

Portrayal of Indian Values in select works of Sudha Murthy

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Abstract

Narrating stories or weaving tales has been the most effective way of teaching children the art of true living and problem-solving as these stories show how people face up to life's challenges and surmount obstacles to achieve their cherished goals. Stories, in fact, influence our behaviour and shape our society and culture. The vignettes in Sudha Murthy's books depict moral values; during conflicts and challenges in life these narratives reinstate values according to the changing socio-culture. Her stories related to the nation, its famous personalities, culture and relationships in a family have helped in shaping an individual's attitudes towards self and towards the society. This and more will be deliberated in the ensuing paper.

Keywords: Indian Values, culture, simplicity, humility, empathy

Sudha Murthy's books *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*, *The Old Man and His God: Discovering the Spirit of India*, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk*, and *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* are her most popular works. These stories and anecdotes touch a cord in the hearts of many readers through the realistic hues of the human nature they portray. Sudha Murthy's books represent life and the social world. These writings are close to the reader while evoking a sense of oneness with the simple, lucid language and characters who are none other than the people one encounters. The story *The Deserving Candidate* depicts the honesty of a candidate who appears for an interview, but refuses to accept the travelling allowance saying that he was staying with his aunt. The story is in fact recognition of merit, truthfulness and honesty where a candidate wants a higher pay to donate a part of the pay to a trust, which funds the education of bright students. The rich background of his parents had not robbed his honesty or simplicity. Sudha Murthy writes about lessons on humility in accepting gifts at the hands of the uneducated like the tribal chief in the story *In Sahayadri Hill*. The story teaches a philosophy of life which says, 'give when you take', to enlighten the grace of accepting a gift. The story *Too Many Questions*, illustrates the grace of accepting a gift. Sudha Murthy says that a gift should not be valued on its price as it is the

thought, which is more important. This story teaches a lesson of humility in the workers who bless Sudha Murthy with good health and prosperity.

Stories like *Three Bright Young Men* and *Oh Teacher, I Salute Thee* depicts the value of gratitude. The student remembers and respects the teacher whose only attachment is to knowledge rather than to materialism. It also reflects the qualities of a teacher who arouses the interest of the pupil by being a fellow traveller in the exciting pursuit of knowledge. The story *Bombay to Bangalore* depicts Chitra a young girl who escapes from the clutches of the evil and travels in the same bogie as Sudha Murthy, who pays for her ticket and sees that she continues living in the orphanage while pursuing her studies. Chitra grows into an independent person and settles in America.

The story *The Grateful Tenant* is a story, which depicts the gratitude Ramesh the protagonist feels for an old couple Shyama Rao and Kamala Bai, who support Ramesh's education, stay and food in Dharwad motivating Ramesh to acknowledge this by naming his house *Shyamkamal* as a gesture of his gratitude. The human value of selfless dedication towards work is dealt in the narrations of *Each Mop Counts*, and *An Old Man's Ageless Wisdom*. The story *Each Mop Counts* illustrates the diligence of a nurse who does not allow the doctor to carry on with his work till the number of mops used tallied with the number of mops recovered.

An Old Man's Ageless Wisdom depicts the sympathies of the old man, with human beings, while saying no one owns land, river or mountains, they are the gifts of God, and a small piece of paper called rupee turns a man's life upside down. The story *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Children* depicts Amba Bai the paternal grandmother, who spends her time fulfilling the responsibilities of looking after a large family. Though she was widowed, she cared for women's education, family planning, and the way the society treated widows. The title story *How I Taught my Grandmother to Read* is actually a real-life incident where Sudha Murthy teaches her grandmother to read when her grandmother was

sixty-two years old and had an ardent wish to learn reading and writing.

The narration *A Tale of Two Brothers* illustrates how money has the ability to divide people and rarely unites through the story of real brothers who quarrel for a piece of property while the unrelated far away people unite in the bonds of brotherhood sharing the love. Love knows no bonds when it changes strangers into brothers, while money sets boundaries changing brothers to strangers. *The Business of Philanthropy* depicts Shri Hiralal Jain a successful pharmacist and a businessman who was kind hearted and believed in philanthropy in helping people with medicines. His son who carried ahead the business believed that philanthropy was the key to business promotion. *To Sir with Love*, reminds us of the noble profession of teachers depicting a teacher similar to a candle that gives light to all while burning itself out. It also describes how this value has changed through the self-centeredness of a schoolteacher.

