

DIDACTIC ELEMENT IN SUDHA MURTHY'S *WISE AND OTHERWISE*

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ABSTRACT

As Tennyson says in one of his poems that 'Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers', the cluster of stories of Sudha Murthy though not elevated her as one of the literary titans of Indian Writings in English, her stories are fraught with age old wisdom and pragmatic in thinking and approach. Her compilation **Wise and Otherwise** appears to be a replica of human propensity in all aspects of human experience.

In fact, Knowledge can be acquired through reading books, listening to speeches and by observing the people of par excellence. Nevertheless, wisdom can be demonstrated only through behaviour and with the faculty of discrimination i.e., whatever be the knowledge that is gained through several ways should be translated into action with the spirit of natural acceptance. Otherwise it appears mere superficial. Hence, in life, it is essential for every being to attain wisdom to lead a serene and a congenial life. Even our scriptures speak eloquently about this kind of wisdom, which enables every individual to liberate him/ her from the shackles of bondage and to enjoy the freedom within to realise the sense of living on this planet. In some of the stories of Sudha Murthy's **Wise and Otherwise**, one can discover the characters with different dimensions synchronizing reality and hypocrisy. Besides, her stories reveal the inborn trait of wisdom in certain human beings how they become perfect as an embodiment of a reformed personality that one can be emulated and excelled in one's life. This paper modestly attempts to evaluate some of the stories in which wise and otherwise meddled with much dexterity in a lucid and didactic style.

Key Words: Wise and Otherwise, Vignettes, Didactic Element, Human Propensity, reality, hypocrisy

Right from the ages there has been a perennial conflict between knowledge and wisdom. It is popularly believed that knowledge becomes powerful only when it is applied in a sensible way to accomplish anything in life. Even, the stories of lore such as **Panchatantra, Jataka Tales** and other fables have imparted human values and morality to lead a congenial life. People who have read these stories imbibed noble traits to encounter the challenges in day-to-day life and proved themselves wise to look at life in a positive way.

Sudha Murthy, the writer and chairperson of Infosys foundation, though not elevated to the heights of literary icon, her works may be considered exemplary to speak volumes about her humanistic approach in dealing with the people for their upliftment in the society. Her charitable attitude, magnanimous and generous nature with benevolent heart regarded her as humanist. Her vignettes in the form of a cluster being titled as **Wise and Otherwise – A Salute to Life** would speak eloquently about her tender feelings and her grasp over human beings and their psychological vicissitudes. The stories promote wide range of complexities and admissible solutions to stand in the society as a fittest human being. It is as well, treated as synchrony of two elements relating to wisdom and otherwise to understand the ways of living in the society. Suchitra Behal in a review to The Hindu paper writes, “It is a candid account of Murthy’s encounters with different people where she stresses the moral fabric of humanity. The book brings out what Murthy herself stands for: integrity and dignity of mankind” (The Hindu, May 05, 2002)

The prime motive behind, presenting this paper is to elucidate the didactic element that has been embedded dexterously by Sudha Murthy to enlighten the readers of divergent attitudes. If we peep into some of the stories of her life experiences in her book **Wise and Otherwise – A Salute to Life**, it is obviously evident that a dichotomy of human emotions are reflected realistically to engross the readers with a sense of commitment. The story “Honesty comes from the Heart” expresses that wisdom is inborn; it springs in life when situation arises. The young boy Hanumanthappa, who receives Rs. 1800 for six months for his studies from the writer, sends her back the unspent money as token of accountability with a letter, as “My expenditure during these months was less than Rs 300 per month. Therefore, I am sending you the Rs 300 that I have not used for the last two months. Kindly accept this amount.” (Murthy, 4) His words demonstrate his inborn element of honesty. Here, Sudha Murthy points out that the wisdom attained through age and experience is different from the wisdom that is innate by birth.

Followed by this, in another anecdote titled “In Sahyadri Hills,” Sudha Murthy ventilates her view on the tendency of reciprocity while dealing with others irrespective of caste, creed religion and social status. She happens to pay a visit to hilly region, as she loves visiting different places that would lend enchantment and charm to enjoy. During her visit to tribal area, she meets an old man named Thandappa. From him, she comes to know the pathetic plight of the schoolchildren of the tribal village. In her next visit, she offers the old man what she has brought for children. Sharply, responding to her generosity, the old man appeals to her to accept his present first as a sign of reciprocity. Nevertheless, she insists him to accede her wish. Despite it, the old man insists her to accept honour his desire, as “Unless you take our gift, we cannot take the things you have brought for us.” (16) Amazing at his etiquette, Sudha Murthy submits herself submissively expressing her consent and appreciates his attitude of humility and humanism. Here, she mirrors the quality “give when you take”, to have peace and harmony in life.

