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The Indomitable Voice: An Analysis of Sudha Murty's Life and Her Selected Literary Works

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Abstract

Sudha Murty is a towering figure who has offered remarkable contributions to the society. She in the capacity of an engineer, a teacher and a philanthropist has motivated and inspired the common masses to an unimaginable extent. She stands as an epitome of humility, diligence and confidence. Through this paper an attempt has been made to analyse a part of her life and her selected literary works. It's an attempt, firstly, to express how Sudha Murty has gone against the grain to be where she is and secondly, to do a close reading of her selected literary works and analyse the social and moral elements in it. Sudha Murty's life and her writings are intertwined. Her narrations are based on her life experiences. She tries to work on the bonding between people and the society. Her choice of using simple words in her writings, her way of empathizing with the common people, her own simple life-style connect her to every person. With a belief in herself and her work, she stands high being the owner of an indomitable voice.

Key Words: Humility, Diligence, Social, Moral, Empathy, Indomitable

Introduction

Sudha Murty is a towering figure whose life itself stands high as an example of sheer determination and hard-work blended with humility. She is a torch bearer for generations of women to come. Sudha Murty is a person who believes that motivating and inspiring the masses with deeds or actions can bring about a desired change in our society. She is a social mobiliser. She has influenced many lives through her social works and her writings. Her writings are not superficial or shallow. She writes from her heart. As a literary person her principal focus has been to reflect upon the truths of our society. She is a keen observer. Her narrations are based on her life experiences and are not unrealistic. Her writings have become social and moral voices. The contents of her writings are taken from the society for the

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society. She picks her narrations from the masses. She acts as a medium and a voice manifesting wisdom and values. She has offered remarkable contributions in the field of inspirational and motivational literature in India. Her inspiring short stories, novels, non-fictions, travelogues etc teach us valuable lessons and render insights into life and human nature. Her stories have the power to influence our behaviour and shape our society and culture. Her choice of using simple words and her way of empathizing with the common people make her writings very effective. She owns an indomitable voice.

Going against the Grain

Sudha Murty was one of the female pioneers to have taken entry into studying engineering when there was hardly any chance for woman to get into this arena. Going against the regular norms, she took admission at Basappa Veerappa Bhoomaraddi College of Engineering and Technology in Hubli, Karnataka. She had to fight many odds as she was the only girl student amongst all other boy students in her college. She came out successful in her attempt and became the topper. She proved to be successful even in her professional life. She has very evenly expressed her feelings and experience of college days in her literary piece, *How to Beat the Boys* in her book *Three Thousand Stitches*. Her motive has always been to spread positivity and assert that nothing can stop us from achieving our goals if we try and fight against the odds irrespective of any kind of discrimination.

Sudha Murty's decision of stepping into the field of philanthropy was one of her another attempts of going against the grain. In spite of having a flourishing career in engineering, she opted for philanthropy and decided to form 'Infosys Foundations'. Through this foundation, she has tried to help the needy and fulfil her duty as a responsible citizen. She has been spreading kindness and smiles through her work. She has turned the success of 'Infosys' into an opportunity to serve the less privileged. She wishes to convey this message to others who are similarly positioned. She has always come forward with an indomitable spirit and voice without fearing the challenges that were to come in her way.

On the Social Front

Sudha Murty set her foot on the social front with a desire and a will to change and illumine people's lives. Her books are scripts of her experiences and deeds wherein she tries to give social messages and inspire people by depicting various facets of life both bright and dark. Her stories are a way of teaching the art of true living and problem-solving. These stories show how people face life's challenges and obstacles to achieve their cherished goals. Her writings depict how social values should be respected even during conflicts and challenges in life. These also portray the changing socio-cultural scenario and the change in human attitudes. Her stories related to the nation, culture and relationships in a family have helped in shaping people's attitudes towards self and towards the society. In the course of her work for the Infosys Foundation as well as in her capacity as a teacher, she has travelled extensively within India and also other countries, meeting many people, young and old, each

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one of whom, she felt, has enriched her life in some way or the other. She was inspired to pass on these experiences to the younger generation in the hope that these narratives would inculcate in them the insights and values that she found in them. Her social works and her lessons as a teacher are the base for her literary works. She plays a vital role in shaping good human beings. Sudha Murty once said, “In life’s journey, we all meet strange people and undergo many experiences that touch us and sometimes even change us. If you have a sensitive mind, you will see your life too in the vast storehouse of stories. For me, it is something very close to my heart.” Through her books *Wise And Otherwise: A Salute To Life, Stove Bursts or Dowry Deaths, The Old Man and His God: Discovering the Spirit of India, The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk, Three Thousand Stitches, Mahashweta* etc., she tries to explore various social issues and problems vis-a-vis human nature and attitude which she had come through during her social expeditions. The books *Mahashweta* and *Dollar Bahu* revolve around women and their circumstances. *Mahashweta* portrays the agony and trauma that a young girl undergoes on discovering leukoderma. The book portrays the ‘skin deep’ nature of relations that is revealed in moments of crisis. Sudha Murty also tries to highlight the orthodox Indian society regarding women’s rights, in stories like *Stove Bursts or Dowry Deaths*, where the death of a twenty year old lady occurs due to issues related to dowry. The story reflects the social structure, dearth of sympathy and consideration among the common people, gender discrimination and the problem of unemployment. These stories create awareness among people and show the need to readdress the society with universal values. In *Three Thousand Stitches* she talks about various experiences in a warm hearted way. The impact of her work in the ‘devadasi’ community, instances of her father’s kindness leading to a positive change in a lady’s life, her explorations as a cinema lover, the tough life as a philanthropist at Infosys Foundation, etc, portray her simplest acts of courage through which she has been able to touch lives. Along with the virtues, she has also written about the vices and evils in society, making readers aware and conscious of the need for self-reform.