In the story *Salaam Namaste*, Zubeida a cancer patient gains fifty thousand for her treatment from the Foundation run by Sudha Murty. She asks her husband to return the three thousand rupees left after her death to be returned back to Sudha Murty. It speaks of compassion and selflessness as Zubeida feels for another person even in her pain and poverty. The story *Horegallu* depicts the empathetic listening of elders under the Banyan tree without voicing a judgement as a let out for worries. The elders carried this act of social service of a Psychiatrist as these small acts of kindness gave them joy. The story *Do You Remember* teaches readers through a lesson learnt by Sudha Murty from Dr. Raj Reddy, who won the Alan Turing Award in the year 1994 for his pioneering efforts in Computer Science and artificial intelligence. *A Lesson in Life from a Beggar* depicts how Meena a pessimist changes into an optimist when she sees a beggar and his granddaughter laughing and clapping, and screaming in the rain seeing that there was no traffic that day owing to the rains.

Meena envies the zest and the spirit in the poor, wondering why she could not sport that attitude. *Think Positive and Be Happy* speaks of maid Girija who values all the things in her life while Vasanta the family friend of Sudha Murty cribbed and felt miserable by thinking about the uneducated. These stories help us develop a positive attitude and comprehend that life is still a great treasure if we are optimists - though we may possess nothing in material terms. The story *Life's Secret Lessons*, guides readers to stand up for one and follow their heart. The narrative *The Journey* is a revelation for readers to

understand that the theoretical discussions of the ideals of Karl Marx or Lenin are of no avail. The story depicts how Mr. Narayan Murty realized that poverty in our nation could be overcome by creating jobs, which could help people generate wealth ethically and legally. *A Buddhist on Airport Road* is a story related to the life of Sudha Murty's friend Saroja depicting that the world is full of difficulties and unfulfilled desires, but Sudha Murty says that if one wants to be happy, one must try to change the attitude of perceiving and not the world. There is no greater joy in life than to render happiness to others by means of intelligent giving. We must donate generously to the poor and needy. The story *No Man's Garden* illustrates selflessness and a noble thought of cultivating vegetables for the poor in a wasteland without accepting anything out of the produce.

Rahman's *Avva* is a poignant story where Kashibai raises Fatimabi's son Rahmaan after his mother's death with his own religion but loves him like her own son. The story is a depiction of human values amongst people belonging to a humble background who nurture compassion and a magnanimity in heart depicted through the pictures of Mecca and Krishna on the same wall. The story *Three Ponds* depicts three stories related to the construction of three ponds. The first is a stand on Rama Gowde's promise of constructing a pond for the people of Navalgund to please his daughter Neelima. It includes Bhagirathi's sacrifice of life to stand on a promise of providing water to the people. Her husband joins her in her sacrifice. The story *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Children* is the story of Ambakka in a village having the simplicity of a villager and great warmth in loving people. She is able to handle the chores at home and in the fields. She is able to assess the state of health of the cattle or the water in a well. She believed in serving people helping young women in delivering children, even in the toughest state.

The story, *Treat Me as a Human* depicts a young couple in Ahmedabad, at the Law Garden Road, selling embroidered purses, but they refuse to accept money given as a gift by Sudha Murty to their son as a gift for the first birthday. The lady returns the money portraying the values of self-respect and dignity in the poor. The story *Genes* displays the irony in the values of honesty and self-respect. Grandfather Anant, who is a mere assistant is honest and believes in returning a loan, but his grandson Hari, who gains admission into Indian Institute for Technology forgets to repay the loan from his fat salary. The story, *The Old Man and His God*, depict an old couple who are happy and contented with what they have and wish to lead a life of dignity though they were poor. They

did not want money given to them as a mark of pity, but were contented to live on what they believed was rightfully theirs. Though blind, the old man could sense that Sudha Murty had given him a hundred rupee note. The story *The Way You Look At* depicts the sense of responsibility of Sharanamma towards the community while asking Sudha Murty's help in getting toilets built for the villagers. It also teaches lessons related to the attitudes of people who look at it as a business venture. *True Shades of Nature*, includes the shades of man's selfishness and Sudha Murty's approach inculcates values of fairness and decision-making. The story depicts the self-centeredness of man in canvassing their deeds of charity with the money collected for helping the Tsunami victims. There are a few stories, which remind us of the values like patriotism, and integrity, which we have largely forgotten. The story *Forgetting Our Own History* depicts Patriotism as forgotten value. The well-being of a country lies in being united despite political differences. People should give importance to the unity, integrity and well-being of the nation and, in John F. Kennedy's memorable words, think more of what they can do for the country as a whole, rather than constantly harp on what the country can do for them.

Sudha Murty's works helps us to strengthen human values so that we as human beings who are described to be the top of God's creation are able to establish our worth

over lesser living beings by setting refined goals and achieving them through the right means. We also detain the beauties of environment and humankind that are accountable for the opportunities in life to serve others. Her works make one aware of the fact that each new day is a gift, which is given exclusively to us, with its inestimable opportunities to work towards human happiness. Each narration of Sudha Murty is akin to precious gems, which impart the light of wisdom and values. A writer's personality and attitude have the ability to reinforce the values they inculcate: humility, genuineness and spontaneity, thoughtfulness and compassion, tolerance and a spirit to live.

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