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NARRATIVE ETHICS, CULTURAL PEDAGOGY AND MORAL COGNITION: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF VALUE CONSTRUCTION IN SUDHA MURTHY'S CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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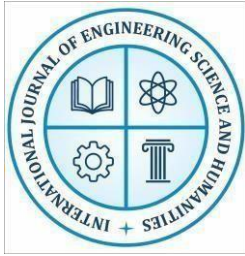
Abstract

Sudha Murthy stands as one of the most significant and influential voices in contemporary Indian English children's literature. This study undertakes a critical examination of some of her short stories from the book "HOW I TAUGHT MY GRANDMOTHER TO READ and other stories", arguing that her narratives function as a sophisticated, layered framework for value construction. The research overtly analyzes the interwoven roles of Narrative Ethics (the conveyance of morality through story structure), Cultural Pedagogy (the use of Indian culture and tradition as teaching tools), and their combined impact on Moral Cognition in young readers. By creating folklore, everyday realism, cultural and mythological retellings in a simple, accessible style, Murthy effectively revives the 'grandmother-driven oral tradition' for the modern child. The findings demonstrate that Murthy's literature is a deliberate pedagogical project that fosters self-reliance, determination, faith, trust, and love in family, emotional intelligence, social responsibility, discipline, and cultural rootedness, thereby laying a strong groundwork for future ethical life. Her contribution is confirmed as a hallmark in modern times for value-based education of children.

Keywords: *Narrative Ethics, Cultural Pedagogy, Moral Cognition, Children's Literature, Value Education, Indian English Literature, Moral Development.*

Introduction

Children's literature has historically transcended its role as mere entertainment, functioning worldwide as a potent cultural vehicle for the transmission of morality, ethics, and societal norms. In India, this pedagogical role is deeply entrenched, beginning with the oral traditions of storytelling such as the *Panchatantra* and the *Jataka Tales*. This study is based on the fundamental premise that the narratives established during childhood impact an individual's ethical framework and sociocultural perception for the rest of their life. In contemporary Indian English Literature, Sudha Murthy emerges as a key figure who successfully revives this ancient storytelling tradition



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for the children of the twenty-first century. Her compelling stories, thoughtful narratives, and simple characters have cemented her position as a celebrated author and philanthropist. While previous research concedes her success in promoting ethical values and preserving culture, a systematic, critical analysis of the *mechanisms* through which this construction operates—specifically, the nexus between narrative structure, cultural content, and cognitive impact—remains necessary. This dissertation, therefore, aims to:

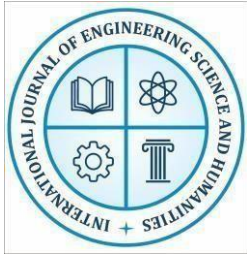
- (1) Critically examine Murthy's narrative style as a form of applied ethics,
- (2) Analyze her deployment of cultural content as a pedagogical strategy, and
- (3) Evaluate her overall contribution to the development of emotional intelligence and moral consciousness in the contemporary Indian child.

Moral and Ethical Framework

Murthy's stories are filled with moral and ethical values. The values like honesty, empathy, kindness, social responsibility, and sincerity. Murthy's method is one of slight instruction, where lessons are delivered through the portrayal of consequences instead of overt didacticism. Her characters are normal middle-class people who face common problems, imparting values to acquire the tradition, culture, and knowledge in the young generation. Her stories familiarize them with problems faced by common men and how they deal with them, preserving their legacy of inheritance, tradition, and wisdom. This approach develops critical thinking, hope, positive attitude, and discipline. Her stories are also fully embedded in the themes of the power of education and knowledge. Children learn how grandparents have lived their lives enriched with mere facilities and little money. Her stories show children that materialism is not necessary for a happy life. A simple life can be very beautiful with your loved one. Cultural Continuity and Pedagogy Murthy's role as a cultural educator is remarkable. Her narratives, especially in works like *Grandma's Bag of Stories*, revive the oral storytelling way of the grandmother. This technique is critical for connecting modern children to their cultural roots, the storytelling way of teaching. Children are raised in nuclear families nowadays due to various reasons. Digital exposure, in addition, leads to a slow loss of their heritage. By portraying the stories based in rural India, traditions, environment, customs, and folklore, her stories are helping to preserve cultural heritage. This fosters children's acquaintance and acceptance of their culture and way of living. They understand the life and thinking of grandparents. They respect their cultural values and try to imbibe them. Children gain an understanding of a variety of cultural backgrounds and become more accepting and open to learning from diverse cultural heritages.

