

**Utopian Society in Sudha Murty's Select Stories: A Treatise on Regional Ethos Dr.
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Abstract

The term Utopia has the origin in Thomas More's Utopia (1516) which projects an imaginary but ideal and perfect society. In this world there is no place for evil and goodness is practiced by everyone involved. The hypocrisy, snobbishness, pompous behavior cannot exist in such a society. The actions and the words of the characters are a true enlightenment. The stories selected for the present research paper deal with one such environment. The countryside of India finds its projection in the selected stories. People here undertake noble activities, the activities which contribute to the betterment and perfection of mankind. The objective is human perfection and it is achieved through constructive actions and deeds of the characters.

Key words: Utopia, society, environment, culture, ideal, perfect, goodness, human perfection

The story "How I Taught My Grandmother to Read" happens to be one of the best stories of Sudha Murty as it brings out the whole cultural ethos of village life. The family dynasty comes before us wherein a grandmother, illiterate but conscious about literacy, loves her granddaughter affectionately and admires whatever the granddaughter does with a great zeal. It is a wonderful village where even old people derive immense pleasure by reading literature in the local weekly. This is simply because literature gives pleasure to majority of people and the grandmother and her friends are no exception for the love of such kind of pleasure. We come to know that Triveni is a distinguished writer who is popular even among illiterate masses. The so-called mass culture is illustrated through the setting of a village which contains the spirit of learning, the spirit of knowledge and the spirit of family bonding. Sudha Murty's treatment of setting becomes all the more significant in her description of local cultural ethos. Respect for elders and

respect for teachers is one more facet which is reflected in the grandmother-granddaughter relationship. They are an ideal pair where a writer learns immense things from her great grandmother. It is also worth mentioning that the illiterate grandmother has the curiosity to learn and she also learns Kannada alphabets from her granddaughter. On the very day of Dassara, the grandmother called her granddaughter at the pooja place, made her seat, gave her gift, bent down and touched her twelve-year-old teacher's feet. It is our tradition that we give respect to the god and elders by touching their feet. Here totally contrasting incident had happened. The writer gets completely flabbergasted by her grandmother's act. The grandmother too understood the turmoil in the granddaughter's mind and said,

"I am touching the feet of a teacher, not my granddaughter; a teacher who taught me so well, with so much of affection that I can read any novel confidently in such a short period.

Now I am independent. It is my duty to respect a teacher. Is it not written in our scriptures that a teacher should be respected, irrespective of gender and age?" [8:2015]

We are deeply touched and overwhelmed when the grandmother touches the feet of her granddaughter simply because she plays a very important role in her life as a teacher. Such human relationship is rare on this planet but it is found in one such village which teaches universal values of respect for each other, goodwill, love, tolerance and above all the desire for knowledge. The story becomes an unforgettable experience for the writer herself and for the readers as it sets the classical example for human race. The setting of the culture here is a manifestation of humanitarianism and rationalism. Matthew Arnold's definition of culture as sweetness and light is apt in case of this village. The fact that people wait for the bus to come and weekly Karmveera to arrive stands for the light of knowledge. The famous writer Triveni gives light of knowledge and wisdom to majority of people who read this weekly. It is also notable that people become so empathetic and compassionate with the protagonist who finds contentment in another person's happiness. The other part of Arnold's definition that is sweetness is realized in the relationship of characters in the story. The sweetness of humanitarianism and the light of rationalism are practiced by the characters in this story.

Another appealing story Bahut 'Kuch Hota Hai' by Sudha Murty focuses the fact - 'vision and action together can change the world.' In the first part of the story, the son of the writer's old friend appears to be ambitious. Having aspirations is a good thing but being overambitious cannot be

approved. The writer in her tone disapproves the action of her friend's son. One should accept the things as they come and one should not over think. The son in the story exactly does same about his dreams and ambitions. He should be prepared and ready to face the things that apparently will approach in future. One should understand the reality and with hard work he must try to enhance his /her position by shaping his/ her present into a prosperous future. The fact that the boy is not ready to work outside the software industry shows his obstinate nature. Rather, he should have made it clear that he is ready to work anywhere initially. One should begin somewhere and try to explore new avenues from thereon. However, the son in the story has neither started working nor thought of new ways or possibilities that will apparently come in his life. He desires the things directly without actually getting into it. One can desire only if one deserves and to deserve one needs to be hardworking, sincere and realistic. The boy in the story is neither hardworking nor sincere, moreover he is unrealistic. The unrealistic people do not deserve and therefore they live only in illusionary world. There is a vast difference between illusion and reality. In short, without planting a tree the boy is expecting fruits from it.

