

# The Quintessence of Values and Morals in Sudha Murty's *Wise and Otherwise*

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## Abstract

*Sudha Murty, the chairperson of Infosys is a social worker, author, a philanthropist and involved with many charities. Published by Penguin, Wise and otherwise is a compilation of 51 stories which are her real life experiences, congregated while travelling across the country. Usually, a successful technocrat writes on matters pertaining to his/her chosen field of specialization. It is very uncommon for a person from one of the most outstanding multinational corporations to write on commonplace issues, but SudhaMurty is an exception. This paper is an attempt to delineate the quintessence of values and morals in SudhaMurty's Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life. The stories of SudhaMurty uphold the old Indian values and morals for the next generation. Her stories venture to support India and transform the present Indian scenario for the betterment of humankind.*

**Keywords:** Quintessence Morals Values

First published in 2002, *Wise and Otherwise* has sold over 30,000 copies in English and has been translated into all the major Indian languages. This revised new edition is sure to charm many more readers and encourage them to explore their inner selves and the world around us with new eyes. She has a simple and unique style wherein she blends morality with fun in such a way that the reader receives the message along with enjoyment without being conscious of it.

It is a collection of fifty vignettes of the real-life incidents of Murthy, which left a profound impression on her, both in good and bad ways. These incidents, although not uncommon, is interpreted by the author in refreshingly creative manner, which would never fail to impress the reader. The book would be an easy and fast read considering the writing style, which is very direct, but still elegant. Brevity and clarity are perhaps the trademarks of Sudha Murthy's writing.

After reading this book, the readers will find a new way to look at life and people. This book will make them realize how small incidents can be a window of opportunity to understand myriad nature of human beings along with their virtues and vices. At the same time, a reader can realize how each moment and the small incidents in our

life can be so inspiring and enriching if we give them our attention and thought just like the writer did.

It chronicles her observation of human nature, and the behaviour of a cross section of people she has come across during the silent yet outstanding social of that Infosys Foundation she helped established. The book portrays a wide variety of people - from high society to hoi poloi, simple tribals to charlatans, anonymous donors to publicity hungry and credit grabbing politicians. One of the stories There are stories that just act as a witness to society, like the discussions between two marriage brokers regarding the impact the IT sector's growth has had on their business, a beggar who moves into an area devastated by an earthquake to take advantage of the aid provided to victims. We get to see a true picture of Real India.

## Imbibing Moral Values from Short Stories

Readers can learn a lot from short stories because the writer gets to his/her point much quicker and is succinct with descriptions. Short story writers like SudhaMurty do not write for the sake of writing. She has a validation in her mind while writing. She writes with a point to convey whether it is moral lesson or insights into life that gives a new perspective. She writes so that the readers learn from

her experiences and enhance their lives. Stories undeniably “have the potential to build authentic communities of shared meaning and values”[1]. It is also said that “people make meaning of their lives through story” [2]. It is true as far as the stories of Sudha Murty are concerned. She imparts a susceptible revelation for morals and values besides giving the readers the deep feeling of travelling along with her. She expects her readers to learn from her mistakes, her successes and her relationships. The narratives of some of her stories give way to catharsis of emotions. Morals and values are a part of the behavioural aspect of a person and are correlated to each other. Moral is a system of beliefs that is taught for deciding good or bad whereas values are personal beliefs or something that comes from within. ‘Morals’ and ‘Values’ are strewn in her short stories. She has dedicated this book to all the ‘shirtless people of India’ who have taught her so much about her country. Each story runs to three or four pages. It is a collection of 50 vignettes of real life incidents which arose from personal encounters in the life of the writer. It is essentially the musings on the experiences the writer had published in the columns of The New Sunday Express and other dailies. Each story portrays the myriads of human nature. These stories are not confined to a particular geographical region, though most of them are set in a village background.

### **Moral Values among the Young and Old**

Moral Value refers to the good virtues such as honesty, integrity, truthfulness, compassion, helpfulness, love, respectfulness, hard-work, etc. Students are the future of India. The future of our country depends upon the *moral values* imparted to them during their student *life*. Most of the stories emphasize the importance of Moral values and about people’s behaviour in different circumstances. The opening story *Honesty Comes from the Heart* is about a coolie’s son who secures a State Rank in the High School Exams. He is on the verge of giving up his studies, since he cannot afford it. He is given a monthly stipend of 300 rupees to maintain himself. He accepts the help, but scrupulously returns the unspent money to his benefactor. Experience has taught the author that “honesty is not the mark of any particular class nor is it related to education or

wealth” (5). Another story *In Sahyadri Hills, A Lesson in Humility* is about the headman of a penurious tribal village, with primitive facilities in the village school. But the elders and children are not lacking in their thirst for knowledge. Given a gift of books, uniforms and umbrellas, the village headman accepts it only on condition that the writer accepts a return gift - a bottle of home-brewed fruit juice. Honesty, pride and self respect are not the monopoly of the urban and the affluent and Thandappa, the headman taught the author that “there is a grace in accepting also”(16).

