



# The Achievers Journal

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## **Burgeoning Ethicality: A Study of Sudha Murty's *Grandma's Bag of Stories***

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### **Abstract**

*Children's literature is a maverick in itself. If a person is prepossessed by this fine literature; she/he delves into the alluring and delightful aura and tries to unfold the visions that encompass it. Apart from the literary understanding, the contribution towards children's literature by Sudha Murty helps develop virtues that pave the way for a contended life. This paper presents an insight to understand **Sudha Murty's *Grandma's Bag of Stories*** and will try to create perspicacity and enable the blooming minds to be more amenable and susceptible towards learning that psychic edifice is determined by values such as perseverance, self-control, respect, honesty, generosity, politeness, kindness, integrity etc. *Burgeoning Ethicality* aids the person to make right choices and decisions in life.*

**Keywords:** children's literature, Sudha Murty, values, ethics, young minds

### **Introduction**

*Grandma's Bag of Stories* can be referred to a treasure bag that contains tales, unending tales narrated to seven grand children by their grandmother. The book opens up with a beginning of vacations. It is at this time when children visit their grandparents and the fascination with which each child wants to get connected to their roots; be it the culture of their grandparents' village to the flowers growing in the garden, the aura of staying with grandmother and listening to her amusing, enlightening and fascinating tales is the speciality of this book. Written with so much love and connectivity, the book through its collection of 20 short stories unravels a new insight to various behavioural patterns. The book for sure influences the juveniles and gives them a direction to manage the complexities of the brain and develop in them a sense of belongingness by getting connected to their roots socially and culturally.

The first short story '*Doctor, Doctor*' begins by reflecting the grave situations arising from the scorching summer heat in a village. Ravi, the protagonist of the story, owns a small



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grocery shop. He has placed a bench just outside the shop so that the village men can chit chat in the evening. Amid the afternoon heat, an old man approaches Ravi's shop. He is unable to bear the thirst and asks for water. There is only a pot of water left with Ravi and he has to manage the whole day with the same pot. The old man drinks till the last drop present in the pot and shows his gratitude towards Ravi and blesses him and then leaves. Ravi watches him till the old man fades in the light. After sometime Ravi experiences a severe headache and gasps. He picks up the water pot to drink a drop of water, but, experiences sweet refreshing water pouring down from the pot. He finds the water miraculous as it wipes out his headache too. Slowly, the people of the village and even neighbouring village come to know about the healing qualities of the magical water, which never finishes in the pot. Ravi helps the needy and doesn't charge anything from them. If someone gives something in return, Ravi takes it as a blessing. One day, the king's men call Ravi and try to influence him by treating the queen first and earn gold coins. Selfish desires overpower Ravi's selfless temperament. As soon as he reaches the palace, not even a single drop of water comes out from the pot. The king gets annoyed and throws Ravi out of the palace. Ravi is filled with remorse. He realizes his mistake and tries to mend it by saving more money and bringing the service of a real doctor in the village. The coming year by year, he longs to visit the old man again to be blessed again by him.

“It can be seen as an individual's urge to experience the eight basic emotions in life. The four directions of squares such as the front, back, left and the right as well as the diagonal square columns represents the collection of eight primary emotions.” (Digvijay, Through the Looking Glass: An Approach to the Perfection of Emotional Invocation)

***Kavery and the Thief*** shows how the intelligence of a poor farmer woman helps herself to improve her living conditions with strong will and determination. Kavery through her charismatic wit fools a thief thrice and brings desirable improvement in her life. The simple story penned by Sudha Murty begins when Ajji, the grandmother throws light on the hardships faced by farmers. The hardcore reality of working continuously in the fields and waiting for harvest to improve the living conditions, leave all the grandchildren with crestfallen faces. To rejuvenate their spirits, Ajji narrates them the story which brightens the mood of children and they all make assumptions about the thief towards the conclusion of the story.

