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Research Article



The Soul and Spirit of Morality in Sudha Murthy's Select Short Story Books for Children

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Abstract

The soul and spirit of morality have been transmitted to children from generation to generation through stories. Stories play a significant role in the mental growth and character-building of

children. Storybooks are a wonderful source of inspiration and lay a strong foundation for their future life. Reading storybooks helps children to increase their confidence, handle emotions, and cope up with problems. It also develops their imagination power, language skills, and learning. The multi-faceted prolific children's author Sudha Murthy's contribution to the field of children's literature is a hallmark in Indian English literature. Her children's stories dealt with the importance of family bonds and concern towards society and fellow beings. The characters in her stories help the children to understand our culture and tradition. The paper tries to analyze three such books of children's stories by Sudha Murthy in the light of the theories of 'tabula rasa' and 'Kohlberg's Theory of moral judgment'. The paper focuses on *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories*, *Grandma's Bag of Stories*, and *The Magic Drum and Other Favourite Stories* and the moral values inculcated in them.

Keywords: Character, Inspiration, Foundation, Imagination, Rasa Theory, Children's Literature, Moral Readings, Human relations

Introduction

India is a unique land with a rich heritage of culture. Our vast culture and tradition are projected in Indian Literature. Short Story is a genre that has moral insight and gives a new perspective. Short stories for children enhance their life. The genre of children's literature encompasses a wide range of works, including fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk tales, stories from classics, picture books, etc. Hence, Children's literature is juvenile literature comprising stories, magazines, poems, and books that are created for children. The aim is to entertain, instruct and enlighten young minds. Children's literature emerged as a distinct and independent form of literature in the second half of the 18th century. During the 20th century, it developed luxuriantly and was claimed as the recognized branch of literature. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the Pooh*, and Munro Leaf's *Story of Ferdinand*, J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* are popular children's books.

Objectives:

1. To study the significance of children's literature in the present technological era.
2. To know the history and evolution of children's literature.
3. To understand the scope of children's literature in Indian English.
4. To realize the contribution of Sudha Murthy to the genre of Children's Literature in Indian English Literature.
5. To understand the moral and ethical values in Sudha Murthy's children's stories

Children's Literature in India

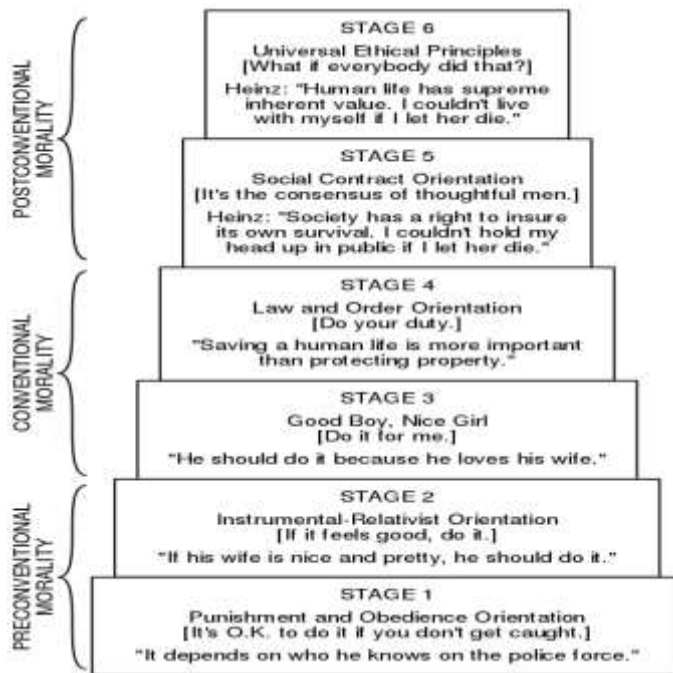
India can be considered the 'cradle of children's literature'. Our rich oral traditions and the incredible Panchatantra stories proved this. India also has tremendous storytelling traditions as in other ancient cultures of the world. A.K. Ramanujan says that stories in Indian families are 'just a grandmother away'. The refined structure and abundant use of imagery of the oral and written tradition is reflected in the children's literature. Panchatantra stories were told by Vishnushrama to his disciples as a part of instruction on the good life and living. They are

practical and interesting stories that contain the wisdom of ages. They are the unique contribution of India to the world of children's literature. These stories teach mankind the basic knowledge and wisdom that make life fuller, richer, and happier. The encompassing Panchatantra stories have morals, life lessons, wit, animals, values, humour, ethics everything in it. We are all grown up with hearing such wonderful stories. Thus culturally significant children's books hold the greatest relevance to present realistic images to young readers reflecting the realities in plot, characterization, language, setting, and style. C.S Lewis said, "Writing a children's story is the best art form for something you have to say". Plenty of popular writers like R K Narayan, Satyajit Ray, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Prem Chand, Rabindranath Tagore, Amir Khusro, Mahasweta Devi, M.T Vasudevan Nair, T.P Kailasam, Sudha Murthy have explored this art form in their languages as well as in English. Sudha Murthy's children's books contain a well-knitted story with contemporary themes and settings, well-illustrated with a fresh perspective.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theory of 'Tabula rasa' proposed by John Locke in the 17th century in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* argued that the mind's initial resemblance to "white paper void of all characters, with all the materials of reason and knowledge derived from experience". The human mind is like a clean slate and ideas have been imprinted on it by the reaction of the senses to the external world of objects. This theory of human nature applicable to all of us and every society operate with this theory. The idea is that the human mind has no inherent structure and can be inscribed at will by society or ourselves. A child is born free mind and we parents and society fill the things in it. If we instill good manners and morals, so the child grows. Stories help to develop a broad mind for children through their moral and ethical values.

In Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Judgment, Lawrence Kohlberg offers three levels; each has two stages in the development of children's moral reasoning. The first level which occurs around seven years old is the pre-conventional level. At the youngest ages, children react to the immediate consequences of their actions. The second stage is the instrumental/relativist orientation stage when a child learns that good behavior is rewarded (Russell, 2009). Children's literature that reinforces these ideas is good for this level. This stage is the conventional level, which occurs between the ages of seven and eleven. At this stage, children learn the value of family, friends, and society. The final level is the post-conventional level. Stories on social values and gang violence and corruption can be understood by children at this level.



Contribution of Sudha Murthy in the Field of Children’s Literature

Sudha Murthy is undoubtedly a widely-read author from India and an eminent writer in English and Kannada. Her books are translated into more than 15 languages. She is an engineering teacher, the chairperson of Infosys Foundation, and the author of many books. Her books include novels, story collections, non-fiction, and most of her books are meant for young readers. They showcase many themes like family bonds, social issues, and Indianess in simple and lively language. Along with her contribution to the field of literature, she also works for social causes, women empowerment, health care, and education. She is a celebrated Indian author, an iconic woman, and a great philanthropist. She tries to bring children into the habit of reading by setting up about 50,000 school libraries. Her witty yet insightful narrative made the children explore the world of books. Some of her works for children which enhance the young minds are *How I Taught My Grandmother and Other Stories*, *Grandma’s Bag of stories*, *The Magic the Lost Temple*, *The Bird With Golden wings*, *The Gopi Dairies*, *Magic Drum*, and *Other Favourite Stories*, *How the Onion Got its Layers*, *How the Sea Became Salty* and many mythology books for children. She is the recipient of many prestigious honors like the Attimabbe award, Karnataka Rajyotsava award, R.K Narayan Award, Life Time Achievement Award, Padmasree award by the Indian Government, etc.

Analysis of *How I Taught My Grandmother and Other Stories* (2004)

The first story in this book *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read* depicts the stanch desire of a sixty-year-old grandmother Krishnakka to learn the Kannada language. The grandmother strongly believed that reading cultivated one’s personality. She decided to learn independently without anyone’s help. She started learning the alphabets from her granddaughter Sudha and within some time she learned reading and writing herself. The story teaches the indomitable determination of a grandmother. She told to Sudha, “For a good cause

if you are determined, you can overcome any obstacle. I will work harder than anybody, but I will do it. For learning there is no age bar” (10). *Books for at least One Library* shows the significance of books in the formation of human character. The story tells about an American billionaire who contributed a huge amount to the libraries who is remembered even after a century for his generosity. Sudha Murthy’s grandfather was highly respected by the people for his knowledge. He always said that "In this life, everything perishes over a period of time. Whether it be diamond, beauty, gold, or even land. Only one thing withstands this destruction. It is Knowledge. The more you give the more you get” (12). The story *Abdul Kalam* describes Kalam’s greatness in reading other's characters perfectly. Kalam influenced Sudha Murthy in an immeasurable way. She says, "That was the best compliment I had ever received. When I write I always think of the end first and then the beginning. Kalam seemed to have guessed it in no time” (15).

Hassan’s Attendance Problem showcases the importance of good habits in life. Hassan was her student in engineering college who was good in studies but not punctual. Though he was intelligent and smart no one tolerates his irregularity and careless nature. He learned his lesson by experience. *The Red Rice Granary* describes the genuine intention and interest in donations. Murthy remembers her grandmother's words, '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” (20). *The Red Jewels* realize the inevitable of mother tongue and motherland in one's life. *A History Lesson on Teacher’s Day* condemns the shallowness of modern children on the nation and its facts. Sudha Murthy narrates her life experience in *Appro JRD*, how a letter to business tycoon JRD Tata changed her life. She was impressed by the humanitarian approach, kind heart to the social work of JRD Tata and she always kept his photograph in her Infosys Foundation. In *Heart of Gold*, we can see a compassionate policeman of New York. It reveals the kindhearted father inside the policeman. Like this, the book contains 25 such beautifully-written stories which reiterate the moral and ethical values for children that must never be forgotten. The humour quotient of the book keeps the young minds hooked and the life lessons it gives are a bonus.

