

The Art and Craft in Sudha Murthy's *The Gentle Fall Of Bakula*

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Abstract

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, The Bakula flower is used by Sudha Murthy to symbolise the brittle purity of love, its selfless sacrifice, and its inevitable decline. This is shown through the journey of the main character, Shrimati, as she goes from being a responsible and loving wife to an empowered individual while fighting through neglect in her marriage and the effects of ambition. Murthy gives a sense of rural authenticity and emotional depth by using simple language-short, clear sentences, common words, and few images. She extends the metaphor of the flower from a fragrant bloom (the peak of desire) to petals that are wilting (the decline of the relationship). This study looks at how she uses simple, subtle writing to criticise gender roles, patriarchal rules, and the journey of self-discovery while mixing details from the Kannada language with English to create a broad impact without teaching in a direct way. By tracing key passages, this paper shows how Murthy's narrative economy works to give feminist insights and social commentary in Indian English fiction.

Keywords: writing style, linguistic artistry, language patterns, feminist insights, Indian fiction,

Objective:

This study looks at the different meanings of the Bakula flower in Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula*. For example, the flower's role as a fragrant symbol of pure love and a happy marriage during the courtship of Shrimati and Shrikant, and its later gentle decay, which represents emotional neglect, sacrificial attrition, and the breakdown of the relationship in the face of urban ambition and patriarchal power. A central purpose is to look at Murthy's linguistic artistry. She uses a minimalist style, short clear sentences, Indian words that are common in everyday life, and imagery that is controlled but still evokes emotion. This adds to the thematic depth of the themes of feminine identity crisis and self-realization without teaching a lesson. It also looks at how this simple, honest style gently criticises gender roles, mixing the authenticity of rural Kannada culture with the ease of understanding English translation to get readers to connect with the custom vs. modernity debate. Finally, the study tries to find out how useful Murthy's narrative economy is as a feminist device, emphasising its strength in conveying social commentary through symbols and simple style in the context of Indian English fiction's changing aesthetics.

Research Methodology

This paper uses New Criticism to closely analyse *Gently Falls the Bakula*. It focusses on the text's internal formal elements, such as the language, diction, syntax, imagery, structure, and symbolism. The paper also emphasises reading the text objectively and giving its meaning on its own, without being affected by biographical, historical, or intentional fallacies. The first step in the process is to read the text several times to get an idea of language patterns like short sentences, simple words, rhythmic syntax, and dense figures. This helps to understand meaning patterns in how the Bakula theme changes from life to death. Flesch-Kincaid

readability measures (for levels of accessibility), Ant Conc and other corpus linguistics tools (for collocation analysis, like motif-adjective pairs), and frequency counts of symbolic recurrences are all parts of stylistic quantification that give us factual information about Murthy's minimalist craft. Thematic mapping is a way of structurally connecting devices to story arcs through subjective analysis. This method is based on textual evidence and is strengthened by using a triangulation method that includes secondary sources as a way of validating the interpretation.

Relational Lifecycle of Bakula

In *Gently Falls the Bakula*, Sudha Murthy uses the Bakula flower as a key. The flower's life, from blooming to fading, exactly matches the way the main characters' minds change. This is done with such precise language that the natural image becomes a deep symbol. In courtship, the Bakula suggests simple, untainted passion, "the flower was neither as beautiful as a rose nor had the fragrance of jasmine or champaka. And yet, it was always special for him. It held an explicable attraction for him" (p, 19). Instead of using exaggerated praise, a hyperbolic style choice that relies on basic words like 'beautiful' and 'fragrance' to draw attention to the flower's modest call, Murthy's avoidant comparisons reflect the New Criticism's focus on the independence of texts and the idea that form gives meaning. The rhythmic closeness created by short, direct sentences makes the syntax sound like a flower's soft, gentle drop. This draws the reader into Shrimati's deep dedication to the countryside. This simple writing criticises foreign ideas and favours Western decoration over indigenous reality. This is a subtle postcolonial move in Indian English fiction.

