
Research Papers



**Sudha Murty's Wise and Otherwise: a journey of humility
to humanity to equality to social issues**

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Abstract

Sudha Murty, a professor by profession imparts education to the society at large through her books like Otherwise and Otherwise, Dollar Bahu, Mahashweta Devi etc. Her literature has strongly based on her real life experience what comes from the Infosys Foundation founded by the Murty couple. She contributes most of her time for and amongst the poor and needy people. The book Wise and Otherwise would mark a question on her ability of writing such outstanding books so are they lucid in presentation and honest stories lived amongst the people she deals about. The stories are memoirs overwhelming every rational Indian to introspect about his contribution to the society.

Sudha Murty by profession a professor in a Bangalore based engineering college; she is recognised for her association with Narayan Murty; ex Chief Executive Officer of the Infosys; a software company based in Bangalore. The couple Sudha Murty and Narayan Murty since the college days thought of some programme for the cause of society like the Infosys Foundation which would render services to the society in many ways which is why the Infosys Foundation was coupled with the Infosys as a Non Government Organization (NGO). The Foundation works for the rural education by rendering the schools books and uniforms, infrastructural help, libraries through mammoth library project through the Karnataka state, rural and urban health issues that are ignored by the government and the society alike, critical issue of prostitution etc. Murty's contribution derives undoubtedly applause for her social contribution. Her husband has recently retired from his active involvement in the professional work but Sudha Murty continues her work in spite of old age. The literary fraternity; including the

Indian Writing in English must be indebted to her for her marvelous memoirs in the form of short stories. In all possible manners, the memoirs are the didactic at every stage of life. She appreciates and comments at times when human attitudes evince a sociable contribution and errors both.

This book Wise and Otherwise is a compilation of 51 short stories and each is a gem itself. The first and foremost aspect of the book to befall in love is its simplicity. The incidents are narrated by the author in simple manner, with no attempt of glamour or extravagance which is why a dictionary is barely required. The opinions are presented direct, in fact, Murty does not want to attract attention deliberately; this is the most attractive feature of the book. All stories are within 5 to 6 pages or many of them in 3 to 4 pages as well, however, each and every story gives a lesson of life. It does not mean they are painted in rosy picture. An impression is possible of being dramatized but it being a real life experience, the impression is shirked off. Murthy gives some instances which clearly portray the vagaries of life.

Some of them are so moving, you are forced to reflect on how unfair life really is.

Murty begins the book with one of the enchanting stories of a rural tribal boy of 15 in the story *Honesty* comes from the heart. Sudha Murty finds some spark in his eyes which invoke her to render financial assistance in pursuing his further education that he wishes to but cannot proceed due to the perennial poverty in the lower social class. But what astonishes more is his honesty in returning the remaining unused amount of money when he has not stayed at the place of college. The boy's father is so poor that he cannot fulfill the two times meal to his family consisting of five members and such candor in attitude and at the age of 15 is notably incredible and indescript. Murty will have never gone to find the status of the boy's stay and study at the place and will never know about the fact of unused of money.

She attacks the human attitudes in three stories of the book; an office executive, a fake author and an aged man. The former boasts about his boy, at her mere nodding in appreciation, he embarks to satisfy himself by narrating story about winning gold medal of his engineering college of Dharwad. It catches her eye for she also studied in the same college and won gold medal of the year. When chased, she realises that he has been narrating story cooked by him because he is known as the only clever man not only in the office but the town as well. To gain his popularity index with Sudha Murty, he tells lies to have won the gold medal of the college which in fact won by Sudha Murty and it is given to one student only every year. In other story, a person in author who cooks up a long story of being intimately associated the Murty family claiming to know the author since childhood till this meeting in the Infosys Foundation office. Disgrace it! He even claims to be an instrument in materializing her marriage with Narayan Murty as an arranged marriage which in fact was a love marriage. She wishes to slap at the face of such people at such beggarly thoughts. He comes to sell his mean books by such deceit. An aged man's story is not much different from the sham author. The man with a middle aged person approaches the Foundation office seeking help for the aged man who is a castaway and nobody to look after him in his old age. What they expect a free old aged home, the person accompanied proves to be his son and more deplorable is that the old man has in possession money, bank balance of a lakh rupees what is discovered when his son arrives to claim the

belonging after the old man's death. In this incidence both father and son prove cheats. The former proves insensible having not thought about the sponsoring organisation or the old age home to bequeath his money before bequeathing to his sons who leaves uncared in the old age home at other's cost. This penury of thought is beyond understanding. Murty loathes such people.

