet Hospitality, A Wedding in Russia, The Accolades Galore, Changing India, Sweet Hospitality, Gently Falls the Bakula. The novels Gently Falls the Bakula and House of Cards throw light on family relationships, the need for women empowerment. The present paper focuses on ecofeminism, cultural bonding and women empowerment in House of Cards and Gently falls the Bakula.

### Feminism

Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movement, aims to understand the nature of gender in equality by examining woman's social roles and lived experiences.

Feminism is a recent branch in criticism. Friedrich Engels and John Stuart Mill in their books, *The origin of family, private Property and the State* (1869) and *the subjugation of Women* (1884) respectively were the first writers to articulate the problems of women and the probable solutions to them. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is considered to be the first book on feminism. The famous sentence in her book, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a Woman<sup>1</sup>" encapsulates an argument that propels feminist thinking for years to come. Feminism as a movement started in the west and slowly paved its way in to Indian writings. The concept of Feminism could not be applied to Indian writing as it is because the position of women in the west differs greatly from the condition of women in India. This was due to the prevailing Indian culture and the caste systems in India.

#### Ecofeminism

The term ecofeminism is used to describe a feminist approach to understanding ecology. The term was coined by the French feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. Today, there are many interpretations of ecofeminism. In 1974, an influential essay by Sherry Beth Ortner 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' sought to explain in terms of structuralist anthropology, the presence in diverse cultures of the idea that women were subordinate to men. The underlying idea, Ortner discovers, is that woman is closer to nature. Ecofeminism is widely referred to as the third wave of feminism, it adds to the former theory that an environmental perspective is a necessary part of feminism. Ecofeminist theory uses the parallels between oppression of nature and oppression of women. Both nature and women are interconnected and each of them should be understood deeply to relate how they are connected. Sudha Murthy's novels revolve around the dominant issues related to women in India.

#### Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be, do and accomplish in a circumstance that they previously were denied. Women empowerment means accepting and allowing women to make decisions. To make women a part of decision-making process. Empowerment is the process that created powers in individuals over their own lives, society and in their communities. Women are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions.

### Cultural bonding

Sociologists define culture as beliefs, customs, behaviours and other common characteristics of the members of a particular group for society. The cultural bond is a common characteristic that bind the social group together. Cultural bond may be ethnic or racial based on gender or beliefs.

### Depiction of women in Sudha Murthy's novel

Sudha Murthy's novel portrayed women as charming, beautiful and enthusiastic. The typical Indian women are brought out in her novels. Women in her novels are epitome of sacrifice. They are kind hearted and gentle by all means. They are ardent lovers of nature and preservers of Indian culture. Though beautiful, highly intellectual and dutiful women no man in the male dominated society appreciates their effort.

### Mridula in house of cards

In house of cards (2013) the protagonist Mridula is portrayed as a pretty, intelligent girl who is among the top students in her class.

*“Mridula had long, dark hair and would not step out of the house without a string of flowers in it”*

*“Young Mridula was sitting on a the swing under the big banyan tree opposite the hanuman temple <sup>2</sup>”*

Mridula is in communion with nature and wants to live her life to the fullest in the hands of nature. The banyan tree, jasmine creepers are the symbolisms of nature used to depict the charm and firm in Mridula.

*“Mridula was not like everybody, she was different she had enormous enthusiasm for life and unlimited energy for reading, cooking and sketching<sup>3</sup>”*

Mridula is attracted to young Dr. Sanjay and eventually marries him with the consent of both the parents. Mridula was a teacher in a school and continued working even after marriage. Mridula loved Sanjay dearly and trusted him. Sanjay became a successful doctor and started his own nursing home. Sanjay's sister and mother exploited Mridula's innocence and Mridula was in the clutches of family bonding, the ultimate pressure of balancing the family relationship fell on her. She never had stepped out of her duties in taking care of her husband or her in-laws. She loved all and took utmost care for them. But they valued money above all relationships. Mridula cared for relationships than money.

*“When we start taking about legal rights, I may get money but I will lose the relationship. I care more about relationship with my brother and my parents<sup>4</sup>”*

On the other hand, Sanjay was more concerned about materialistic gain, which hurt the feelings of Mridula to the core. Sanjay concealed all money matters from Mridula and ultimate breach of trust, which inculcated restlessness in her and she broke.

Mridula tells her friend Anita, *“Anita, it is not about money. Money can be earned and lost. It is about faith that a wife has in her husband. That is more valuable than money and gold. Faith sustains a marriage and brings joy to the family. Without it we have nothing. How can Sanjay destroy the faith and trust, I had on him?<sup>5</sup>”*

Mridula valued love, trust and truth above all gold and money. After a careful analysis, she decides to release herself from the emotional obligations and decides to leave Sanjay and go back to her own dear village. To be happy and peaceful in the hands of nature

*Mridula came out with white cotton sari with a glow of peace on her face. She said, "Now I have spent 25 years of my most important years with you and yet I never felt like I belonged to you or your family. I am still an outsider...Now, I want to live for myself, I have my job my school and my village. You don't have to worry about me any longer. You and Sishir can visit me, whenever you want"*<sup>6</sup>

Shrimati in Gently Falls the Bakula

Shrimati the protagonist of Gently Falls the Bakula is a beautiful, intelligent, hardworking and the brightest girl in the class.

*"Ms. Shrimati Deshpande was a slim, tall girl with a wheatish complexion and good, clear features. She had unusually long hair that reached below her knees. She always wore a string of bakula flowers in her hair. Shrimati was one of the brightest students in her class"*<sup>7</sup>

Shrimati was ardent lover of nature, she loved her garden all the trees and plants around her, specially the bakula tree.

*"The bakula tree stood gracefully, as usual spreading its fragrance. It was evening and the flowers lay on the ground, forming a carpet of blossoms"*<sup>8</sup>

The bakula tree, the bakula flowers stands out as a symbol of nature representing the charm and firm in Shrimati. Shrimati and Shrikant were neighbours and fell in love with each other. They got married in spite of the conflict prevailing in both the families. Shrimati was a loving, sincere, dedicated and beautiful wife. She sacrificed her dreams, aspirations and professional life just for the sake of Shrikant's happiness and success. But Shrikant failed to recognize her sacrifice and reflect her love. He became more and more ambitious and valued material possessions about love. Material possessions in life devoid of love and understanding

are meaningless. Shrimati finally decided to be herself and do what would give her ultimate joy and peace in life. She decided to leave Shrikant and continued her Ph.D. Shrimati told Shrikant,

*“Shri, I am getting a scholarship. I have taugh over this matter for the last few weeks before taking this decision. I did not bring anything with me when I got married to you. Now also, I am not taking anything from this house. My flight is scheduled for tonight... Now I can leave peacefully<sup>9</sup>”*

Shrimati broke the cultural bonds that had clipped her wings and soared up high in the sky flying towards her long-cherished dream. She finally decided what was right, a sense of women empowerment.

## Conclusion

The colours of ecofeminism, cultural bonding and women empowerment paints the novels of Sudha Murthy. Both Shrimati and Mridula were innocent and gems of wisdom. They were ardent flowers of nature and respected nature. They value relationship and love above all material gains in this world. They are epitome of sacrifice, who have sacrificed her own self and dreamed just for the man they loved. Their love and sacrifice went unnoticed driving them to nothingness. They were birds in the cage of cultural bonding. A self-analysis finally empowered them to break the cage and they set themselves free flying back to pursue their dreams. Thus, the women in Sudha Murthy's novel acted on what they felt was right not even bothering about what would people think of them. Murthy's has portrayed strong empowered women finding their own identity.

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