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Sudha Murty's Short Stories as a Motif of Values

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Sudha Murty

Indian Women Novelists and Short Story Writers

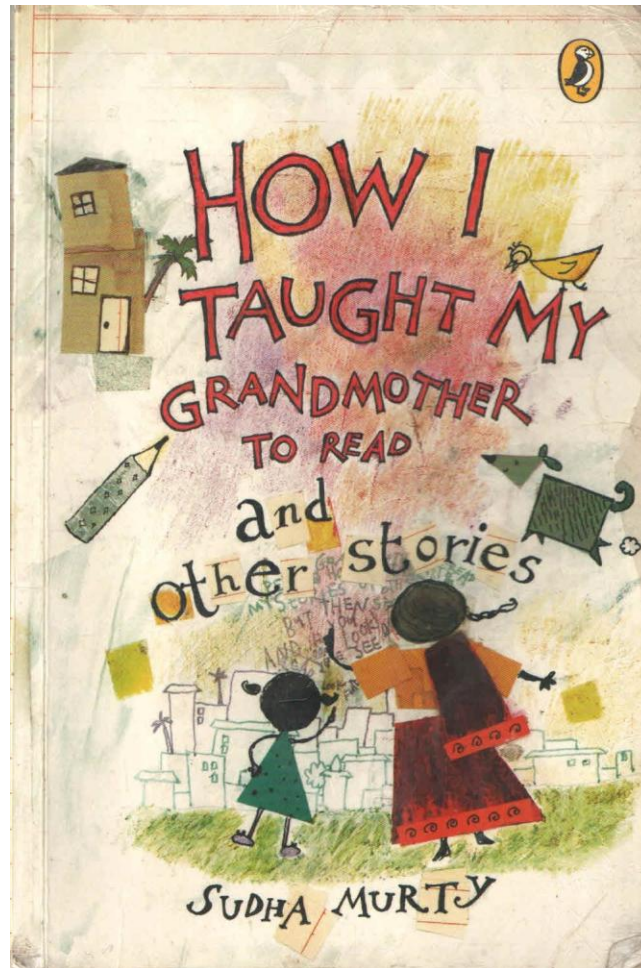
Indian woman novelists focus mainly on women's issues. They create their own world with a wide range of characters and a variety of existences. The cultural alienation and the loss of identity faced by the expatriates and immigrants are some of the other aspects they are concentrating upon. Writers like Attia Hosain, R. P. Jhabvala, and Arundhati Roy have won global recognition in literature. These writers have used their skill in portraying the tortured mind of the suppressed women. They are able to read the inner mind of these women and portray their psychological and emotional imbalances.

Among the many short story writers some are internationally acclaimed. Janhavi Acharekar, Sarojini Sahoo, Pratibha Ray, Stan Ageira, Dr. Ampasayya Naveen are some of the well known short story writers of modern India.

Sudha Murty, a Notable Short Story Writer

Sudha Murty, a Padma Shri awardee, is a philanthropist, writer, columnist and a passionate teacher – an all in one icon in the present day. A gold medalist and an outstanding student in Electrical Engineering she completed her post graduation in Computer Science. She was the first woman engineer to be selected by Telco, Pune. Her savings of Rs.10,000/- is instrumental in founding Infosys which her husband N.R.Narayana Murty proudly mentions on several occasions.

Many stories in Sudha Murty's short story collection *How I Taught My Grandmother to read and Other Stories* tell us about her passion for teaching and the involvement she has in the lives of students. The bond she shares with the elders in the family, particularly her grandfather, is the highlight in the story collection *How I Taught my Grandmother to Read and Other Stories*.



Among the many awards conferred on her, the prestigious award Padma Shri, a civilian award from the Government of India, proclaims her contribution to the society. The Best Teacher Award from Rotary Club, Bangalore, Rajalakshmi Award for social work are some of the other awards she has bagged.

The Themes of Sudha Murty's Stories

Among the many works of Sudha Murty *Dollar Bahu* is story about the aspirations, dreams and struggle of a traditional family. Her novel *Mahashweta* deals with a girl who is affected by leukoderma and brings out the trials and tribulations she faces in her life. Her recollection of stories told by her grandparents is published as *The Magic Drum and Other Favourite Stories*. It remains her favourite, for the entire collection is a timeless folktale.