On the contrary there are uncivilized people living in tribal parts of India observing an incredible culture of humility even in hard stricken poverty. In *Humility in Sahyadri Hills*, she puts forth a tribal poor village deep in jungles evincing rich culture in all respects preserving from generations. They scarcely feign or they have nothing to feign for. Through the Foundation, Murty wants to help their school made of thatches, meets the thandapa, the chief of the village who expresses his inability to accept her help when she brings back a large cloth for school pupils' uniforms and umbrellas. He, in return, wants to gift Murty a bottle of fruit juice used throughout the year. She feels embarrassed to accept the gift for she feels that she has come 'to give not to accept'. Then the Thandapa cannot also accept her gift unless she accepts his – such is the culture taught to them by their ancestors and preserved by their generation. With humble reverence, she accepts his gift. In the next incidence, she narrates another tribe of Kalahandi District in Orissa state. An aged man comes out with live experience of life and its mortality – a lesson scarcely heard, told and taught in schools and universities as part of the curriculum. It refuses all material theories whether applied or not of life. The man has his simple theory of life that when nothing is of human beings why on earth, man is falling after money. He attempts to imbibe on not to waste one's energy and time in the material life because land, river, air, monsoon none in the man's hand, why should strive for all that. Murty is inundated with pride and honour for the Indian culture, she is a part. These two incidences remain measuring and correcting the human beings

Further this paper may fall short unless it refers to the some social issues and gender issues dealt in the book. There is an undying issue of Indian woman about her status in our society. Two incidences of the collection narrate the unending strife between the daughter in law and the conventional in-laws. In retaining the customary dignity structure, newly married women are harassed even in 21st century. Recalling her childhood days, Murty narrates how a

neighbouring daughter in law was harassed by her mother in law for nothing but only to retain her supremacy in the house. It is Murty's grandmother to interfere in their personal problem and makes realise the mother in law that her daughter would also be a daughter in law of somebody who might react similarly and harassment stops. If this issue is seen in a general manner such problems would never crop in any families is what the incidence teaches. In other incidence of Stove burst or dowry deaths, Murty brings in to light how deeply the society is orthodox in respect of women's right and being. A girl in twenties is on deathbed as a victim of age-old stove burst incidence. She ascribes herself responsible for the stove burst keeping in view the future of her two marriageable sisters. Her concerns are considerable in the inclement social conditions of her family what makes shun her accountability to sue against the in-laws including her husband who burned her like 'a brinjal'. The story comments on the social structure including poverty, population, female discrimination and unemployment. And the next story in this facet is Bond betrayed on a Rakhi Day. Apart from the delineation of a social issue, it deals with a delicate thread of relationship between sister and brother. The major issue for this paper would be the social issue of women falling victims to the flesh trade. All women in the trade would not be the voluntary workers but some conditions making or causing them enter it. In the Indian and African set up, the situational entry of women becomes a need. The incidence of Tara is a model case in this regard. Her terrible story is that her own young brother took her on the pretense of meeting their relative and sold her to an agent in the red light area. Her agony is that she had shouldered the responsibility of her brother and begun living a modest life, why she should have been sold at a tender age that too on Rakhi Day. The day implies a lasting bondage between sister and brother.

The moral of the stories varies from humility to humanity to equality to social issues. Another feature of the stories is they being realistic sensitise the readers. The people relate to these stories in many ways. It deals neither about the rich nor and famous but about everyday common people. The heroes in the stories are for the most part, simple common persons for instance; the tribal boy Hanumanthapa, tribal old persons, the beggar from Murty learns lesson of how can be made happy and positive, a salesgirl selling balm on train, an office executive, the bogus author, the woman on the deathbed, Tara; a prostitute and

number of other characters.

The best part of the book is the experience factor. The way the stories are written, one can evidently see the feelings, the emotions and the experiences that have gone into each of the yarns. It is obvious that the author has travelled far and wide - from the extremely poor villages in Orissa to the flashy environs abroad. The tiny threads that the author gathers in each of these encounters aggregate to form vast experience. It is this personal insight and experience that injects life into every single story. One will have no doubt that Sudha Murty is superb story narrator. Her social contribution is evidence before the society only through this book. Her intention of this book is not to publicise her work but her experience of live life with rich culture of urban, rural and tribal to guide life towards proper directions. It compels the readers to introspect our being in the world. These experiences can be shared equally by many but true and diverse experiences are rare and this is where Sudha Murty serves.

Reference:

1. Murty, Sudha (2005). *Wise and Otherwise*. East West Books, Chennai.