

# Values in Conflict in Sudha Murthy's the Mother i Never Knew

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## Abstract

The foremost matter of universal concern and anxiety in our times is the alarming deterioration of human values across the globe. The present is an era of rapid changes. They have vitally affected human thought, lifestyle and institutions. Science and technology, computers and democracy as a global entitlement of people have revolutionized human life. But at the same time they have rendered dysfunctional the traditional mainstays of social control in the twentieth century. These are only the tools which have indeed improved the quality of material life of humankind but their use, misuse or abuse depend entirely on the quality of human agency. The human agency primarily includes a man of letters. This paper is prompted with the curiosity to study the role of a technocrat turned India's best seller, Sudha Murthy's writing in this perspective. Milton has envisaged that a good book to be the precious life blood of master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. W. H. Auden has upheld creative writing to properly focus on human life. It deals with human nature or discusses human life, its problems, its joys and sorrows. These statements of Milton and W. H. Auden triggered the urge to study Sudha Murthy's novel, '*The Mother I Never Knew*'. The researchers were curious to consider Sudha Murthy's writing, taking into consideration the role of creative writers in depicting the social reality and hence shaping the lives of readers. Although not clearly didactic, Sudha Murthy's writings are focused at boosting the morale of common people amidst the whirlwind of uprooting changes in life around. The clear depiction of social reality is perused with a purpose to resolve the conflict and to guide the reader onto the rugged path of reality.

**Keywords:** Social reality, values, conflict, Sudha Murthy.

## Introduction

Sudha Murthy's vision and value system have been strongly founded in Hindu culture and spiritualism. Her Brahmin descent and family environment as well as the traditions have gone a long way in the making up of her mind set. Her bringing up in a middle class educated family of the twentieth century has left a lasting impression on her psyche. Sudha Murthy seems to have retained within the deepest layers of her heart a true love for India and Indian values. In her novels she evokes the Indian ethos and interprets them in terms of its values. Both through her life and literature, she is fulfilling the mission of a cultural interpreter to her countrymen and cultural ambassador of India to the west.

Sudha Murthy's compositions may be traced back to three distinct inspirations. Her storytelling style is heavily influenced by the epics, puranas, vedas, and upanishadas of ancient India. The financial and cultural aspects of Indian society are also reflected in her work. Thirdly, her volunteer work with the

Infosys Foundation has affected her perspective toward her writing. When it comes to telling stories from our old literature, there is an air of absolute simplicity. A clear beginning, middle, and end could be found in each of these tales. The author describes in detail the majority of the events and incidents. These tales do not have any convoluted or confusing stories. While considering Sudha Murthy as a popular story-teller, we notice that they contain messages for the readers to follow in their daily life. The stories are simple and not much is left to the imagination of readers.

Sudha Murthy's novels equally make reading interesting and engaging on account of her penchant for story -telling. In the first few chapters, she presents her primary characters and that never veer from their fundamental characteristics. Throughout the narrative, she focuses mostly on events involving these characters. The rest of the cast pops in or out of the narrative without making much of an impact. Although, her stories drew readers who were not interested in delving into the psychology and neurophysiology of the protagonists. The readers of her novels are satisfied by her psychological insight into the mind space of the protagonist of the novels. For Sudha Murthy, old virtues like love, devotion, compassion, and sacrifice are still important. Of course, she has incorporated all of these into her novels as well. In her stories the war between good and evil was fought to the end, and good prevailed. In her writings, evildoers were forced to confess and atone for their sins. Mischief-makers were forced to own their mistakes and trouble-shooters were shamed into silence. Sudha Murthy as a writer of novels as well distinguishes herself for her deep empathy for the disadvantaged and destitute, including women and the elderly. It is her belief that everyone is capable of greatness that which she conveys through her writing.

The fact that Sudha Murthy is the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, which focuses on improving education and health care in rural regions, is well-known. She acknowledges the influence of J. R. D. Tata's counsel, '*Never to start with diffidence*'. To always begin with a positive attitude. One should give back to society when one is prosperous enough. One has so much to give back to society and one must be determined to do so. She has traveled widely abroad as well as throughout India. Her professional standing as the head of the Infosys Foundation, has taken her through the nook and corner of the Indian subcontinent.

This is what has provided her with first-hand knowledge of Indian society, culture, and economy. All of her life experiences have been included into the writing. Being married to Nararyan Murthy, a titan in the Indian information technology (IT) business, she has observed the transformation of Indian society from close quarters. Over the course of her career, she has observed the varying stages of development of the workers around her against the backdrop of globalization.

In her writing, she frequently discusses the changing face of India's neo-millionaires and the detrimental effect on family life. Because of this, she seems to have a unique perspective on both pre and post-globalization India. Her voluminous writings represent all of this. Despite her profession as an industrialist, her writing is a product of her travels among rural India's farmers, peasants, villages, children, youth and her empathetic attitude towards them.