If the marriage is happy, the motif's fragrance phase stays intact. The Shrimati's hair is decorated with a Bakula 'string', which ties mates together even if they are from different groups. While sensory collocations make one to feel a certain closeness, the restraint adjectives that Murthy uses, like 'sparing', and the verbs she uses, like 'direct' and 'avoid', keep things from getting overly sentimental and let the meaning come through. As desire weakens their bond, things begin to wilt, "The Bakula tree, whose flowers symbolised the love between them had fallen sadly". (169) The passive voice 'had fallen', here gives the impression of inevitable decline without blaming anyone. This adds emotional weight through uncertainty about the sentence's meaning. The adverb 'sadly' adds very little emotion here, its place delays the reveal for ironic effect, where Murthy's writing turns plant facts into feminist complaints, Shrikant's success in the city makes Shrimati less interesting, just like the tree's canopy falling between Smartha's and Vaishnava's houses. This is described by critics as "the novel employs powerful symbolism, notably through the Bakula flower, to underscore the fragility of love and the emotional journey toward self-realization", (Sharma, 2025, p. 2) and the patriarchal neglect is made clear through plain language. Using metaphors to describe things recursively-an odour gets stronger after it decays, and a straight decline is reversed while grammar returns to the energy of courtship Murthy brings the story to a close by using motif symmetry. The simple language hides the deep philosophical meaning of love's strength beyond ownership.

Linguistic Simplicity: Making Art Accessible

Murthy's paratactical sentences, clear word choice, and trademark simplicity, boost Bakula symbolism, putting criticism in apparent to make deep themes accessible. For an example, "I used to feel happy that my ancestors were a part of battles and a part of the kingdom too. I still feel that I belong to this area. The events might have taken place twelve centuries back, but when I closed my eyes, I could visualize many things." (90). Here, Shrimati's historical reverie shows in a very moving way. The first-person immediacy of iterative brevity creates an introspective rhythm that connects the reader to the protagonist's mind. Verbs like 'closed' and

‘visualise’ create a sense inwardness. The verb groups around ‘epiphany’ avoid unnecessary adjectives and make the text easy to read, drawing a wide range of people into a feminine interiority. This self-control is the opposite of Shrikant’s simplistic and narrow view, “He became an industrial man, viewing everything on the basis of profit and loss” (176). The binary opposite imitating commodification, and the clipped syntax acting emotional emptiness, is similar to Murthy’s verbal economy, which makes things more ironic, while the rich-in-irony memories of Bakula stay in a dry relationship.

Even Murthy turns proverbial into reinforce. To cite an example, “When ugly ducklings are tested, they often become beautiful swans” (126), here the transformative metaphor gives a hint of awakening. In the end, hypotactic conditionals give way to assertive parataxis, which is like the way that Shrimati’s power grows. Instead of using fancy language, Murthy likes to be exact, “true love . . . lik’d a quiet stream that slumbereth with no sudden swell”. The soft adverbials in the simile echo Bakula’s fall, with the steady flow judging the roughness of desire. This type of work fits with stylistic minimalism, which uses common nouns to promote universality and turn personal stories into culture lessons about sacrifice. Feminist readings consider this to be subversive, simplicity disarms patriarchal dismissal, making women’s suppressed dreams clearly pressing.

Using Stylistic Restraint for Subtle Feminist Subversion

Murthy uses Bakula imagery to make sharp points about gender, and it does so without sounding preachy, by using syntactic parallels and a small number of mixed metaphors. Dialogues show that there is an imbalance, Shrikant puts down other cultures, which makes Shrimati admire Ashoka. The colloquial fragment ‘sense changed’ makes the Kannada language sound more real, and the naturalistic speech reveals differences in power, where his directions are short and to the point, while she takes a long time to think about things. Bakula recurs adverbially ‘quietly’, encoding feminine erasure, “The Bakula bloomed quietly in the garden” (123), a delayed modifier that adds to the irony that enduring silence comes before eruption.

