



Instilling Values through Short Stories with Special Reference to Sudha Murty's *Grandma's Bag of Stories*

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Abstract

*Values, like charity, begin at home. Nevertheless we live in a world where digitalizing is everything, and digitalization throws itself into everything from the way we work, communicate, play and even the way we raise our kids. For the most part, it is Wi-fi that brings people in the families together. The exquisite art of coming together to listen to stories from grandmothers is quietly fading away from our absorbed life-style. Story telling is a legacy so lovingly bestowed to us down the generations. The most cherished values for a life time have been endearingly shared through stories around the world. The present paper focuses on the values and life skills imparted in Sudha Murty's *Grandma's Bag of Stories*. Murty has most amusingly enwrapped the values in attractive envelopes and presented them for the child readers.*

Keywords: Short Stories, Values, Didactic, Instruct, Family Bonding

Introduction

Short stories, like other genres of literature, show us something of how people respond to life. It is one of the best ways to inspire, inform, and create memories and emotions and a great way to share a lesson. The tradition of telling and listening to stories has successfully been passed on from generation to generation and continues to flourish in the present time as well. As a literary genre, the specialty of the short story is in expressing human life as reflected in the brief incidents and single episodes as unfolded in everyday life.

This paper pays attention to the short stories of one of the most iconic writers of India and an adoring philanthropist, Padma Bhushan Awardee, Sudha Murty, Former Chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, a social activist and writer. Murty has made tremendous contribution in the field of inspirational and motivational literature in India through her inspiring short stories, anecdotes and novels. All her stories contain moral and ethical messages. According to Shiv K Kumar, "As stories, these fables and tales were tightly structured and ingeniously conceived, although their primary objective invariably didactic-g geared more to instruct than to entertain their readers. Her stories are diverse in themes, relevant for young learners and they aim at shaping children's minds and they are designed to instill human values in children" (12).

Sudha Murty's *Grandma's Bag of Stories* helps us revisit the halcyon days when summer vacation was the most delicious time of the year, one always looked forward to for meeting, playing and enjoying with kith and kin. For the adult readers, this collection of stories resurrects the good old memories when recreation primarily meant playing together with friends and family members or listening to stories from their grandmothers. It takes the young readers for a vacation trip to the grand parents' house, where one can feel being a part of the

children clustered together around a wise old loving grandmother listening to enthralling stories. This book takes the place of a mellow granny for the child readers by strewing around pearls of wisdom.

Grandma's Bag of Stories

The most attractive trait about the short story collection, *Grandma's Bag of Stories*, is that the readers can link the stories to their own lives as they deal with real life situations taking place in real world locations. The stories portray life in readily recognizable ways. Sudha Murty believes in the values like affection, sacrifice, reverence, compassion, consideration etc. Naturally she has included all these principles in her writings.

This collection of short stories for children begins with the grandchildren reaching the grandmother's home for summer holidays. It is written like a conversation between the grandmother and her grandchildren, during which the enchanting stories are shared. In her stories, Murty talks about all the quintessential values and intrinsic skill sets, a child needs to grow up with. Through her writings, she has become the affectionate grandmother of the children who are living in isolated family structures, where Kindle and apps and sites for story telling heedlessly replace the grammies in the families.

This book serves as a compact package and a repository of tenets and virtues, one need to possess. It encompasses all the key values of life which should be manifested like love, loyalty, unity, contentment, standing by one's words, rewards of helping, dependability, responsibilities like preserving natural resources, farsightedness and the need to innovate, skills like prudence, diligence, willingness to accept changes, and the temperaments to be dodged like boasting, obsession, greed, squandering, irrationalities and sluggishness.