***Who Was the Happiest of Them All?*** works on the principle that all of us have someone in our life to whom we should listen. Based on what they teach us, we should change our ways when needed. The grand kid Meenu demanded a story from her grandmother Ajji, about a king who was generous and not unkind or rude to his people. Then Ajji had all the smiles



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and she took out another story from her all accomplished mind. Ajji narrated a story about a king called Amrit and his intelligent minister Amrit. The King used to feel elated that all the people in his kingdom were happy and rich. He took pride in saying that his people were the most contended of all in the entire world. One fine day, he asked Chandan to call all the people related with various professions and even the home makers to have a conversation with the king. The next day every person who came to visit the King expressed gratitude towards the King. Chandan sensed something. He whispered in the King's ear to ask those people to visit his personal lush green gardens filled with mouth watering, juicy and honey-sweetened fruits. The people came in the morning. They were given sacks to pluck whichever fruits they liked and they filled it. Then, they entered a garden filled with fruits made of precious jewels. The moment people saw the lawn; they emptied their sacks of fruits and filled them again with precious jewel coated fruits. Suddenly a stream of water came running down from rocks. There was no boat that could help the people come out rather than swimming themselves. For that, they had to empty the sacks. A young man emptied the sack and started to swim. Others followed him. When they came out, they were all sad as all the precious jewels which promised bright future prospects were left behind. Looking at their mournful expressions, the King asked them about their previously stated definition of 'happiness'. All of them were ashamed. Chandan noticed a young man showing no regrets. He was the one who had first emptied the contents placed in his bag. The young man expressed his gratitude towards the King for giving him an opportunity to witness the beauty of his gardens. He was thankful for tasting the fruits and clarified that he had collected a few real fruits from the garden and not the precious fruits for his daughter. He revealed that it was his inner self that was happy. To this, Chandan praised the truthfulness and contentment of the young man. Meenu became happy and all the kids promised Ajji to listen to the values imparted by others.

***The Enchanted Scorpions*** is a story of Siddharth, a young and good-natured merchant. He owned Uday's house whose fortunes had turned against him. When Siddharth started repairing the house, he found a sealed box buried underground. As he opened the box, to his utter surprise, the box was filled with scorpions. An old man told Siddharth that a spell had been cast on the box. Only the members of Uday's family could see the real treasure in the box. Siddharth opened a new business. It flourished day by day. He was so generous that he took out four scorpions from the box and placed them in the four corners of the shop. People commented, but, he knew that the real owners would recognize the real treasure. Years passed by. One day a young boy visited Siddharth. He talked about his financial helplessness and requested Siddharth to provide him aid for his studies. Siddharth revealed that the villagers had exaggerated about his riches. The young boy lost his cool and told Siddharth that it was unbelievable that the person who had tied gold coins in the four



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corners on his shop had a small heart. Siddharth realized his wait was over. He ran after the young boy and enquired if he had any relation with Uday. The boy told him that he was named Uday after his grandfather's name. His grandfather had expired of grief of losing his ancestral property. Without wasting a minute, Siddharth went back to his home and got the treasure box and handed it to Uday. He even asked the boy to open and let him know what was inside the box. The little boy was surprised to see so many varieties of jewels and promised Siddharth to use them wisely. Uday took it and remembered the kind gesture of Siddharth throughout his life. The happiness in giving is the main idea of the story.