In the creative vision of Sudha Murthy, social and human values acquire a dominant position. As every society faces change which affects middle class life most, Sudha Murthy's novels and her characters are the perfect mirror for the change of social values in society. Her protagonists who accept changes rationally are successful in the long run. Whereas those who fall prey to these changes haphazardly and without discrimination, lose the track of soul and meaningful living. This shows Murthy as a critical traditionalist and rational moralist. She achieves this aim through her candid remarks mingled with sadness.

Sudha Murthy reflects the society around her. Murthy too admits this in an interview that the writer is a spokesman of the community in which he lives and of himself and to him absolute freedom of spirit matters most. A well known critic R. Govind also supports the view. He writes, “Her depiction art adheres to the narrative tradition in India, which is simple and direct. This means that Sudha Murthy’s books and short tales are aimed at Indian readers today. Due to her love of Indian culture, she is an outstanding storyteller, not because she mimics westerners. This shows that India has changed but the Indians have not.” Critiquing the themes of Sudha Murthy, S. Parvathi observes that, “Using both traditional Indian values and contemporary technology, Sudha Murthy connects people to both Indian culture and the modern world. The majority of young characters are engaging their growth professionally and personally. The old characters are drawn to wealth but in other ways are unable to improve themselves. The modern world of technology results in conflict between the old and new, ancient practices, customs and conventions with the modern ways of living.”

The author Sudha Murthy's work, *The Mother I Never Knew* contains two novellas. Both have the same theme, young men’s emotional bond with their elderly parents. Venkatesh and Mukesh are the young men, feeling uprooted due to the reality of their life. Bhagirathi and Nirmala are old women who are victims of the traditional practices of the twentieth century India. The conflict of values is the undercurrent of the narrative.

The human values of love, pity, compassion and commitment are constantly pitted against the extreme of greed. The first novella titled Venkatesh, which is also the name of the protagonist, signifies the embodiment of human values. He holds on to the humanitarian attitude in the narrative. The plot revolves around the fact that these human values are in constant conflict with the inhuman, selfish tendencies of the characters around. The novel, 'The Mother I Never Knew' describes life in a small village, Shishunal, and in the city of Bangalore. A banker from an upper-middle class family named Venkatesh has been transferred to Hubli. When Venkatesh encountered a man named Shankar who was his look alike, he became curious. Shankar, a headmaster from a low-income family, has a difficult existence. Venkatesh arrived at the village of Shishunala due to his curiosity about how similar they were. There, he learns that before marrying his mother, his father had discarded his wife and a child. The poor woman Bhagavva lived her entire life believing her husband to be dead.

She has put up a lot of struggle and has overcome numerous obstacles to raise her son Shanker. She had experienced real injustice despite the fact that it seemed unbelievable at the time. Venkatesh was unable to fathom the suffering she was through. Venkatesh, the protagonist of the novel, is a tragic character. Despite having honorable parents, his voice had been suppressed first by his grandmother and then by his own wife. His selfish and overbearing grandmother Champakka kept an eye on and controlled his parents, Setu Madhav Rao and Indiramma. Because he was given no other choice, he was forced to marry Shanta. He wasn't asked for his opinion and couldn't voluntarily express his emotions. Champakka was awed by the wealth and social standing of Suryanarayana Rao and his wife Savitamma. So she had decided to get Venkatesh married to their daughter.

Venkatesh’s in-laws made the problems worse. They forced him to borrow money and make purchases in order to display their excessive wealth. He started to distance himself from family matters and was happy to be sent to Hubli. In Indian society, the individual is governed by social concepts. A sensitive person like Venkatesh was burdened with the question, "What would people say?" all the time. Later in life, Shanta and Ravi exploited this mindset to their advantage. Because he offered assistance to everybody who needed it, Venkatesh earned the respect and admiration of his bank colleagues. Geeta, a

bank employee, had a child that she was required to feed every three hours. After lunch, Venkatesh gave her permission to leave the bank while he personally attended to her counter.

