

Culture: A Clash between Emotionalism and Rationalism in Sudha Murty's *Gently Falls the Bakula*

S. Infant Joshi Sudha M. A., M. Phil.,

English Department, Aditanar College of Arts and Science

sfinfantvijs@gmail.com

Abstract- Culture is born out of the emotional attachment with rich heritage and tradition of one's own country or region. The culture followed by the whole world is termed as 'world culture' and it goes on as 'national culture', 'regional culture' and 'native culture'. The cultural background of an individual becomes the base for constructing the identity of a person. Sometimes the cultural norms pave way for gender discrimination. The intervention of materialism into the rationalistic minds of the people lead to the emergence of cultural materialism. The clash between emotionalism and rationalism begins here. The present paper focuses to show how the emotional attachment with culture breaks because of the rationalistic attitude of a cultural materialist with reference to Sudha Murty's *Gently Falls the Bakula*.

Keywords : Identity Construction, Gender Discrimination, Cultural Materialism, Emotionalism, Rationalism.

Culture relates a human being with oneself and with the society around them. It refers the way for an individual to understand himself with their relation to the society on the basis of socio-political, economical, religious and language norms. It differs from group to group, and from society to society. The customary beliefs and practices of a community play an important role in developing the culture of the community. The emotional aspect of an individual is greatly attached to the culture. There are some recent trends in analyzing the culture of a region.

Sudha Murty is one of the prolific writers who has regarded culture as a part of literary works. She has a great respect for the culture and tradition of her region and it has been reflected in almost all of her works. The novel, *Gently Falls the Bakula* is no more an exception from it. The title of the book itself is a symbolic representation of the cultural practices in her region. Bakula is an unusual flower that has divine fragrance. It is used as an offering to please the divine power of that region. Murty has intentionally used the flower to represent one of the major characters, Shrimati. Bakula has a special bonding with Shrimati. Plaiting the hair with bakula flowers becomes the cultural practice of Hubli. The bakula flower is believed as the flower of prosperity and happiness in their culture. The flower is also seen as a love memento in many

of the ancient stories. The protagonists Shrimati and Shrikant are emotionally and rationally attached to the flower respectively. Murty has brought the flower to show how the culturally represented flower becomes a rational attachment to one and an emotional attachment to the other.

The biological differences distinguish human beings as male and female whereas the cultural differences distinguish the human being as masculine and feminine. The gender discrimination is socially constructed. It is given in the text as:

Since they considered themselves aristocrats, the landowners did not believe in working. They spent their time indulging themselves in all sorts of bad habits. It was a purely patriarchal society where the head of the family decided everything—be it arranging a marriage, making a donation to a temple or an ordinary household matter. The women were always in the background, suppressed, and subservient, irrespective of their age. (GFB 12)

It is important to recognize the fact that the culture paves the way for gender discrimination. Murty has skillfully recorded how the cultural practices naturally oppress the women and praises the men. In order to analyze the text in this point of view, two major characters and two minor characters are taken into consideration. Gender discrimination becomes the part and parcel of the cultural practices. Shrikantrao Deshpande, the father of Shrimati, is a person who is not keen to find any job. He has never earned a single paisa in his life. But he is respected by the society. Kamala, the wife of Shrikantrao, is an educated woman. She is the sole breadwinner of the family. But she has no economic freedom. She is also dominated by her mother-in-law and is often accused with pungent words. As per the cultural norms, she is not expected to open her mouth against the domineering nature of her mother-in-law and husband. She is expected to be an introvert in the family.

The other two major characters are: Shrikant and Shrimati. Both are equivalent in most of the characteristics and socially constructed norms. In fact, Shrimati is a step ahead of Shrikant in education. But the sociological treatment they receive is entirely different. When they are united in the bond of marriage, she is oppressed by her in-laws. He is viewed as an economical commodity to be sold in the marriage market. As Shrimati is not able to satisfy the material needs of her mother-in-law, she is taunted by her. The cultural

practice of dowry plays a vital role in the oppression of women. Shrikant is respected by both the families but Shrimati is made to feel the oppressing hand of her mother-in-law. Shrimati, like her mother, does not complain about the ill-treatment. She tries to win over the hearts of them where she fails abruptly. The culture of viewing women as the sole reason for not having a child is also revealed in the novel. Shrimati is unable to bear the fact that she is been blamed for not having a child. This tortures the heart of Shrimati a lot and it is expressed as: “She remembered Gangakka referring to her as a barren woman. How could she convince the uneducated, unsympathetic Gangakka that she was not to be blamed, but neither was Shrikant. She continued sobbing” (GFB 98). It becomes evident that culture views men and women from different perspective.

The institution of marriage is not an exception in the intervention of culture. There are some cultural norms to be followed by the women in the institution of marriage. It is expressed through the words of Kamala: “In our society, you marry not only an individual, but also his family” (GFB 53). Even though Shrimati does not agree with her mother in the beginning, she realizes the depth of her words only after her marriage. The psyche of the woman is naturally tuned to the culturally framed norms of the society. It gives rise to the trending theory of ‘psycho feminism’. Shrimati is neither free from the psycho feministic attitude. In her emotional attachment, she is ready to sacrifice anything for the sake of marriage with Shrikant. It is clearly noted, “Living like this may be very common in our culture” (GFB 113).

Murty has presented the difference of attitude in both the characters through: “Though Shrimati and Shrikant had such a common cultural background, their temperaments were very different” (GFB 13). The socio-economic background of the two families has been revealed by the novelist. Murty has also presented how religion becomes a factor to create enmity between the two families.