Contentment

All problems in life today arise from the unending desire of man wanting more of everything. People are getting more and more materialistic and lose sight of the beautiful things life offers them. In the pursuit of wealth, they go bankrupt in the real riches of life like contentment and satisfaction. The author draws attention to the actuality that real sense

of fulfillment can come only from the inner self. She tries to endorse the value of being content in the story, *Who was the happiest of them all?*

This story talks about a king who wants to find out whether his people are really happy by giving them a test. King Amrit assumes that people of his kingdom are very happy and takes pride in it. Advised by his Minister Chandan, he invites the people of his kingdom and tries to find out whether they are really happy at heart. He learns that his men are happy but not contented. An unworried young man among the disappointed villagers demonstrates to understand the need to be contented at heart for a happy living. Murty conveys her message through the words of the Minister, Chandan, "Your Majesty, I hope you now realize that people's contentment does not end with having enough food or money. They also need to be truly happy inside. Only then will they not be swayed when they gain or lose wealth. That is a lesson that everyone - whether a king or a commoner - needs to remember" (32). The story enunciates that contentment is more important than happiness.

Standing by One's Promises

Making and breaking the promises nonchalantly has become so common these days. It is imperative that the children understand how important it is to keep up their words. Murty has chosen a plot befitting the innocent young minds to take home the message of standing by one's words. In "Payasam for a Bear", the couple Mohan and Basanti try to deceive a bear who helps them collect wood for cooking. The couple plays a trick and breaks the promise they made to a bear that they would treat him with Payasam if he carried firewood for them. When they broke the promise, the bear got angered and destroyed their property. They finally realize that if they had been sincere in their words, they would have been free from the bear's affronts. The author precisely conveys the message of the importance of keeping promises.

Love, Loyalty, Unity

The abstract attributes of love, loyalty and unity are woven into a beautiful story in an apprehensible way to the child readers. The children need to understand that these are the foundation stones in

any relationship and grow up with an understanding of what really matters the most in life.

In the story, *'The Story of Paan'* the children are explained how the ingredients of Paan came into existence. The Story of Paan comes from Aiji's intellect when the whole family visits a family for dinner. After the completion of dinner, Kaka brings a big box of paan. The children love the way Kaka prepares the paan by appropriately mixing the ingredients. Aiji tells that the uniqueness in the red colour is because of the perfect proportion of each ingredient and opens up a story related to it. She narrates the story of two brothers Bhanu and Veer who were full of love and care for each other. One day Veer joins the army in spite of pleadings by his elder brother and sister-in-law, pressing him to remain home. But Veer insisted and left. Days passed by. Bhanu was unable to bear the agony and he and his wife went for searching for Veer. They crossed plains, mountains, valleys, forests and many villages. Veer's sister-in-law died of exhaustion and his elder brother even died on the spot. Their bodies turned into two wonderful plants.

After a few years Veer returned home, got deplored to know the tale of woe of his family members, and started searching for them. When he reached the place where his brother and sister-in-law died, a villager told him the story of the two wonderful plants and the story of two people searching for their brother who died and turned into plants. Veer was awe struck and changed into a statue. Since then the nuts, leaves and lime from the statue were used in appropriate proportions for the preparation of paan. The author tries to inculcate the values of love unity and loyalty through this story.

Rewards of Helping

The first story 'Doctor Doctor' revolves around Ravi, a shopkeeper in a village where each drop of water is valued so dearly, as the village was badly affected by water scarcity. People had to walk for miles to fetch water for their everyday needs. The story starts with the shopkeeper helping a tired old stranger who empties Ravi's entire day's supply of water. Though water was considered more precious than anything else for the villagers, Ravi was happy to be of some help to a thirsty old man.

After the strange old man had left leaving the pot with a few droplets of water, Ravi wanted to drink those few drops left behind. To his amazement, he saw the pot was overflowing with sweet water. He drank from the pot and immediately felt that his head ache had been cured. Ravi, the owner of grocery shop now became the owner of magic pitcher, the water from which could heal anyone of any disease. Ravi realised that the old man he had helped must have given him this gift in gratitude. Ravi almost became a doctor for the villagers and helped everyone with ailments. He was helping the poor people without expecting anything in return, until one day he was taken over by greed. Instead of helping, he started making money over it.