On the other hand, the boy staying on the sea shore of Orissa is aware of the fact that collection of single drops will ultimately lead to the formation of an ocean. You cannot be a millionaire overnight. For that, you need to have perseverance and tenacity which is missing in the earlier boy. Rome wasn't built in a day. Similarly, without actually getting involved into it, you cannot dream of going to The United States. The writer feels sad to know that with

tremendous hard work he gets so little income and expresses her unhappiness by saying:

“Only five or ten rupees, Javed? What will you get with that? And to earn that you wake at 5 a.m. and you don’t go to sleep till 11.00 p.m.”
[180:2006]

With enthusiasm and smiling face, the boy replies,

“Madam, is five rupees not a big sum compared to nothing? *Panch rupay se bahut kuch hota hai!* We can buy salt; we can buy chilies. If we sit idle, we cannot buy even that. Nobody gives us money in hundreds and thousands. Every drop makes an ocean.” [180:2006]

This boy Javed at the sea shore should be appreciated for his attitude. He is moving on after getting involved into it. The writer Sudha Murty who is a renowned practitioner of values such as hard work, modesty, perseverance, dedication and determination appreciates the gesture of sea boy while indirectly she disapproves the attitude of her friend’s son. Perhaps, staying on the seashore of Orissa, the boy has developed a large vision like a sea. The setting plays a very important role here in the development of the attitude and the character. Javed, is not aware where his present will lead him into the future. He is good at his studies, helps his mother and supports the family with the little income on the sea. Such boys are rare. Human values are inculcated in humble surroundings. Only by taking higher education, the stream of your vision does not get higher. The story is a wonderful example of treatment of setting in which the spirit of place decides the spirit of people.

In a story named ‘A Woman with Mind,’ the writer brings forth the feminist side of rural setting. After a long time, she goes to meet her friend Nalini, a Ph.D. holder in History and a professor at a college in Bengaluru who is an excellent wife and good teacher too. While talking with her, the writer understands that her friend has taken too much tension of her only son’s H.S.C. exam and restricted herself to the well-being of her home and son. She looked tensed and worried. The writer further learns that all the important decisions in the family are taken by her husband Satish only. Though she is an educated working woman, she has easily approved the supremacy of her husband and ultimately gets dominated. She has a belief that her husband is better than her in all respects, knows outside world very well and that is why his decisions would always be correct for her and her family. Completely awestruck by her thoughts, the writer feels bad for her as being highly educated and working woman she should have been much more confident, independent and should be able to take her own decisions.

On the contrary, next day she meets a village woman Yellama while travelling to a village by bus. Writer knows her as she used to bring fresh vegetables for the writer from her garden and did not accept any money in return. This healthy, cheerful woman of around 35 years old with her typical village like appearance and pleasant smile looked confident to the writer. Both she and her husband Rudrapaa grew and sold fresh seasonal vegetables from their small owned garden. That day, she tells writer that she is in hurry as she had to sow seeds which would be ideal for coming three months. The writer asks her about her husband who also can take proper care of the garden to which she says that, he can but

she must also share her views. She tells the writer how she used trial and error method in one corner of the garden, became unsuccessful in first few attempts and after certain experiments apparently learnt which vegetables are suitable in which seasons. This has brought a great respect for her and her ideas in her family and that is why they take opinions from her before taking final decision. She is sure that this year also she will plant carrots and cauliflower which will fetch good money for her efforts. The writer finds Yellama, a farmer woman who is uneducated and untrained, totally different from highly educated, learned and financially strong working woman Nalini.

In the first part of the story, the readers are introduced to the urban areas of Bangalore where a lady professor in spite of being highly educated background, accepts the patriarchal views of the society. It is quite surprising that there has not been broadening of the views and vision in highly progressive urban area whereas there has been an extension of mental horizon in rural area where the lady is shown to be self-dependent and has the views of her own. Sudha Murty deliberately portrays her rural characters with certain virtues and qualities that make them stand out. In fact, the urban characters in most of her stories are snobbish. The lady in the village is groomed from her childhood in a certain manner that she is completely engrossed in her duties and rather leads from the front in her family business even ahead of her husband. This is in fact, the impact of setting where people in villages are broad minded, self-reliant and ready to accept challenges. The characters in urban area are blocked in their minds and live within certain periphery. They do not cross certain boundaries. These limitations are reflections of their narrow mindedness

whereas rural characters possess immense strength and justify the things they do.

The story *Wretched of the Earth* presents a realistic picture of a village where underprivileged leprosy patients stay together harmoniously in an isolated colony in spite of the suffering they bear. An old woman named Veeramma is presented to be a character with a lot of dignity and with certain social taboo as she does not come out of the house at the arrival of the writer though she knows, the writer could be of great help. She realizes that it is not appropriate to come out naked though it is understandable that she is old, poor and leper. She is sheer representation of poor, neglected and suppressed class. The values enshrined in the story are that of self-respect, dignity, compassion, goodwill and love for humanity. The eternal value of compassion is expressed by the writer because she does help people from deprived sections of the society. The values of goodwill and love for humanity are also practiced by her knowingly and unknowingly. Other characters in the story are the victims not because they are exploited by anybody but they are the victims of the fate. They are destined to be lepers and they have accepted the reality wholeheartedly. They do not regret or complain but simply accept the present with enormous amount of courage and mental toughness. In normal circumstances, the place could be full of anarchy and chaos but the people here have accepted the life given to them by the almighty. The fact that they are cut off from upward social mobility being lepers, they would have been easily disillusioned, and however, there is something in the place that people stay in the positive frame of mind in spite of their problems.

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