A cashier by the name of Mahesh once discovered extra money totaling rupees one thousand that he intended to spend with his friends on entertainment. For his wife's C section, Venkatesh provided the money to the bank watchman. With the money, everyone wanted to celebrate and throw a party, but Venkatesh objected, saying, "*No, that's not proper. Keep that aside, please. If the owner comes seeking it, we'll give it back. The cash was delivered to the office watchman Karim for his wife's C-section when no one showed up to claim it.*" (p 24). This showed his consistent sympathies for the weaker members of society. It made up for his separation from his own people. The discovery that he had a look alike in the neighborhood changed the course of his life. His mental picture of the past shifted. He could not be motionless and at ease because of his human nature. His stepmother and stepbrother were revealed to him. He decided to help her with fifty lakh rupees in an effort to make up for his father's mistake. Venkatesh tried to discuss his intention of helping Bhagirathi and Shankar with his wife and son. He agreed with his wife and son that they were not at fault. But when he inherited his father's assets, he was deemed to also inherit his share of mistakes. His father had failed to fulfill his obligations to them. Even though the past could not be changed, with their present state of wealth, they could make the lives of the mother and son a little easier. He also agreed to the fact that there was no legal proof of their marriage. Only a newspaper clipping about the accident and a photograph of his father fondly called as Appa was with Bhagirathi. He further continued saying that there was a divine court of justice above them. Venkatesh could reach out to his step mother due to resemblance between him and Shankar. He was aware that Madhav Rao and Indiramma were his parents. Bhagirathi was his step mother and Shankar was his step brother. He was also aware that his stepmother was the mother of his look alike.

Despite the fact that he was in no way to blame for Bhagavva's situation, he was trying to make up for the evil his father had committed decades earlier. Anyone else would not have bothered to take on the duty if they were in his position. Unexpectedly for him, Bhagavva's mother's heart did not permit her to make a hue about Venkatesh or his father. She was quiet and calm as usual when they met. She wasn't argumentative or violent when talking about her past. She was sensitive to Venkatesh's unpleasant situation and quietly related her own marriage and widowhood. Because of this, it was incredibly challenging to comprehend, consider, and interpret mother in Indian contexts.

Shanta played a significant role in managing the lives of her husband, son and daughter. She had such a deep love for herself that she never gave her husband or daughter a second consideration. She mistreated her in-laws and despised her husband's middle-class status. Right from her early years, her parents lavished her with attention. She was characterized as having "*grown up like a princess with her parents meeting all her wishes*" as is described by the author.

As her education advanced, the family moved to bigger cities and towns until they eventually settled in Bangalore, where Shanta earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Maharani's College. Shanta's family's wealth rendered her blind. Because she was her parents' only child, she was a legal heir to their property. Fortunately for her, three years after her marriage, her mother-in-law, father-in-law, and grandmother-in-law all passed away. She now had complete power over all the members in her family. As a result, she became more arrogant. She quickly gained recognition and fame, which gave her an autocratic personality. Shanta envied both her own daughter and her future daughter-in-law. She feared Pinki would separate her from her son, Ravi, just as she had done to her husband's mother. She thought that every penny that she had worked so hard to acquire would one day belong to her daughter-in-law,

Pinki. While Ravi, her adorable son, would also be that girl's property. Shanta had thought of speaking about the thoughts that worried her to Venkatesh. However she doubted whether he could understand anything of it.

Gauri and Venkatesh talked about his transfer from Bangalore to Hubli. Gauri had already made all the necessary preparations for his stay at the home of her friend's father. The intimacy between the father and daughter irritated Shanta. She had always expected requests for assistance. She instructed her spouse to get in touch with influential people for his transfer. She was unable to put up with her husband and kids' independence. She was only kind to people who sought her advice and paid attention to her. Ravi, her son, was a mumma's boy. He used to call her from the US, but he didn't often speak to Gauri or Venkatesh because she had made him her slave. Gauri was unique. Against Shanta's wishes, she pursued an MBBS and a specialization in gynecology. Shanta urged her to pursue an MBA and make thousands of dollars quickly. Thus, it becomes apparent that she did not get along well with anyone who did not conform to her wishes. Shanta showed her husband no respect and showed no emotion. Venkatesh was wise enough to take care of his own affairs without raising any issues with her actions or tendencies towards egotism.

The conflict of values is persistently visible throughout the first novella. Venkatesh's goodness is seen as being impractical by his wife Shanta. He was overcome with guilt at his father's act of negligence. He earnestly felt that Bhagirathi and Shankar were going through hard times due to his father's callousness. The selfish attitude of his wife, Shanta stands in contrast to Venkatesh's philanthropist bent of mind.

As part of her book 'The Mother I Never Knew,' author Sudha Murthy has included two novellas. The other tale concerns Mukesh, an adopted boy who was surprised to learn that he was actually an illegitimate son of an abandoned biological mother. It depicts Mukesh's journey from one mother to another. He was adopted by Rupinder, then raised by Sumati after being born to an illiterate teen mother named Nirmala Kumari.

A hard-working Punjabi girl named Rupinder, who was a childless mother, met Nirmala, made friends with her, and learned the secret of pregnancy, according to the story. The appearance of Rupinder is that of a savior who is more potent than the destroyer. She came from the border of Punjab and Haryana, and she was married to Surinder, a man who had dropped out of school and had a quick temper. Rupinder requested Nirmala take care of her child because she had lost her own child. In Rupinder, the maternal love is given particular attention due to the loss of a child. Her brother and parents worked as laborers at Zamindar's home. After giving birth to a healthy boy, Nirmala handed Rupinder a golden necklace and instructed her to later give the chain to her child. Before giving the newborn child to Dulari, Nirmala caressed his feet and said, "Beta, please forgive me."