When the same old man who gifted him the magic pitcher came back again to his shop seeking water, he understood that Ravi was no more that kind and generous person. He had become so greedy and selfish that he started neglecting people who needed him the most. The old man took back his powers when he realized that Ravi had been misusing the gift. Ravi realized his mistake and was filled with remorse. He longed for the visit of the old man to be blessed by him once again. He wanted to do something for his villagers and finally decided to bring a real doctor. Murty tries to teach the children the virtues of being helpful to others and how greed and selfishness may take away all the good things from us. She also makes it clear that even the kindest people may fall for a temptation which will eventually deprive them of every piece of good fortune.

Renouncing Greed

People being taken over by greed and covetousness is a recurring theme in most of her stories. "The Enchanted Scorpions" is all about an honest merchant who finds a hidden treasure in the property bought from an old man. Siddharth, the merchant finds an old box full of scorpions, protected by an old spell. Actually it's a box of gold and silver which can be seen only by a true family member of the ancestry. The fair-minded merchant preserves it and hands it over to the right person finally. This story aims to teach the kids to keep them away from greed of others' wealth. It augments the need to be fair always and avoid being greedy and materialistic.

Environmental Concerns

The inadvertence of the present generation culminates in exhaustion and depletion of natural resources. The main theme of the story “The Island of Statues” is preserving the gifts of nature. This story talks about an island which was once full of deep forest and blue rivers becoming an empty barren land. The island had a quarry of a unique kind of stone. It was valued for its attractive white colour. It was also easy to turn into sculptures. This natural beauty of the land gets lost due to the greed of the thoughtless new king. “Rajdip’s wishes of lining his capital city and palace with giant sculptures was fulfilled. Each student in the art school made a beautiful huge statue and gifted it to him. Soon these statues filled up the entire kingdom. Where once there were deep forests and blue rivers and streams the island was a barren land now. The forests were gone. The rivers had turned into dirty trickles of water. The climate had become hot and dusty as the rains no longer came on time. People started leaving the island. The houses, schools and palaces slowly fell silent as they were abandoned. With time, everyone forgot about this island. Many, many years later when explorers landed here, they found hundreds of statues strewn all over a bare island: a land destroyed by the king’s greed” (110). This story addresses the consequences of exploiting natural resources in the name of development. It aims at inculcating a social responsibility from a young age itself. Children are explained how to make proper use of the natural resources available to us. It is a bugle call for the young minds to use the riches sparingly so as to sustain it for the succeeding generations.

Dependability

This story is about a girl named Gita who never seemed to have any responsibility or seriousness towards anything. She is known for being unconcerned about any piece of work given to her. She lost the trust of her own family members and proved to be unreliable to everyone in the family. One day when Gita had promised her friends to bring sambar for a school picnic, her mother tells her to add five spoons of salt and leaves for temple. Keeping in mind the undependable nature of Gita, every member in the family adds five spoons of

salt thinking that she would definitely forget. When Gita takes the sambar to the picnic, she cuts a sorry figure in front of everyone when they taste the exceedingly salty sambar. She comes home teary eyed and explains what happened in the picnic. They make her understand all this happened because of her undependable attitude. She realizes her mistake and resolves to be dependable from then on. Today girls like Gita are a common household material who never takes things seriously and easily get lost in their world. This story holds a lesson to all such children with haphazard attitude.

Prudence and Diligence

Murty tries to teach young readers the importance of being smart and shrewd in order to keep them away from the threats and bullying of strangers. The story “Kavery and the Thief” is all about a village woman Kavery who saves the village from a thief with her prudence. The thief who tried to steal the money from the temple wanted to buy the land of Kavery only through which he could get into the temple to steal the coins and ornaments from the temple. Understanding the evil plans of the thief, Kavery cooks up a story about a hidden treasure buried in her land by her ancestors to keep it safe from the robbers. This made the thief dig the land for her all night. Having found no treasure, the thief understood that he had been fooled. He disappears for a few months and comes back to the same place in disguise for looting. Once again Kavery uses her timely wit and saves village from the thief. The story also emphasizes the need for hard work to come up in life.