'The Horse Trap' and 'A Treasure for Ramu' are two stories from the book that present two view points. While the former talks that more and more thinking about future can deviate us from reality, the latter one explains that having a foresight is important otherwise a person can land in trouble. *The Horse Trap* shows that George Smith was a thinker and scholar who was always lost in thinking about future and advising the prime minister. One day while travelling in a horse coach, the smell of horse dung wafted his nose, that, he imagined the dire consequences of increase in number of horses along with the problem of disposing the horse dung. So, he told Adam, the prime minister's secretary to arrange for an emergency meeting. Adam was an intelligent man. He tried to understand the reason of George's discomfort. Upon hearing George, Adam suggested that in future many new modes of transport will be invented. The other story *A Treasure for Ramu* has portrayed a couple Ramu and Rani. They were laborious farmers who were kind and earned enough to feed their children. It so happened that one day Rani was planting a tree in the garden, there was a loud clang deep inside the earth. When she dug deep inside, she took out a metal box. It was filled with gold and silver jewels. Rani shared her happiness with her husband. Both of them were too excited. Suddenly there was a change in their lifestyle. They had become a fine example of turning from rags to riches. They even moved to a city and started living a luxurious life. Without thinking about future, they spent the entire treasure and even came under debt. Ramu discussed the gravity of the issue with Rani. Through introspection they realized, the seeds of damnation had already been sowed by them. They had understood that they had made their Goddess Lakshmi leave their home. Rani confessed that lethargy had overpowered her both mentally and physically. She no longer fitted into her clothes as she had gained weight. Even when she worked in the fields, she had a sound sleep. But now she spent sleepless nights planning about her wardrobe. The couple decided to go back to their village and live the same life filled with happiness despite less of money. Both stories reflect the importance of human needs.

*The Donkey and the Stick* highlights the fact that we should not always go by what we read in the books; we should try to ponder over our life experiences and read between lines. The



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grandmother through the narration of these lines headed towards telling the tale, 'The Donkey and the Stick'. The story supports a strong message. We should not blindly follow rituals and words uttered by others without comprehending the meanings ourselves. When a group of school going students observes a big rock lying on the side of the road; they try to gauge the meaning of the rough drawings on the rock. There is a picture of a stick and a donkey drawn on it. The villagers try to guess the meaning and visit the ashram of a wise sage. But the sage has gone to another village. His ashram is taken care by one of his disciples who is foolish, but, pretends to be a learned fellow. The villagers present the case. He simply looks at the rock and says that the image is of a magic stick. The person who is holding the stick is the hero of the place and died while protecting the village. If people don't make offerings, then they will be turned into a donkey. All the people were carried away by the disciple's explanation and declared him the priest and assigned him the task of safeguarding the rock. People made offerings and the disciple became fat and rich. When the sage returned, he was awe-struck. Looking at the deplorable state of the ashram, he started searching for his disciple. Shocked to see him mumbling false prayers and fooling the people surrounding him, the sage gave the explanation of the images drawn on the rocks. The revelation to move the rock with an iron rod and take out the treasure lying underneath came as a surprise to people. The sage further explained if we did not take out the treasure, we are donkeys. So the people understood the fact and the money was utilized to repair the road. The disciple went back to the ashram and was punished for befooling the villagers by cleaning the ashram.

*What's in for Me?* talks that the joy of helping someone itself is a reward. If we come forward to help others, it should not be supported with materialistic returns. This short story is about a cunning rat Mushika that comes forward to help others on a condition to get something in return. Mushika helps a potter, milkman and a groom and in return demands a pumpkin, cow and a bride. The bride turns out to be smart and teaches the little rat a lesson for a lifetime.

*The Princess' New Clothes* is a short story which just by its unfolding of events conveys learning of a lifetime. Ajji took all the grandchildren for shopping. All the children except Krishna took a long time to decide and rejected many dresses. Finally after rejecting a few more, she bought one. On their way back, Ajji appreciated her for buying at least something for her own self and warned her that its good she managed one otherwise she would have turned out to be like princess Beena. Soon the kids grew curious to listen to the story. There was a king and queen of a place named, Ullas. They were contended in every aspect. Their main reason of sadness was that they had no child. So they went deep inside the forest and prayed to the Goddess. She blessed them with a baby girl, but warned them that she would



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have a flaw of wearing new clothes every day. The entire kingdom was filled with happiness with the arrival of the beautiful princess. She grew into a kind and beautiful girl. Only one flaw overpowered all her beauty and goodness. She demanded a new dress for every day and refused to repeat it. In the beginning everything seemed to be fine. Slowly, the king and queen started to lose all the savings. They again requested the Goddess and she blessed Beena with a new dress for every day. The Goddess only asked Beena not to wear any other clothes apart from the ones provided by the Goddess. During a celebration in the village, some people praised a girl wearing a simple sari. Beena was filled with jealousy. She requested the girl to exchange the dress and the girl readily agreed. No sooner Beena wore the dress, her complete ambience transformed into an isolated forest. Beena knew she had committed a sin. She pleaded the Goddess to turn her into a plant and she turned into an onion. Ajji told the children that all the layers of the onion are the various dresses that Beena wore and when mothers peel the onion the shedding of tears symbolize the tears shed by the people in Beena's kingdom for their beautiful and kind- hearted princess.