Rupinder brought the infant to her in-laws' home in Jalna, Maharashtra. The arrival of an orphan with a dark patch upset both her spouse's family and her husband. Rupinder had to face the conflict with her spouse and her in laws. Her spouse, Surinder convinced her to leave the child to a shelter or gurudwara. Surinder and his family represent the selfish nature of people in society who are little moved by pity at the condition of the needy. Only Rupinder and not her family had the love and desire to raise a child. She was hurt by the disregard shown by her family. Since Mukesh alias Munna had a dark spot on his right foot, his grandmother thought it was a terrible omen. He was shunned, abandoned, and deprived of love and familial ties by Surinder's family, which forced him to reside at Sumati's home. Munna was not to move with Rupinder's family when they relocated to Amritsar. It was believed that Munna would



bring them bad fortune. Sumati had intended to take a picture of Neeru and Munna before they left as a sign of her affection. Sumati accepted Rupinder's suggestion that she adopt Munna. Sumati here represents the good people in society, though few in number are an asset to the needy and destitute. Sumati with the consent of her husband, Krishna Rao took up the responsibility of bringing up Mukesh like her own child along with their daughter, Neeru. Sumati adored and cared for him as if he were her own son. In every stage of his life, she gave him support and encouragement. Both Sumati and Krishna Rao, chose not to disclose his adoption because then, society and his family would treat him differently. He had the chance to lose his cynicism and gain self-confidence, innocence, and vulnerability. She told her in-laws she was expecting and she subsequently gave birth to a boy. Munna had brought their family good fortune and they gradually grew wealthy. With each passing year, Sumati's stitching business developed rapidly. The family stayed in Bangalore and developed the business by opening a new factory there. Sumati always took good care of the gold chain that Rupinder had given her son as they said their goodbyes.

Sumati and Krishna Rao's goodness has seen Mukesh grow into a confident, loving young man. However after the sudden demise of Krishna Rao, Mukesh is faced with a dilemma. After his father's death, he learns of the reality of his adoption. Finally, after much consideration, he sets out to discover the identity of his biological mother. As he digs deeper into the past, he becomes increasingly unsure about how he should place his allegiances. He oscillates between his biological mother and the one who brought him up. The conflict is resolved through Mukesh's acceptance of the goodness of his adoptive parents.

## Discussion

The institution of family has seen drastic changes in the relationships, from the twentieth to twenty first century with the advent of globalization. Patriarchy, respect for elders, tolerance is the values that have been upheld in Indian society since generations. But with ever changing scenario of modern life, this rich tapestry of traditional social values is observed to be waning. Globalisation has brought forth transformations that have challenged these long standing values. Sudha Murthy emphasizes how the Indian families' shifting value systems are causing tension in their ties to one another. She discusses the way politics, greed, kinship and how utilitarianism has replaced them all. The Indian value system is currently in a foggy state. We alternate between our centuries-old customs and the Western value system we learned from the British. With the reforms due to adoption of the policy of liberalization and India's full membership in the global village over the past thirty years, the lifestyle and value system of its citizens has undergone a significant change. Since its beginning, the generational gap has become wider. Only those in the middle-aged generation of our society who embrace change and make an effort to fit in with the encroaching western lifestyle live happily; those who continue to uphold their old traditions and values are seen as social outcasts, especially by the youth, and suffer the mental torment of being unable to walk hand in hand with their children or grandchildren or of being an outsider in today's society.

The disparity within families is what weakens and eventually kills family relationships over time. Girija's love for her father Venkatesh and his devotion to his late father are the noble human values that are very important to bind members of a family. These values are in conflict with the money minded approach of Ravi and Shanta. The second novella, too is resplendent with the conflict between human

values and egoism, selfishness depicted by Rupinder's spouse and in laws, Mr. Choudhary and Satish in the narrative.

### Conclusion

Sudha Murthy is never acknowledged as a writer with a didactic purpose. Readers have enjoyed and praised her novels. But she is never realized as a novelist with a moral purpose. It has been an endeavor to show how Sudha Murthy's fictional world or creative vision, consciously or unconsciously maintains or even presents the values. After having a detailed analysis and a sincere study it has been successfully displayed that her novels definitely contain a greater quantum of her concern for religious, social, family and human values. Sudha Murthy is neither a philosopher nor a teacher. She does not teach morality openly. But in spite of all these things, describing sorrows and joys of the experiences related to our beliefs, our trusts, our superstitions, or goals, it appears that Sudha Murthy persuades man to walk on to the path of virtue in an indirect fashion. Thus conflict of values is candidly depicted and its resolution is also optimistically suggested by Sudha Murthy.

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