Internal monologues get deeper during the illness scene. The stoic verbs that show “She did not want him to cancel his business deals”, (134) emphasises this sacrificial norm. The similarity between Bakula’s wilting and Shrimati’s role as a ‘ornament’ in elite circles connects them. The integration of motifs through sense persistence (smell during decay) calls to mind the essence that doesn’t give in. Sage Bhamati’s promise, ‘Bakula . . . sweeter. . . after she ‘falls,’ uses a prophetic proverb to connect ancient and modern times and turn symbolic meaning inside out. Murthy’s lack of adjectives makes the words hit harder, and by using mostly country words (like ‘bakula string in hair’), he keeps the Kannada flavour while making a comment on how people in the city feel alone. This restraint captures feminist aesthetics: preference for fine over grand, and ‘life’s journey . . . experiences of learning and unlearning’ is the short version of self-discovery. Comparative stylistics puts Murthy opposite Desai’s density-her writing has air in it, inviting analysis instead of empathy.

Structural Symmetries and Setting Closure

In *Gentle Falls the Bakula*, the Bakula motif’s perfect symmetry connects the stages of a flower’s life to the three parts of a story. The bloom represents courtship and the tree’s leaves represent the sectarian tension; the lasting smell of the flower represents harmony in marriage, while the hair binding the lovers together represents the fragrance; the wilting of the flower in the middle of the city’s rise represents neglect; and the renewal after separation shows the opposite of decay as a ‘sweeter fragrance’. This cyclic recursion-‘Bakula . . . special’-recurs at the beginning and end, creating a structural closure in which the opening draw can be heard in the epiphanic return and syntax looping vitality post-fall works to defy linear decline. When passive phrases like ‘had fallen sadly’ are replaced with more active ones, it gives the text more life, which is similar to how

Shrimati's agency grows. At the same time, the wise character Bhamati's forecast makes prophetic symmetry stronger, which is Bakula's continuity without bondage. This kind of structure makes symbolism more important, changing the life cycle of plants into a female story about coming back strong.

Larger Meanings in Indian English Novels

Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula* creates a new style of Indian English fiction by using the Bakula to mix dense symbols with simple language. The novel uses empathy instead of over-the-top language to make feminist ideas about the gendered toll of desire accessible to all. Her simple writing style is based on Kannada sayings and is easy for everyone to read. It has a school grade readability level and sounds like it was written by someone from the country US. It connects the gaps between rich and poor people in cities and turns common themes into cultural stories that go against the postcolonial style that likes the dense writing of the writer. Murthy's narrative structure makes it possible for modern voices to be heard and combines tradition with modernity to give a voice to sacrifices that have been silenced. This makes the novel a model of approachable profundity in gendered self-realization discourses.

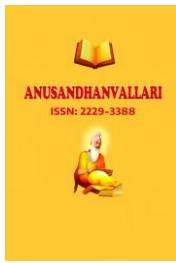
Conclusion:

Sudha Murthy's *Gently Falls the Bakula* uses the life cycle of the Bakula flower as a symbol to show the fragile nature of marriage, the sacrifices women make, and the strong self-realization that can happen in a world dominated by male ambition. The flower's calm journey from bloom to wilt represents these ideas. The novel's minimalist style is achieved through clear language, sparse syntax, and meaningful simplicity. By looking at the text in great detail, this study shows how Murthy's simple writing style turns normal pictures of rural life into a deep feminist allegory. In this allegory, ignored comparisons praise simple truth over fancy extras, and passive sentences criticise neglect without feeling like they are teaching a lesson. In Shrimati's 'sweeter fragrance' after the fall, she represents the continuation of culture and the wisdom of prophecy. Structural symmetry-pattern repetition that frames the energy of courtship against the background of rebirth-breaks down the nature of relationships and turns linear decay into cyclical strength.

This narrative redefines or transforms Indian English fiction by using Kannada-influenced expressions to connect the old with the new and making the story easy to read. The way Murthy uses simple language to hide a social critique gives readers the power to question the hopes and dreams women have kept silent. This makes the novel a classic example of how good style can serve thematic depth. Ultimately *Gently Falls the Bakula* shows how powerful literature can be: as Bakula gently falls, Murthy creates an impact that lasts on the topics of love's quiet endurance and identity's hard-won bloom.

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