Similarly in the story “Roopa’s Great Escape”, the author talks about how an orphan girl Roopa pretends to have a distant relative to avoid being pitied by the villagers. A thief who overhears the story takes advantage of the situation and comes in the guise of the distant uncle and takes her away with him. She understands his plan and cleverly escapes from him and makes a living by working in an inn. When destiny brings him there, she punishes him for what he had done to her. After putting an end to him, she goes back to her own village and lives happily. These two stories are intended to convey the message to the children that prudence and wit can help them win over any hardship or threat.

Importance of Far-Sightedness and the Need to in Novate

Creative thinking and critical thinking are indispensable for the growth of an individual, organization or a nation. “The Horse Trap” is about a great thinker and scholar George Smith who counsels the king about future requirements. It also talks about how his calculations are outdone by a practical thinker Adam, the King’s Secretary. George Smith comes out with an idea that as the population grows, the number of horses used will also go up and eventually people will die of diseases caused by horse dung. Adam invalidates George Smith’s speculation and talks about the innovative skills of human beings which will keep making things better. The need for practical and innovative thinking has been outlined in this story.

Inevitability of Changes

In this story *How the Seasons Got their Share*, the grandma explains the grandchildren how seasons were created, through an imaginary story. The children understand how each season has its own beauty and how difficult life will be, if the seasons are not equally distributed. The seasons in nature can offer metaphors for the experiences of life. Through this, the author throws light on the necessity to adapt to changes and the impermanence that things are constantly changing.

Likewise *The Story of Silk*, as the name goes, the journey of the gradual change from one stage to the other involved in the discovery of silk. It is about a queen who notices the threads peeping from the cocoon which accidentally fell into the cup from a mulberry bush. The author explains the astonishing process of the thin strong and shiny thread that came out from the cocoon becoming a soft strong cloth woven by the empress. The author denotatively delineates the transformation of life through various stages.

Staying Away from Squandering

One of the problems with those who become prosperous by sheer luck is that they spend money recklessly as if there were no tomorrow. “A Treasure for Ramu” is the story of a poor hard working couple in the village who becomes rich with the help of

a treasure found while digging the land and how they become lazy and rude with wealth they have accidentally acquired. The couple, Ramu and Rani, loses all the riches by squandering. They finally realize that wealth does not stay in a place unless they work and use their money wisely. The story ends with the awakening of Ramu saying to his wife, “We’ll go back to our village, and to our old ways. We will work hard like we did once, and we will help everyone around us. Maybe that will make Lakshmi come back to us one day. And even if she doesn’t, we will try and be happy with what we have” (48). A simple message of continuing to work hard no matter what wealth one has is conveyed through this story.

Rational Thinking

In spite of the growing dominance of scientific reasoning, irrational beliefs continue to exist. ‘The Donkey and the Stick’ is a story that supports a strong message that we should not blindly follow rituals and words uttered by others without comprehending the meanings ourselves. This story is about how people of the village are deceived by the trick of a foolish disciple who misguides the villagers in the absence of the sage. He makes the people believe the drawing found on the stone lying across the road was about a magic stick and hero who died protecting the village. They made him the priest and started doing a lot of offering. Finally when the sage comes back, he explains the true meaning of the drawing and helps them find the treasure beneath the stone. It’s all about following the rituals and others’ words blindly and without thinking. Murty expresses her exasperation with the irrational beliefs of the people and ends the story with the words of the sage:

You should not follow rituals and the words of others blindly. Think for yourselves and understand why you are doing what you do. If you had given this some thought, you would have recovered this treasure many months ago. Instead, you wasted your time and money making offerings to a rock and helping this greedy disciple of mine become fat and make fools of you. This treasure belongs to all of us. Let’s use it to keep this road in good repair so everyone can use it and go about their work in peace (53).

Helping Unconditionally

People do not come forward to help out to others unless they get something out of it. It has become a common syndrome to have selfish intentions in every little service we do for others. It is important that the children learn to reach out to others without expecting anything in return. The story “What is in it for me?” is all about a mouse named Mushika who always expected a reward for every little thing he did. Mushika helps a Potter with a twig and manages to get a pumpkin in return. Giving the pumpkin to a milkman gets a cow in bargain. The cow is interchanged for a bride in a marriage party. Finally, the smart bride teaches a lesson to this little mouse. Through this story the author wants to convey that the joy of helping someone itself is a reward and it is not right to do things with an expectation of a something.