An Exploration of *The Magic Drum and Other Favourite Stories* (2015)

The book begins with the story, *The Superman* which tells about the lesson taught by the king to the four lazy men who were wasting their time boasting and not doing anything. It teaches the children about the importance of hardworking. *A Fair Deal* deals with an unfair deal between two persons Himakar and Seetapati. It portrays the importance of harmony and truthfulness in every walk of life. *The Seed of Truth* is about the king of Gandhara called Vidyadhara who was heirless and was looking forward to an honest one to become the crown prince. He tested the children and finally got one honest boy and the king declared him as his crown prince. The story teaches that always honesty wins. *Haripant the Wise* tells about how the wise magistrate called Haripant settles the disputes and teaches the lesson to cheaters. His clever verdict made everyone on the right path. The story reveals the consequences of cheating

and the importance of being sincere. The miser couple Devaiah and Devamma in *The Last Laddoo* beautifully depict the fruit of miserliness and the importance of helping nature.

Inner hunger and staunchness are inevitable for the taste of any endeavour are taught through the story *The Tastiest of All*. The girl in the story says, "There is one thing tastier than all this. It is hunger. If your stomach is full, the greatest of feasts will be tasteless, but on the empty stomach, the most ordinary, even the stale food will taste like nectar." (30). The ignorance of a boy is humorously depicted in *The Cunning Fruit*. The intellect is more important than the physical look is brought in the princess Suryaprabha's story *Nine Questions for a Princess*. The worldly wisdom of the elderly people is exhibited in the story *Dead Man's Painting*. It hints that the practical insight and intelligence of the old people are guiding light to the young generation. *The White Crow* beautifully and humorously tells how the rumors spread. All the 37 stories in this book contain a hidden message for the younger minds to follow. This book of delightful and timeless stories is a reminder of knowledge is permanent than any wealth. Each story has a character to admire and lesson to life and thus captivates the young readers.

An Evaluation of *Grandma's Bag of Stories* (2015)

This collection of stories was originally published in 2012 and the illustrated version of the book was published in 2015 that I referred to. Both publications are by Penguin Books India, is a marvelous collection of stories told by Sudha Murthy's grandmother and she recaps it when she became a grandmother. The healthy charitable social works are going to be rewarded is depicted in the story *Doctor, Doctor*. It also shows that selfish and greedy intentions will always meet undesirable outcomes. Ravi served water to an old man who was very thirsty so that Ravi got the magical power to cure the diseases. After some days Ravi charge money and the pitcher dried and its magic touch vanished. Here Murthy shows the importance of charity and donations. *Kavery and the Thief* tell about the need for the presence of mind and alertness. If the old lady in the story was frightened she would have been robbed by the thief. She saved herself with the help of her sharp wit and reason. The story *Who is the Happiest of Them All* focuses on the inevitability of life satisfaction. Chandan replies to King that, "Your Majesty, I hope you now realize that people's contentment does not end with having food or money. They also need to be truly happy inside. Only then will they not be swayed when they give or lose wealth. That is a lesson that everyone, whether king or commoner needs to remember" (33).

The practical knowledge of the old people is amazed and a true treasure is shown in the story *The Enchanted Scorpions*. It tells how the genius and sharp wit of the old father saves his bag of gold coins to his son. The follies of the immature people are revealed in *Horse Tramp*. The story wrapped with a lesson that, "Truly, if a man did not innovate and experiment, our species would have died out" (51). *A Treasure for Ramu* tells that the wealth got by an undesirable way will lead to evil impact through the example of Ramu and Rani who attain the treasure of gold and their lavishness leads to poverty at the end. The contrast between the image and the reality is well brought out in the story *The Donkey and the Stick*. It shows the importance of a thirst for knowledge and an investigative attitude in man's life. The evil mind

always faces the unpleasant ending is exposed in *What's In It for Me?* A mouse has a dry twig for the pumpkin to the potter, he gave it milkman for cow, and he gave a cow to the father of a bride to get her. She is smarter and told him to enter the hole and she closed it. The message Murthy passes here is some people are smarter than us and they will outshine us. Thus this book has 22 such stories full of delight and ethical values.

Conclusion

Sudha Murthy's children's storybooks demonstrate the traditional method of storytelling in which kids feel the presence of a loving grandmother. These books return us to the old ways of molding the young generation through narrating moral and character-building stories. In earlier times elderly people in the family took the responsibility of nourishing the children through their affection and inspiring storytelling. But now we are very busy that don't find time to take care of our children. In such a situation the storybooks of Sudha Murthy inculcate in our children the values of honesty, hard work, love, affection, sincerity, togetherness, etc. In everyone's life childhood is the most memorable and wonderful period. The memories and inputs of this stage of life form the future. According to John Locke's theory of Tabula Rasa and Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment, the knowledge attained and experience gained in this stage of childhood leave an everlasting impact on future life. Children's literature imparts plenty of occasions and opportunities for young ones to broaden their horizons. It develops their emotional intelligence and creative power. In this sense, Sudha Murthy's children's storybooks are a treasure house of moral and ethical values for children.

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