In another experience, namely, “A Lesson in Life from a Beggar,” the writer highlights that experiences teach us lessons of wisdom. She has had a friend, Meena who is arrogant and pessimistic in her approach to look at everything. She confronts, for example, “If I said, “Meena, Shwetha is a very beautiful girl, isn’t she? Meena would be pessimistic’. ‘When a pony is young, he looks handsome. It is age that matters. Wait for some time. Shwetha will be uglier than any one you know’. (58) In due course, Meena has been transferred to Mumbai. After many years, Sudha Murthy meets Meena at Mumbai and finds to her dismay, an enormous change in her attitude. Out of curiosity, Sudha asks about her transformation in her attitude Meena narrates her practical experience with a beggar, who has impressed her with his positive attitude even in a

deplorable situation. Further, the writer enquires her that how much time she has taken to attain such equanimity of mind. In reply, she says two years. By this, Sudha Murthy enunciates the dawn of wisdom in Meena projecting her as a semblance of idle person.

Moving from series of experiences reflecting wisdom, Sudha Murthy's perceptions on divergent ways of living are enumerated through some of the stories relating to otherwise in **Wise and Otherwise** without deviating from her odyssey to impart didactics through her work of art. In the story, "A Bond Betrayed on Rakhi Day" the writer elucidates the agonizing plight of certain women in the society. Like G.B. Shaw in **Mrs. Warren's Profession**, the writer focuses on a painful scenario of sex workers in our society. Shaw said he wrote the play **Mrs. Warren's Profession** "to draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together." (Powell, 229) Sudha Murthy also draws a clear picture about compelling circumstances that a woman resorts to embrace this kind of profession to keep body and soul together. The writer accidentally comes across Tara, by name, who has undertaken the profession of a sex worker because of her brother's betrayal on a Rakhi day by selling her to an agent in a red light area. She listens to Tara's heart-rending experience. At one stage, Tara does not accept the writer to call her 'akka', as she has been novice to such human relationship. However, due to writer's overpowering love and affection she likes to be called 'akka' after understanding Sudha Murthy's positive thinking in reforming a woman in depression. Above all, the story reveals that once a woman is taken to any undesirable situation it is very difficult for her to survive in the society. Here, the writer attempts to present the people who are living otherwise by denying the human harmony.

In another poignant experiential story "In India, The Worst of Both Worlds" Sudha Murthy recounts how a son dishonestly expects money from his father without discharging his onus to take care of him at the old age. Once, when she is in the office, two persons meet her and on enquiry the middle-aged man introduces the old man as a destitute. He urges her to show mercy on the old man. Hence, she joins the old man in an old age home. As days roll on, one day she receives a call from the old age home that the old man is very sick and admitted to hospital. She rushes to hospital and finds the old man's condition is highly critical. On receiving a number from him, she calls a person and soon the called, arrives and looks at the old man and turns angst. Meanwhile, doctor comes out and announces that the old man has breathed his last. She feels very sad. The visitor's eyes have filled with tears and ask about the bag the old man has. She wonders and compels him about his identity. To her surprise, she learns that he is none other than the old man's son. It pinches her and causes much agony to her heart. Besides, when the bag is searched out the old man has got a bank passbook and bequeathed Rs. 1,00,000 to his son. This too embitters Sudha Murthy and she says "In India, we have the worst of both lands: children neglect aged parents and parents routinely leave their property to their children." (36) By this, Sudha Murthy throws a dig at hollowness of human bondage.

In another story, "Pay or I'll Commit Suicide" deals with the tendency of human beings, if they are not helped at the time of need. The writer after establishing Infosys foundation has received umpteen letters from the public to seek her financial help. One among them is a letter from a woman who mentions that her financial loss is not so big but requests the writer to meet the loss of Rs.5 Crore. When the writer expresses her reluctance to meet the loss, the Woman sends a threat to commit suicide by making the writer responsible for her death. Of course, the writer says her help can be extended to those who are in dire need and unable to cope with the

situation. In the above three stories under Otherwise, she pens her felt feelings pathetically and emotionally.

Frankly speaking, Sudha Murthy's enterprise to record her vignettes display a testimony for her shrewdness and vivacity in understanding the pulse of the people with human touch. At one stage her astute and yearn to penetrate into the workings of human emotions almost reaches the pinnacle of perfection in no way inferior to famous writers in presenting human passions, follies and foibles impeccably. Her zest and zeal to feel the throb of humanity is really universal and unique on her limited canvas but her limitless gigantic vision is evident to establish herself as an adept creative writer.

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