Love and Human Relationship

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Dhanalakshmi A

Sudha Murty's Short Stories as a Motif of Values

The theme of love and human relationship is the recurring idea in many of her short story collections. *The Old Man and His God*, *Wise and Otherwise*, *How I Taught my Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* have the same theme – human relationship. The relationship of Sudha Murty with her grandparents, her colleagues, her students, her family, her friends are all narrated with delight.

Valuable Lessons in Simple and Direct English

The simple English Sudha Murty uses reach the readers directly. Almost all the stories in these collections teach valuable lessons of simplicity, patriotism, the importance of love, friendship, guidance etc. The respect and faith she has in mankind is apparent in almost all the stories. Love for her fellow beings is evident from her narration where she doesn't scan people but accept people as they are. Her appreciation about the good work done by others is a pathfinder for the younger generation to follow.

Even though she talks about rendering help to others she is not didactic in her tone. Instead, the reader will be able to appreciate her work and would give his or her consent whole heartedly to her suggested ways. By simply presenting the true incidents effectively the young minds would be captivated.

Sudha Murty can be placed in the highest pedestal for projecting the positive side of human beings.

Bonding with Grand Parents

Sudha Murty shares a special bond with her grandparents. Most of her stories highlight the respect she has for them and the bond she shares with them.

In *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, she as a youngster teaches her grandmother to read and write. The grandmother depended on the author for reading stories. Realising the grandma's thirst, young Sudha taught her to read and write. The grandma, in turn, learnt well and as Sudha puts,

“I knew then that my student had passed with flying colours.”(How I Taught...6)
As a token of respect the grandma fell to the feet of the teacher. It moved young Sudha and she became overwhelmed at her student's achievement. “I did return namaskara to her touching her feet and gave my gift to my first student...” (How I Taught...5)

Respect for the Elderly

The respect she has for the elders, though, is evident in all the stories. Her story Dead Man's Riddle reveals this concern in detail. Sudha, through the words of Som Gowda, has aptly portrayed the role of our elders and their valuable suggestions in simple words.

“...Experience is the best teacher in life. Elders have seen many ups and downs in their lives and interacted with many people. During the process they have acquired knowledge which can't be taught in a school or college. It has to be learnt over a period of time. Now it is left to you people to make the decision.”
(81)

Sharing with One Another – Give as Gift What is Best

Sudha Murty, while imparting values, tells us that one should share the best of things they have. People in the guise of helping others give away the unwanted things. She is shocked to see the heaps of old clothes given by people for the tsunami affected people. Her grandmother used to give away better quality rice to the poor and unknowingly she as a child learnt to share the best with others. The incident changed her and she stresses that it is the duty of the adults of the family to teach the young children.

“My grandmother Krishtakka smiled and told me something I will never forget in my life. Child, whenever you want to give something to somebody, give the best in you, never the second best. That is what I have learned from life. God is not there in the temple, mosque or church. He is with the people. If you serve them with whatever you have, you have served God. My grandfather answered my question in a different way....This lesson from my grandparents, told me when I was just a little girl, has stayed with me ever since. If at all I am helping anyone today, it is because of the teaching by those simple souls.”(How I Taught...29)

Children as Teachers

Children can be the best teachers and eye openers. Sudha too acknowledges it and recalls the incident when her daughter Akshata insisted on her to help a poor blind friend, Anand Sharma.

“Amma, when an educated person like you, well travelled, well-read and without love for money, does not help poor people, then don't expect anyone else to do.”
(How I Taught..., 63)

These words made her to “abandon my search” she confesses. “Child is the father of man” goes a saying. It is hard for adults to accept what a child says. People hardly realize it and practice it. Besides accepting her child's suggestion as a way of life, Sudha is able to proclaim it in her story.

“I am ever grateful to Akshata for helping bring this happiness and satisfaction in my work and life.” (How I Taught..., 64)

The respect she gives to the other soul and acknowledging her mistakes is indeed a great quality in the author. She also remembers the parting advice of JRD Tata ‘Give back to society’.