Impact on Moral Cognition

The literature draws on psychological and pedagogical theories to illustrate the intense impact of her work. John Locke proposed the theory of *Tabula Rasa* in the seventeenth century, and Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment argues that the mind of children is like a blank slate on which



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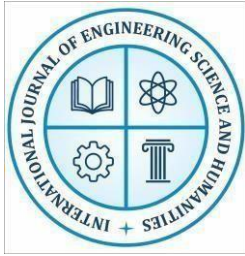
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there is no knowledge, character, or wisdom. A child is born free mind. Family, society, and environmental experiences imprint their prints on the young minds and shape their character. So, storytelling is a great way to shape the thinking and behavior of young people. Ethics, morals, and cultural values imparted through storytelling make a permanent mark on their personality. According to Kohlberg's second stage at the conventional level, children between the ages of seven to eleven years learn family values, friendship, and social behavior best through storytelling.

Analysis and Discussion

In the short story "How I Taught My Grandmother to Read," the author narrates the story of herself when she was a little girl, about twelve years old, and her grandmother, whom she called Avva, lived in a village in North Karnataka. Avva was illiterate, never gone to school. As the village was small with poor transport facilities, newspapers and magazines were always a week late to arrive. Every villager waited eagerly for them. Avva loved listening to stories written by the famous Kannada writer "Triveni". Especially "Kashi Yatra" since Avva could not read, the author used to read the weekly episodes for her every Wednesday. She always listened with great interest and even discussed the story with her friends. Once, the author went to a wedding and stayed away for a few days. During this time, a new issue of the magazine arrived. When the author returned, she found Avva crying. She explained that she felt helpless and dependent because she could not read the story herself. Avva decided that she wanted to learn Kannada. Her age was sixty-two years, but her determination to read and write was firm. The author became her teacher. By the time of Saraswathi Puja during Dussehra, Avva had successfully learnt to read a novel by herself. To show her gratitude and respect, Avva touched the author's feet, considering her a teacher. This emotional moment made the author realize the true value of education. In this story, the author inculcates the moral values in readers of tender age that there is no age limit for learning. Avva learned to read at sixty-two which proves that you can start at any time, at any age. Secondly, it shows that determination matters a lot. When you are determined, success always finds its way to you. One more value the author gives here is that education always brings independence. Your money and wealth are useless without education. Self-realization and women's empowerment are other messages of this story. Educated women feel stronger and more confident. The narration is in the first person. The author is telling her own story herself, which is making it personal, emotional, and realistic. The language of this story is quite clear, simple, and short sentences with some Kannada words, making it accessible to young readers. This story also shows an autobiographical tone. Narrative feels real and truthful as it is based upon the author's own life experience. The social life in the rural area and the traditional giving social realism aspect.

In the story "Books For At least One Library", she again shared her childhood experience with her grandfather. She came from a middle-class family of teachers. Books and knowledge were considered to be more important than money. When she lived with his grandfather, who had a



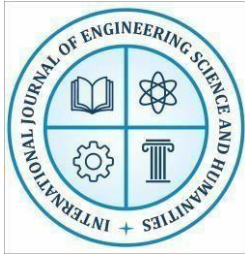
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library in that village, she read all the books in his library. Once, when her grandfather asked her what she would like to do if she had wings. She answered that I will fly to the neighborhood village library and read all the books there. Her grandfather was very pleased to know about her love for books. When the author's grandfather was taking his last breath, he asked for a promise from the author. He asked that if you become well off in your life, you will definitely donate books to at least one school library. The author kept the promise of buying books for the library, and today, through her Infosys Foundation, she has given books to 10000 such libraries. This story mainly shows the values of respect for elders, desire for knowledge, and the bond between grandparents and their kids. This short story proves how elders inculcate various habits in the young ones, which are engraved in their hearts and minds for lifelong in such a beautiful way. This story again gives the lesson about the power of education, reading, generosity, and helping others. When the author became well off she kept the promise. This short story gives the message that one should help others when they can. So, helping, sharing, keeping promises, and being true to oneself and others. Sudha Murthy, as an author, gives such moral and ethical lessons in a simple way. Language is simple, easy. It seems like she herself is visualizing all the episodes and sharing the conversation between her and her grandfather. She avoids the use of complicated words, making her stories easily read by young readers, making it interesting and engaging. When children read the stories, they feel that they are in an imaginary world and experience everything naturally.

