



## THE SPIRIT OF PLACE IN SELECT STORIES OF SUDHA MURTY

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### ABSTRACT

*Sudha Murty, an accomplished writer of short story dwells on various facets of human nature. It is all the more important because certain nobility or magnitude of human nature is connected with the specific setting of a particular short story. Setting in her short stories does not only produce atmosphere but imbibes the spirit among people staying at that specific locality. These people are driven, motivated by the spirit of the time and place. The local habits, customs, superstitions, beliefs, costumes, language, dialects and patterns of behaviour are essential part of the spirit of the place. Apart from these elements, there are certain values which can be observed in the livelihood of people. Murty's short stories which have the rural setting, there are frequent overtones of eternal human values. Values such as honesty, kindness, helpfulness, universal brotherhood, love for others, love for nature, love for knowledge, human morality, humanitarianism and goodwill are profoundly found in the rural characters of Murty. These assets are predominantly echoed in these rural characters.*

**Key words:** setting, rural, place, characters, spirit

### INTRODUCTION

We can say that Sudha Murty's rural world is a perfect world or Utopian world where everything is ideal in a true sense of the term. As Aristotle said, 'Our human life can be perfected,' we can experience it after reading Sudha Murty's short stories that consists of the

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rural setting. We experience the same in her short story 'In Sahyadri Hills, a Lesson in Humility'. The writer's Infosys Foundation wanted to provide help to a tribal school in a densely forested area in a distant village in Karnataka. For that reason, she visited the place twice. In the first visit she inquired the thandappa about the problems and hardships faced by the students and the people in the region. The thandappa is the chief of the village, the senior most man, considered the supreme power and being a godlike figure. By taking enough information about the difficulties of these villagers she departed and when she visited second time, she brought some umbrellas and clothes to the underprivileged children and hands it over to the thandappa. Initially, he hesitates. The writer tries to convince him but he leaves the place without saying a word and goes inside his hut. Then after some time, the thandappa comes with a bottle in his hand, which has a red colored liquid inside it. As a token of appreciation, the thandappa wanted to present her this return gift, a bottle of a very special drink which is made by extracting juice from wild red fruits. It has no added preservatives and can last for two rainy seasons. The writer feels awkward as they themselves did not have enough to eat and drink and so very politely from that point of view she declines the gift. Then the thandappa says that their ancestors have taught certain ways to them and so he takes a stand not to accept the things which she had brought for the students unless she accepts his small gift. Completely shocked by his stance, she learns a fact about these pastoral people and writes,

*"Here in the Sahyadri forest was an old man, a tribal with no schooling, practicing a highly principled philosophy of life- give when you take; do not take without giving. This was culture at its best. I smiled and gracefully accepted his gift." (page no.16) When Murty accepts the gift, the thandappa also doesn't forget to remark "There is a grace in accepting also." [16:2006]*

The story is a disclosure of the extension of the mental horizons from the village chief and the writer. It is observed from the story that the village setting and the values like honesty, nobility and grand thoughts sprout from the rustic heart. The setting has a very important role here that, the characters are governed and administrated by the principles and values of the place. The village chief practices customs and beliefs that are passed on to him by his previous generations and being the supreme authority, he is bound to pass on same value system to the next generations. We can find the thandappa to be equally kind and generous even though he holds hardly anything to gift to others. The willingness and attitude of the village chief towards life are reflected in the incident which is illustrated in the story. He is a decent, noble and principled man with great human values and only one of a kind found only in the countryside area. The fact that he belongs to village setting makes him remain unrestricted from the sophisticated urbanity that is characterized and categorised by snobbishness and pretense.

In a short story named ‘An Old Man’s Ageless Wisdom’ we also witness the same spirit of the rural setting. Once, the writer visited Kalahandi, a very small and sleepy town in Orissa. Her mission to visit this place was to provide some help to the tribal people and that too without intimidating their own identity. While travelling to Bhavani Pattanam, district headquarter of Kalahandi, she traveled through a tribal belt of the region. After observing them throughout the journey, thousands of questions gathered in her mind regarding their life style, their civilization etc. She knew very little about them such as, they are direct in their ways, there is no rigidity in them for their rituals, they live in groups, and also, they barely believe on individual property concept, because it is extremely difficult to find it among them. So, she was keen to find out the actualities about them. She was accompanied by an interpreter and a translator who knew the local language. After travelling by car and a long walk they reached the village where she meets an old man of nearly one hundred and four years old. She started a conversation with him and understood that he was a pure soul who is not at all affected by urban civilization. He was not aware of many fundamental facts about country, independence, government, democracy, currency and so on. For this old man his country is still Kalahandi which is reigned by Company Sarcar. She was unable to convince him that goriwali rani no longer rules India or we are an independent nation. She also tried to tell him the importance of money or currency such as with the help of this paper he can buy many things, a piece of land also. On the contrary when she tried to convince him, he looked sympathetically at her and said,

*“For this paper, people fight, go away from our ancestral land, leave our forest and go to cities? Have we not led a complete life without that piece of paper? Our ancestors did. We are children of God, settled here happily without this paper. This is God’s Land. Nobody owns this land. No river is created by us. No mountain is made by us. The wind does not listen to us. The rain does not ask our permission. These are gifts of God. How we can “sell” or “buy” land, I do not understand. When nothing is yours, then how can you make such transactions? This little paper of yours can turn our lives upside down.” [30:2016]*

After hearing something that she hadn’t expected at all from an uncivilized, tribal man from the forest of Kalahandi the writer remained unanswered. Rather she asks a question to herself and to the readers that, who is more civilized? This wise, sensible old man or we people whose fingers are on the pulse of the internet? This story of Sudha Murty implies much broader perspective. The old man with the life experience of one hundred and four years and with the larger spectrum of his virtuosity is noted when he says ‘the currency is nothing but a mere paper.’ Ultimately, the old man has understood that the nature is the supreme power and even a wealthy man with a large amount of money cannot challenge it. Rivers, valleys, hills, trees etc. cannot be affected by the artificiality of money and materialism. Subsequently,



these are manmade things that are grown out of longing and sheer greed. We are reminded of Sir Phillip Sidney's statement, "Nature gives forth golden apples, materialism gives forth brazen." In fact, this high regard and respect for nature is conquered after living a life of more than hundred years in a village setting. In contemporary scenario, a man in his 30's or 40's may chase money and fame but a man who has lived enough life can understand the shades of human existence. After all, it is the ultimate truth that the human existence is temporary whereas the existence of nature in this universe is perpetual. Man will take birth and die and some other day, some other man will take birth and subsequently die but nature has been prevailing and will continue to exist forever. This phenomenon is understood by a rustic man from a rural area from Orissa. If the man was from the capital Bhubaneshwar or any other city, perhaps he would have thought of materialistic things. So, the rustic setting plays a significant role here. Only a man from rural area can understand the importance of nature and preach a profound truth and eternal philosophy about life.

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