Heeding Mother’s Advice Changed Many Things

The bond she shares with her mother and her advice helped not only Sudha but her whole family. She recollects it as, “...she said something which helped me immensely in late life....when you are in difficulty only few things will come to your help. Your courage, your ability to adjust to new situations and the money which you have saved. Nobody will come and help you” (How I Taught...87).

Heeding to the advice she saved money from the beginning and “the money was kept in a safe place in my kitchen cupboard and I never counted it”. When Murty, her husband came out with the idea of starting Infosys she offered this “rainy day saving” to him and she declares that “...I realize that our lives changed completely because I had listened to my mother’s valuable lesson” (How I Taught...90)

Sudha as Mother

Sudha is not only a good daughter and granddaughter but also a good mother. Her understanding nature is evident in the story ‘A’ for *Honesty*. When her son was upset with his marks she was able to boost his morale and confidence, and encouraged him.

The understanding parent always cares for the child’s mental health. Sudha’s words of encouragement like, “... You have lost the battle but you will win the war...” clearly state her closeness to her son. The value she has imparted to her son made him to confess to his teacher and he says, “...grades are important but honesty is even more important.” His words elated her and moved her to tears. She not only imparted values to her son but to her students too. It is evident when she proclaims, “Many of my own students have behaved in a similar way in different situations, though they may have lost a lot in the process. But I am sure the good values they have learnt will help them in any crisis.”(118)

Overprotected Child

In the story “Doing What You like is Freedom” she portrays the plight of an overprotected child. Even though she is not familiar with fellow travelers, her concern for a boy who is pampered by her parents portrays her respect and concern for a kid. “How long can you keep birds in cages when their wings are strong and they are ready to fly?” (94) She not only teaches the kid but also

the parents to realize their duty. Overprotective parents tend to spoil the future of their kids. She states,

“I was wondering what Puneet’s mother will do when he gets married. They seemed to have forgotten that he was an independent person who could take his own decisions with some love and guidance. Instead, they were bombarding him with their own ideas and opinions. Too much of affection can become a golden noose around the neck. Puneet will never be a confident person” (95).

Inspiring Others

Sudha as a story teller has inspired many besides her students. ‘A Journey through Desert’ is one such story which talks about an identical twins, Ram and Gopal, who rose from the level of errand boys to garage owner. Though Gopal failed, Ram was able to climb up in the ladder. As Ram recalls, “...Madam, our life was very difficult. You were aware of it. The only thing we looked forward to was your visit every Saturday when we listened to your stories.” (74) The story about two boys who went in search of wealth inspired Ram and he consistently worked to reach greater heights and in his words, “After hearing the story I decided to study in spite of all the odds I had to face.” (76) The inspiration of the boy made her dumbstruck and she remembers it as, “I was dumbstruck to hear how a small story I had brought so much of change.” (77)

As a teacher, she has allowed the students to grow and is proud to recall them to be her wards. She not only states about others but also about the teacher who made her a wonderful story teller. Gowramma, her arts teacher, inspired her and though the relationship ended half way in her childhood days, the impression her teacher has created shaped Sudha as an excellent teacher.

Writer in Real Life

Sudha, as a woman, shaped not only her family but supported her husband during his needs. She was the one who willingly let her “rainy day savings” to start Infosys. Besides, it is the understanding between them to share the burden during the trying times. The belief in her husband made him a successful giant in software industry. She rightly calls him “...a pioneer of India software industry”. The man who is driven by the powerful motto, “Powered by intellect and driven by values” succeeded in his life through his sheer hard work and focus. His life has made him an icon and she proudly claims her husband as, “...an icon of simplicity, uncompromising quality and fairness, apart from being a philanthropist”. “Never start with diffidence. Always start with confidence” – these words of JRD Tata made her confident and it is these words of courage and encouragement that made Sudha to back her husband.

Integrity in a person shapes him or her. Sudha Murty has done her role as a mother, teacher, granddaughter, daughter, wife etc., effectively. She is able to publicly accept her mistakes,

arrogance, ignorance, and everything. It needs great courage to publicly declare one's shortcomings, especially when you are a person of some stature in public eyes. She isn't portraying herself as a great soul but as an ordinary person with all faults. But a careful reader would be able to see her great values. She isn't proclaiming or declaring that she is the champion of human cause. It is her down to earth acknowledgement of errors and love for the fellow beings that makes her a unique and a great story teller.

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