*The Story of Paan* comes from Ajji's intellect when the whole family visits a family for dinner. After the completion of dinner, Kaka brings a big box of paan. The children love the way Kaka prepares the paan by appropriately mixing the ingredients. Everyone enjoys the flavor and makes a beeline for the mirror to check if their tongue is red or not. Ajji tells that the uniqueness in the red colour is because of the perfect proportion of each ingredient and opens up a story related to it. She narrates the story of two brothers Bhanu and Veer. Both were filled with love and care for each other. Things were moving at their own pace. One day, a message came from the King's side that the enemy had attacked the territory and he wanted the youth to come in the forefront. Veer decided to join the army. His elder brother and sister-in-law cried and pleaded, telling him to remain at home. But Veer insisted and left. Days passed by. One day Bhanu heard few people talking about Veer's whereabouts. Some said that Veer had been wounded badly; few mentioned that he was captured by the enemies while few talked about his death. Bhanu was unable to bear the agony and he and his wife went for searching for Veer. They crossed plains, mountains, valleys, forests and many villages. Veer's sister-in-law died of exhaustion and his elder brother even died on the spot. Their bodies turned into two wonderful plants. Again after few years Veer returned home. When he heard about the sad story of his family members, he started searching for them. When he reached the place where his brother and sister-in-law died; a villager told him the story of the two wonderful plants and the story of two people searching for their brother who died and turned into plants. Veer was awe-struck and changed into a statue. Since then the nuts, leaves and lime from the statue were used in appropriate proportions for the preparation of paan. The story talks about love, unity and loyalty.





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‘Payasam for a Bear’ and ‘Fire on the Beard’ are set on the virtue of fulfillment of promise and being punctual. Both these stories show human temperaments influencing the life of the characters as mentioned in the stories. In *Payasam for a Bear*, Mohan and Basanti try to make a fool of a bear who helps them collect wood for cooking. The bear understands that it has been tricked and destroys their possessions as it has been cheated by the over smart couple. Though they lament afterwards, but, the damage was done and they thought to themselves that had they not been that greedy; they would have been saved from the bear’s atrocities. In ‘*Fire on the Beard*’, Brij is a member of The Idler’s Club of his village. He is a shabby, disoriented young man who has all superficial excuses to show his lethargy to his wife, neighbours, villagers and even his friends.

*The Way You Look at It* is a short story that highlights that every individual has a different view point while looking at the same thing. The story presents various temperaments of looking at the same rock from the lens of Raju, a sculptor, a merchant, a soldier and a washerman. The other stories ‘*Roopa’s Great Escape*’, ‘*Five Spoons of Salt*’, ‘*How the Seasons got their share*’, ‘*The Island of Statues*’, ‘*The Kingdom Of Fools*’, ‘*The Story of Silk*’ and ‘*When Yama Called*’ are dainty little gems that talk about the qualities of sensibility, courage, responsibility towards all the chores, appreciating the blessings by being a part of nature, realizing the worth of all the elements of nature and the clout of wisdom and humility in a person’s life.

## Conclusion

The book begins with a small author's note which is magnificent and dazzling and acts like a guide to the entire book. The narrative is relevant and concise for children and even for elders. The book is for the child in everyone. It inspires faith in oneself, and it inspires us to ethical action. The book influences our thinking and lays a path of self discovery. It is an insightful book which tries to comprehend the unique relationship between three generations and holds the perdurable virtue of love as an unremitting bond of togetherness.

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