### **Lack of Moral Values among the Grownups**

In the short story *On Human Foibles*, a young man invites the author for tea to his residence as a result of the appreciation he received from the author for documenting his work well and efficiently. He is all praises for his family and is not satisfied with the superficial recognition he received from the author after showcasing of his son’s talents. He feels proud and also owes his son’s talents to heredity and genes. The ultimate of his boast is that when he tells that he graduated from BVB Engineering College and secured Gold Medal in 1972. On hearing this, the author is flabbergasted as she is the only person to receive a Gold Medal in that particular year from the same institution. She is really taken aback by the foible of that young man who is well-mannered and studious in his work to come out with such a lie. In *Death without Grief*, the author goes to meet her neighbours who lost the old woman of the family to offer her condolences. She was completely shaken when she comes to know from the daughter-in-law that the death of the old woman is a “good riddance”(21) as the old woman was bedridden with a stroke and it was expensive to look after her. To complement his wife, the husband too feels that his mother is finally relieved from all her suffering. The author feels disturbed by the statements of the couple regarding the death of the old woman and questions herself: “Have our lives become so busy that grief has become proportionate to the usefulness of the loved one we have lost?” (22). In *India, the Worst of Both Worlds* revolves around a man who introduces his own father as a destitute found on the roads, obtains a place in the Old Age Home with the help

of the author, and forgets about him. He returns on the death of the old man whose bag he wants to claim and reveals only then that the old man is his father. The bag contains a passbook showing a balance of over a lakh of rupees. *A Man Too Clever by Halfis* the story of a impostor who hastens into the office of Infosys Foundation, and mistakes Sudha for one of the ordinary staff members. His aim is to sell a few substandard books written by him for the libraries assisted by the Foundation. He claims to have known Sudha from childhood and gives a fictional account of how he helped her husband in his career. At one point, the author discloses her identity and tells him "...only an honest human being can be a good writer"(53). The author was highly disgusted with the world the human beings live in without any morals and values.

### Moral Values among Womenfolk

The sister in *When the Mop Count Did Not Tally*, even under pressure from the surgeon does not handover the needle and catgut to him. When the surgeon asks for explanation for her stubborn behaviour, she cautiously tells him that she goes by her learning and principles. She tells him that "...if the mop count is not correct, then the needle and catgut should not be given to the surgeon. When experience teachers say something then they must have their reasons. I just followed my teacher's words"(26). The sister values her teacher's sayings.

### Conclusion

The stories being realistic, provide factual realism through actual facts, and are emotionally rational while dealing with the protagonists' feelings and sensitivities. The narratives depict social realism and contemporary realism while portraying the realities of life in a society, and the social hazards in the main stream of the society in the modern days. Ruskin Bond's stories provoke our thoughts towards gratitude and goodness. Sudha Murty's narratives are moralizing, instructing readers that problems are a part of life giving the readers an emotional experience and deep values to overcome. The language of the book is

lucid, yet striking and the message it imparts is effective. She leaves her readers will start looking at life from a new perspective. It will make them initially think, medially introspect and finally act.

There are 51 anecdotal stories altogether giving interesting insights into different facets of life dowry deaths and forced prostitution, changes in personality with passage of time, a beggar who unknowingly transforms a pessimist to an optimist, nostalgic memories about childhood and simple pleasures of life, changing values and mores. The anecdote portrays whole range of human emotions - compassion and greed, jealousy and celebration of others' success, human dignity as well as degradation, charity as well as exploitation. What is striking about the book is that it talks about good and bad. But one cannot fail to notice that there is more about good than bad. Even while writing about things bad and unsavoury, the author is not judgmental or pontificating. Fifty vignettes showcase the myriad shades of human nature. A man dumps his aged father in an old-age home after declaring him to be a homeless stranger, a tribal chief in the Sahyadri hills teaches the author that there is humility in receiving too, and a sick woman remembers to thank her benefactor even from her deathbed.

These are just some of the poignant and eye-opening stories about people from all over the country that Sudha Murty recounts in this book. From incredible examples of generosity to the meanest acts one can expect from men and women, she records everything with wry humour and a directness that touches the heart. This book is recommended for every Indian who wants to know more about the real state of India. Sudha Murty has left it to the readers to decide what's good and what's bad.

### References

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