Another short story from the book How I taught my grandmother to read and other stories is "Salaam Abdul Kalam". In the story, Sudha Murthy described an incident when Mr. Abdul Kalam called her to appreciate her written column named "IT DIVIDE". It was about the role of information technology in people's lives. Mr. Kalam called her. She thought that there was a mistake by the operator, and maybe he wanted to talk to her husband, Mr. Narayan Murthy. But when Mr. Kalam complimented her on how nicely she had written on such a tough topic, humorously. In this story, the author explains the simplicity and humility of Mr. Kalam. She described one more incident when the head of the Institution came to invite him for the prize distribution day, but Mr. Kalam was short of time, so he denied. That person requested a photograph and put a shawl on the shoulder of Mr. Kalam. After the photograph had been taken, he took the shawl along with him. The author was very angry at this behavior, but Mr. Kalam replied; It does not matter. I don't need any of them; he probably needs it more. This shows the state forwardness, secular outlook, and compassionate heart of Mr. Kalam. Later on, the author tells us about the oath-taking ceremony of Mr. Kalam, where the guest list was full of children, teachers, and his family members only. The author also told about an incident when she asked her son to meet and talk to Mr. Kalam, but as a young person, he was not very convinced and hesitant. He thought that he was the president of the country, so how could I talk to him? Later, when he met Mr. Kalam, he had a conversation of about two hours with him regarding computers, saints,



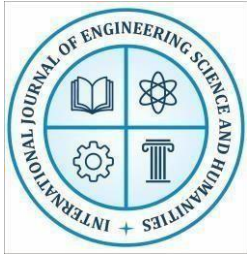
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and the future of children of India. He told his mother; Amma, I never felt that I was talking to the president of India. The author talks so much about Mr. Kalam about how he was so active, irrespective of his age. He was true to his promises, very loving to children, a great teacher, and a brilliant mind. The author gives an anecdote through the story. The power of knowledge, simplicity, hard work, dedication, and futuristic thinking is portrayed. Strong ethics and deep cultural and traditional manners are shown through the mannerisms of the president. Language is simple, humorous, narrated by Mrs., how great power comes with great responsibility. The young children, when they read this story they feel highly motivated and impressed by the behavior, mannerisms, and the quality of life and values exhibited by Mr. Kalam. The story also gives inspiration and light to the young children about how talking with people of value enlightens them. The youth, under the guidance of knowledgeable seniors, always blossom. This is the hidden message of this story that how respecting and following them leads to the path of success.

“The Red rice granary” is a story where the author feels nostalgic when she received a donation for flood-affected States from employees of an affluent company in Bangalore. She received a pile of bags in her office. When she opened the bags, there were piles of torn undergarments and faded shirts, cheap sarees, broken cassettes, and toys that were broken. She was surprised to see that instead of sending it to Kabaadi Wala, all the junk was sent to her for donation. This reminded her of her childhood when she was brought up in a village of Karnataka's Haveri district called Shiggaon. Her grandfather was a retired school teacher, and her grandmother, Krishtakka, never went to school. They had two granaries in their house, one in front and the other in the back of the home. Whenever anyone came seeking help and food, her grandparents asked her to give the high-quality rice from the front of the granary to them. But in the evening, when they had their dinner, they always ate the low-quality rice which was stored in the backyard of the house. Once, the author asked why we should always eat red rice when it is not so good, and give the poor people better quality rice. Grandfather replied that God is not in the temple; he is with people. With whatever you have, you have served god. This lesson was taught to her grandparents lived with her ever since. This story shows deep cultural and moral beliefs that help others to the best of one can do. The teachings of life are not learnt in schools; these teachings are learnt from day-to-day behavior. How her grandparents served others before they left a mark on the author's heart, and she does the same. As children, from a young age, copy the same behavior as their elders do. So, this story tells us that being observant, ready to learn, and especially doing the same as you have learnt is of great value. Any moral or ethical values do not form in one day. They blossom with time; we have to continuously practice them so that they can be passed on to the next generations. This story is also in simple language. When we read the story, we feel a realistic experience, and it feels like we are also a character in the story. The author has given her message in a simple way, which can be easily learnt by the children.



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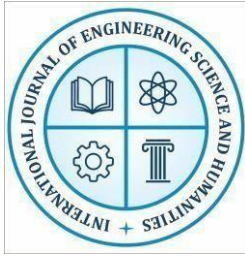
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“The real jewels” is a story set in the district of South Canara in Karnataka, where the literacy rate is very high. People are enterprising and hardworking. Once, when the author visited a small village near the coast of the Arabian Sea for a school event, it was the rainy season, and it was pouring. She had to stay in the house of the school chairman. The house was very large, full of coconuts and vegetables. The chairman’s mother lived there. The old lady was very gracious, and the author couldn’t resist talking to her. She asked the old lady, called “Kuttamma,” if she was educated or not. In reply, she shared her life story. Kuttamma was very young when her husband died. She worked as a laborer in a school teacher’s garden. Over time, her son became a successful businessman in Bombay. When she grew old, her son asked her about her wishes. He said, “Amma, I want to buy lots of jewelry for you.” Kuttamma replied that the real jewelry is education. She wanted him to open a school for needy children in South Canara. The chairman understood his mother’s feelings. He moved to the village himself and built ten schools. This story demonstrates that “if one man studies, only one person is educated; if one woman is educated, the whole family is educated.” It is a beautiful story that emphasizes the value of education. It also conveys a hidden message about women’s empowerment through education and how an educated woman can raise educated families. The story highlights the deep moral value of giving, sharing knowledge, and doing one’s best to help others. It shows how society can progress when people work together to improve the community. The language is simple, with some words from Kannada and a Sanskrit shloka about the motherland. Sudha Murthy’s storytelling style feels very natural and carries the essence of a native touch.