Overcoming Obsessions

One of the problems that call for our attention is obsession. People get obsessed towards certain person, object, subject or thoughts and eventually become distressed. This hinders them from paying attention to more important things in life. The stories ‘*The Princess’s new clothes*’ and ‘*The Unending Story*’ are examples of how important it is to overcome being obsessed towards something.

In the story, ‘*The Princess’s new clothes*’, Beena, the princess of Ullas, came as an answer to the sincere prayers of the queen and king of Ullas. When the Goddess granted them a child, she said that the child would have a flaw that should never like to wear the same dress twice. Initially it was not taken seriously. Years passed by it became a big burden to the couple to fetch her new dress every new day. So she was sent again to the goddess to find a solution. The goddess again grants her another wish by giving a new dress everyday on condition that it should not be exchanged with anybody at any cost. When Beena breaks the condition, she is ordained to become an onion plant, the layers symbolizing the outfits of Beena. This story aims at explaining the kids to help them stay away from obsession of any kind.

In the same way, *The Unending Story*, a 15 year old selfish and irresponsible King Pratap is smitten by the urge to listening to stories all the time. He even went to the extent of giving half the kingdom

for a person who would tell him an unending story. Then a minister in disguise makes him realize his roles and responsibilities. Through this story, that grandma tries to tell the children that the children cannot spend all the time listening to stories. They need to involve in other activities too. She helps them understand obsession of any kind is distasteful and hence should be curbed.

Dangers of Slothfulness

Laziness and lack of motivation in children are among the most frustrating issues parents face today. Getting poor grades, procrastination, not sharing any household chores and not caring about future, all these arise from laziness and disinclination to do things. The character Brij in the story “Fire on the beard” is a personification of laziness. Brij, the leader of Idlers club in the village, was damn lazy that he would not even bother to trim his beard which grew up to his knee. Even when the house caught fire, he would not move. He was finally saved by his wife Shanti and the other hardworking women of the village. This story talks about how his laziness almost led him to the danger of losing his life.

Perceptions and Interpretations

Perceptions differ based on one’s experiences and the socio-cultural background one is from. In the story, “The Way We Look At It”, the author wants to convey the message that same thing can appear in different ways to different people. Example of a rock which appears to be an image of a God to a devotee, as a stone for sculpture to a sculptor, resting place for a travelling merchant, an obstacle to the public in the eyes a soldier. The stone is actually used by washer man to wash clothes. Every object has its meaning and significance attributed to it from our own thoughts and experience. The author also brings to the attention of the readers how people try to interpret things based on their own experiences and exposures.

Stop Boasting

It could be observed in today’s society that some are so prone to boasting and bragging. These are just signs of ignorance and immaturity. “The Kingdom of Fools” is a story which explains children that day

should not be boastful of their knowledge. They should always understand that there is a lot to be learnt. It talks about a king who thought everyone in his kingdom was clever and always felt proud of it. An old teacher comes to make him realize that his people were not as clever as he boasted of. The king finally realizes his mistake and promises to rule his Kingdom with wisdom and humility.

Conclusion

Literature is believed to have the potential of fostering values by providing emotional experiences that shape the brain circuits for empathy and help the child gain insight into human behavior. Exposure to such stories is a step towards popularizing literature that helps create attitudinal shifts. Murthy's *Grandma's Bag of Stories*, embedded with morals and values, are actually poignant as they remind us that values is actually what makes human life meaningful and really worth living. The stories are meticulously tailored to convey the values, attitudes, and information necessary for children in everyday life with a view to bringing out the innate power and positive tendencies in the children to help them find everlasting love, peace and happiness. If we can instill proper knowledge and direction in our children, we can channel their energy and enthusiasm, and achieve extraordinary things. If we guide them in the right direction, by instilling the right social and cultural values, they will transform our society.

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