To have a clear understanding of the clash between emotional and rational attachment with culture, it is necessary to study how it is attached with Shrimati and Shrikant. Both of them respect their culture but their perspective differs. Shrikant views culture from a rationalistic point of view whereas Shrimati views it from emotional point of view. The first occasion that shows the variation in the mindsets of the major characters is in the train. There is a situation where Shrikant extends his hand for greeting her but Shrimati

finds it odd. Murty has presented the dilemma in the minds of Shrimati as: “Shrimati was confused for a moment. A gesture, like shaking hands with a man, was not common in the society of that time” (GFB 26).

The second occasion that reveals the emotional attachment of Shrimati with culture is the conversation with Professor Mike Collins from America. As he has a different culture, he naturally expects Shrimati not to address him as sir. She replies, “ ‘But Sir, you are older to me in age and more so in knowledge. In our culture, addressing elderly people by their first name is looked upon as rudeness. I can never do that’ ” (GFB 45). The sharpness of the words depicts the love and respect that she has for her own culture.

The third occasion that depicts the clash is the conversation between Shrikant and Shrimati. An issue is created by Gangakka, the mother of Shrikant, regarding addressing the husband by his first name. As per the culture, it is believed that if the husband is addressed by his name by his wife, his life span will be shortened. On hearing this, Shrimati views it from an emotional perspective. Shrikant understands the situation and rationally says to his wife, ““Shrimati, get out of that old custom! When I can call you by your first name, you should also be able to do the same”” (GFB 71). Shrimati has a better understanding and great regard for culture. In an argument with Shrikant she bursts out emotionally about the richness of her own culture. Shrimati says:

‘Over a period of time, the superstitions of a culture grow on to become a habit. The older the civilization, the greater the superstitious beliefs and hence slower the progress. It is like a wave. Older civilizations, like Egypt, China and India, are rigid unlike America. Just as there are ups and downs in the life of an individual, the same is true for a country.’(GFB 128)

From these incidents, it is evident that Shrikant and Shrimati have difference of opinions regarding their common culture. When her emotional attachment is greatly degraded by her husband, she is disturbed to the core. She feels that the emotional attachment with the cultural practices kills her own individuality. She ignores the thought what others will think of her and takes up a decision. She thinks of her mother who becomes the subservient woman with the preoccupied thought of the culture. Irrespective of situations, a woman is expected to be with her husband till her death. But she does not want to behave like her mother,

she disagrees this point of view. It is presented as, “Shrimati did not agree with that belief. She felt that there was a limit to which one could be obedient and subservient, but once that limit was crossed, the individual’s happiness became more important” (GFB 157). Shrimati moves out of materialistic world to find her individuality. The cultural impact in the mind of Shrimati breaks when her identity is questioned. She does not want her identity to be constructed by the impact of culture. She sets up a new trend in culture studies.

The character of Shrikant can be analyzed in the light of cultural materialism. The theory of cultural materialism holds culture as a productive process. Cultural materialism aims to understand the effects of technological, economic, demographic factors on molding societal structure and superstructure through strictly scientific methods. Marvin Harris states that cultural materialism strives to, “create a pan-human science of society whose findings can be accepted on logical and evidentiary grounds by the pan-human community” (Harris, xii). Cultural materialists identify three levels of social systems that constitute a universal pattern. Infrastructure is the basis of all the other levels. It shows the interaction between culture and environment. To analyze the character of Shrikant in this sense, Shrikant is the product of the culture that values material wealth more than human relations. The entire clan of Shrikant is highly passionate about money and wealth. Though he is not personally attracted towards money, the domestic interaction with the environment paves the way for cultural materialism. The social relations around him are attracted towards materialistic wealth and so his mind is automatically driven towards the material wealth. The environment around him culturally lays a materialistic foundation.

The infrastructure leads to the next level of structure. The structure refers to the society’s economic, social, and political organization. The cultural product, Shrikant is immigrated to Bombay which has a different cultural set up. This influences the mind of Shrikant. The socio-economic structure of Bombay influences the thought of Shrikant and he becomes all the more materialistic. His attitude towards life changes, “every dinner, every conversation, every relationship was based on profit and loss” (GFB 119). The structure leads to the third level of cultural materialism. Superstructure is related to the ideology and symbolism of the cultural product. When Shrikant becomes more and more successful, his ideology is

influenced by the cultural pattern. The change in the ideology of material wealth is clearly depicted by the novelist as:

Initially men work for money but soon, money becomes unimportant. It is power. There is nothing like power. Once the intoxication of power catches hold of an ambitious person, there is no escape from it. It is a vicious circle. Like in a whirlpool, it is difficult to come out of it. More work, more involvement and more power. The individual loses the ability to see and enjoy anything outside his work. (GFB 142)

This shows how a person who is filled with the love for family is gradually driven towards the materialistic world due to the impact of culture throughout his entire life.

The clash between the emotional and rational aspects of culture has driven the character of Shrimati to move out of the cultural set up and build her own identity. On the other hand, it has driven the character of Shrikant to materialistic world. Sudha Murty has clearly depicted the impact of culture in shaping the life of an individual through her novel, *Gently Falls the Bakula*. To conclude, it is suitable to quote Hyde Park, the men of culture are those who have:

A passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of the society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have labored to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time. (Williams, 5)

It will be fruitful when culture is emotionally and rationally attached with a being. The proper understanding and promoting the best of one's own culture is significant. The emotional and rational handling of culture has been skillfully captured by the novelist.

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