On the Moral Front

Sudha Murty is a firm believer of diligence, perseverance, humility, gratitude, down to earth attitude, optimism and many such positive values. She appreciates dignity of labour. Self-reliance and confidence have been such moral forces that have illumined her personality. These get reflected in her writings. Through writing she tries to impart moral lessons to her readers. Her stories play the role of parables more of which are her first person encounters. Sudha Murty tackles human attitudes in many of her stories. In *The Old Man and His God* and in the story, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* she expresses that humanity and culture in many village folk who are hardly literate, are far better than the city bred and educated. She believes and shows that the lessons of humility can be learnt from these villagers who do not feign like the rich and well-bred. In her piece *A Life Unwritten* in the collection *Three*

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Thousand Stitches she finely portrays the value of kindness and humanity. As the instance goes once her father, at the beginning of his career as doctor, managed to save a new born baby from the clutches of social injustice. Later on, this girl took up the profession of a doctor, saving and nursing many lives. An act of kindness and humanity leading to another act of humanity depicts a moral linkage making the world a better place. *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories* imparts important human values, it teaches us the importance of doing what we believe is right and having the courage to realize our dreams. *Life’s Secret Lessons* convey the value of honesty depicted through the act of a little boy who tells Sudha Murty that her writings are better than the way she reads the stories. 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. Though born to rich parents he did not lose his honesty or simplicity. In the story *Too Many Questions* she says that a gift should not be valued on its price, it is the thought, which should be valued. This story teaches a lesson of humility in the workers. *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 obtain that attitude. The story, *The Old Man and His God* depicts 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. He returns it back to her saying that the money was far more than what one normally gives as a payment for the services of a priest. *A Journey through the Desert* is about two young boys who work at a service station. Their lives change due to the values they imbibe on listening to the stories told by Sudha Murty. The story *Crisis of Confidence* teaches lessons on qualities like self reliance where Sudha Murty observes that education makes a person economically independent and self-reliant. The power and strength of hard-work are depicted in the story *I Will Do It*. The story illustrates how a bright boy has to forego an engineering seat in IIT as his father was not in a position to pay higher fees due to financial and social responsibilities. The boy consoles himself, saying that it is not the institution but the individual who can change his own life through hard work. Through hard work, without the help of caste, community or political connections, this boy became a pioneer in India’s Software Industry. He turned out to be an entrepreneur credited with the first wave of Information Technology in India. He earned wealth legally and ethically. He believes in the motto ‘Powered by Intellect and Driven by Values’. This became the tag line of his company, Infosys. He is

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none other than Sudha Murty's husband, Narayana Murthy; Founder of Infosys who remained the Chairman and Mentor for long. This story has been an inspiration for many youngsters to comprehend that success at its best is a product of hard work. The story *Mother's Love* teaches one to empathize with a mother who first wishes to give away her unwanted child to a rich couple, but later on refuses to do so. It also depicts the story of another mother who leaves her helpless blind child as she was blind. The stories *The Red Rice Granary* and *A Heart of Gold* teach us lessons in helping people without expecting anything in return. Sudha Murty urges us to spread kindness and happiness among the needy and deserving with sincerity without any kind of expectation, without caring for caste, creed and religion, so that the receiver may prosper. She says: "When you donate something give the best and not the second best. God is not there in the temple, mosque or church. God is within people. If you serve them with whatever you have, you have served God." *Friends Forever* is another poignant story of friendship, bonding, relations and friendliness. She, through her interaction with her grand- daughters and from the experiences of her own childhood, realized that children learn more through stories rather than sermons, so she decided to write stories for children along with the writings for readers of all ages, where she could usher in moral lessons. As the unbiased young minds can be shaped easily with right values, so her children's collections like *The Magic Drum and Other Favourite Stories*, *The Serpent's Revenge: Unusual Tales from the Mahabharata*, *Grandma's Bag of Stories*, etc., are all packed with morals.

Conclusion

Sudha Murty's writings are full of social and moral elements. She shines with a personality deepened in humility, compassion, self-respect, confidence and positivity. Sudha Murty opts to be like one from the common masses and this is what connects her to every person. Her deeds and her writings are meant for the upliftment of the people. With a belief in herself and her work, she stands high with an indomitable voice.

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