Conclusion

Narrative Ethics: The Power of Consequence

Murthy’s narratives positively implement Narrative Ethics by constantly illustrating ethical ideologies through action and consequence. She avoids abstract moralizing and a strict instructive method. Her stories are structured to place normal, ordinary children or relatable figures of common men, like the grandparents, real-life great personalities like Mr. Kalam, who are an inspiration to all of us, old middle-class people, and school teachers. These central characters are from real life, to whom children can easily connect. For example, the story Real Jewel shows how building schools in the native area raised literacy and enterprises, while keeping the promise of her grandfather, Sudha Murthy, who donated around ten thousand books for school libraries. Mr. Kalam, before and even after becoming he president of our country, taught students, wrote books. His humility, hard work, and knowledge became the reasons that he became the most respected and popular president to now. The use of simple, concise language is a deliberate stylistic choice that confirms the ethical seed of the story is immediately reachable, assuring the cognitive effort is spent on *moral reasoning* instead of linguistic decoding. This



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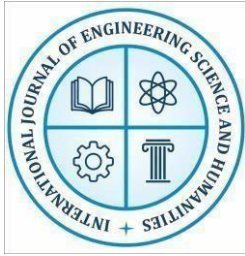
technique facilitates the internalization of values such as humility, determination, knowledge, simplicity, and social responsibility.

Cultural Pedagogy: Bridging Tradition and Modernity

An important component of Murthy's value construction is her mastery of Cultural Pedagogy. Her most remarkable contribution in this area is the revitalization of the grandparents' storytelling experience. The repeated motif of the older generation conveying wisdom, like the grandmother or grandfather character, acts as a powerful cultural signifier. It lends immediate authority and warmth to the moral lessons. In the story *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, Avva touched the feet of her granddaughter without hesitation. She considered her as her teacher, so by doing so, she displayed respect for the teacher. In our country teacher is considered a rank higher than god himself. This is our cultural beauty; the age of the teacher does not matter. This strong cultural value is transmitted to the author in such a subtle way that it came to her. Story: *The Red Rice Granary* imparts our rich cultural message to help the needy with the best you have. Additionally, the content itself—the stories of grandmother, grandfather, gods, students, common men, to president, and common village life—is a cultural map of India. By describing the storytelling of grandparents to anecdotes of real-life heroes, she teaches children to appreciate the roots of their own heritage and promotes acceptance of the nation's "rich cultural diversity.". It is vital for growing a strong sense of national identity and social togetherness in a diverse society. This pedagogical strategy ensures that ethical values are not presented as abstract rules but as deeply rooted cultural practices.

Fostering Moral Cognition and Emotional Intelligence

The synergetic effect of Murthy's Narrative Ethics and Cultural Pedagogy has a demonstrable constructive influence on Moral Cognition. By exposing children to a wide range of human experiences—problems, solutions, honesty, social responsibility, wisdom, women's empowerment—Murthy widens her emotional vocabulary and capacity for empathy and wisdom. Her stories develop the readers to be wiser, determined, disciplined, humble, knowledgeable, and education lovers. Children learn to respect, be socially responsible, and ethically and morally rich, like the characters of the stories of Sudha Murthy. This developmental impact moves deep in the mind and heart as a moral lesson. It enriches the child's mind to use ethical values in real-life situations. It fulfills the supreme aim of value-based education, which is the practical application of virtue in social life. This presentation confirms that Sudha Murthy's children's literature is far more than a collection of moral fables; it is a precisely created pedagogical project. Her work brilliantly integrates Narrative Ethics by using simple, consequence-driven plots and applies Cultural Pedagogy by rooting these ethics in the raw, pure traditions of India. The result is a strong stimulus for raising the Moral Cognition in young readers. By bridging ancient Indian storytelling with the blend of the modern value-based curriculum, Murthy not only conserves India's rich



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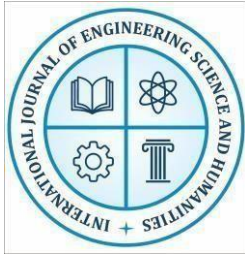
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cultural heritage but also consciously equips the modern generation with the compassion, discipline, respect, humility, critical thinking skills, and moral courage necessary for being a responsible citizen. Her enduring legacy, reinforced by her philanthropic commitment to promote reading culture, ensures her position as a transformative figure whose influence on the ethical landscape of India will be felt for generations.

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