

# Humanistic Philanthropy in the Literary Narratives of Sudha Murty's *Wise and Otherwise* and *Three Thousand Stitches*

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## Abstract

*Philanthropy is the discipline which is diversely explored in the times of pandemic. The present study focused on the etymology and history of philanthropy in general and Sudha Murthy's altruism. An iconic writer and a philanthropist Sudha Murty involve in changing the lives of people. The select short stories Three Thousand Stitches and Wise and Otherwise, are deeply grounded in Murty's personal experience. The stories help children understand and engage in philanthropic citizenship more critically. This paper aims to provide the insights into altruism, humanistic perspectives, and benevolence in the select works of Sudha Murty with a close textual reading.*

**Keywords:** *Philanthropy, Literature, Compassion, Empathy, Humanity, and Sudha Murty*

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction to Philanthropy and Literature

According to the Orthodox theology, philanthropist refers to the love of God towards people, who are called upon to imitate this by loving others as themselves. Paul Valley (2020) argues that, 'Gift-giving goes back at least to ancient Mesopotamia, a thousand years before the Greeks coined the adjective *philanthropon* to describe someone who is gentle and kind towards others. The philosophical roots of philanthropy lay in Ancient Greece, and took a profound switch in direction because of the evolving theology of the Jewish people, a change which was subsequently developed by both Christians and Muslims. (p.16) But the biggest development in the history of philanthropy, in the century which followed, came from a Scotsman, Andrew Carnegie, whose vast fortunes were amazed on the other side of the Atlantic, where he became the richest man in the world and established a new model for philanthropy. Carnegie was not only the biggest philanthropist of his era: his philosophy of 'he who dies rich, dies disgraced' also inspired generations of philanthropists who followed. It directly influenced the establishment of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. He continues to be cited regularly by a host of today's philanthropists. The idea of a new way of doing philanthropy' occurs repeatedly through history: yet the revolutions in philanthropy supposedly ushered in by today's philanthrocapitalists titans such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg owe much to the philosophy developed by Carnegie (Paul Valley, 2020, p.17).

Philanthropy in literature is a theme that has been explored across various cultures and eras, reflecting the deep-seated human values of altruism, charity, and social responsibility. From classic works to contemporary narratives, authors have depicted philanthropic acts as catalysts for character development, plot progression, and societal critique. Literature not only portrays the noble deeds of giving and selflessness but also examines the complexities, motivations, and consequences of such actions. Through diverse genres and perspectives, philanthropy in literature serves as a mirror to society's evolving attitudes toward benevolence, highlighting both the transformative power of generosity and the moral dilemmas it can entail. Whether through the charitable endeavors of iconic characters or the intricate examination of philanthropic institutions, literature offers a rich tapestry of insights into the human condition and the enduring impact of giving. It encompasses a broad spectrum of actions and motivations, from acts of individual charity to the establishment of large-scale benevolent institutions. By examining these acts within the narrative framework, literature often reveals the intricate and sometimes contradictory nature of giving. Philanthropy is frequently used as a tool for character development. In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from a miserly

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figure to a benevolent benefactor highlights the redemptive power of charity. This narrative arc emphasizes that philanthropy can lead to personal growth and societal harmony. In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, the March sisters' acts of kindness and their mother's charitable work underscore the theme of selflessness and community. These actions help shape the sisters' identities and influence their paths in life, illustrating how philanthropy is woven into the fabric of everyday existence. Throughout history, literature has reflected the prevailing attitudes towards philanthropy. In ancient texts, acts of charity were often linked to religious or moral imperatives. For instance, in classical Greek and Roman literature, generosity was frequently portrayed as a virtue of the noble and powerful, reinforcing social hierarchies and expectations. In medieval literature, philanthropy was deeply intertwined with Christian teachings. Texts from this period, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, depict acts of charity as both spiritual duties and social necessities. Characters who embody these values are often rewarded, while those who neglect them face moral scrutiny.

Alison and Jayne (2023) in their article titled *Philanthropic tales: A critical analysis of how philanthropic citizenship is represented in children's picturebooks— problems and possibilities* critically examines how philanthropic citizenship is represented in children's literature, particularly in picture books. The analysis of over 100 Western children's books reveals that most portray philanthropy as an individual, private act of kindness and generosity, often disconnected from broader socio-political and environmental contexts. These representations frequently reinforce traditional stereotypes related to gender, race, and power. However, some books attempt to link philanthropy to social justice issues, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of citizenship. The authors argue for further research to explore how these philanthropic narratives influence children's perceptions of good citizenship and emphasize the need for educational strategies that encourage critical engagement with social justice.

The motivations behind philanthropic acts are often complex and multifaceted. In Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, charity is sometimes depicted as a social obligation rather than a purely altruistic endeavor. Characters engage in philanthropic activities to maintain social status or fulfill societal expectations, revealing the often-self-serving undercurrents of ostensibly noble actions. In contemporary literature, such as Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, acts of charity are deeply personal and driven by guilt, redemption, and a desire to rectify past wrongs. This nuanced portrayal underscores the idea that philanthropy is not always purely altruistic but can be a means of seeking personal absolution and healing. Literature also uses philanthropy to critique social and economic structures. In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, the struggles of the poor and the charitable acts of characters like Jean Valjean and Bishop Myriel highlight the inadequacies of societal systems. Hugo uses these acts of kindness to advocate for compassion and social reform. Similarly, in George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, the portrayal of charity and social aid provides a critical view of the inefficiencies and stigmas associated with philanthropic efforts. Orwell's work questions the effectiveness of traditional charitable models and calls for a more systemic approach to addressing poverty and inequality.

- 1) Why is it important to see philanthropy in the insights of literary writings?
- 2) How does it scrutinize young minds to be an altruistic individual?
- 3) How significant the theme of altruism in the literary narratives?
- 4) In what ways does Sudha Murty use the theme of philanthropy to address social inequalities and moral dilemmas in Contemporary society?

### **Philanthropy in Indian English Writings**

Philanthropy in Indian English writings is a significant theme that reflects the country's rich cultural heritage, complex social fabric, and the evolving nature of altruism in the face of modernization and globalization. Indian authors, writing in English, have explored philanthropy from various perspectives, ranging from individual acts of kindness to organized efforts addressing systemic issues. These literary works often delve into the motivations behind charitable acts, the impact of philanthropy on society, and the moral and ethical questions surrounding benevolence.

In R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days*, the small-town setting provides a backdrop for numerous acts of everyday

kindness and generosity. Characters like the schoolteacher or the local doctor often engage in philanthropic activities, highlighting the role of individual effort in fostering community well-being. These narratives underscore the idea that even small acts of charity can have significant impacts on the lives of individuals and communities. Indian English literature has its roots in the colonial and post-colonial periods, during which themes of social justice, economic disparity, and cultural identity were prominently explored. Philanthropy, as a theme, is often intertwined with these broader issues. In early writings, influenced by the Gandhian ethos of selfless service and the Bhakti movement's emphasis on compassion and charity, acts of philanthropy are depicted as fundamental to the Indian way of life. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the novel addresses caste discrimination and economic disparity, shedding light on the limitations and hypocrisies of charitable efforts within rigid social hierarchies. Roy's work often questions the effectiveness of charity in a deeply divided society, suggesting that systemic change is necessary for true progress.

Institutional philanthropy is another important aspect of Indian English literature. In Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, the efforts of various charitable organizations and the role of government in addressing social issues are examined. Seth's portrayal of institutional philanthropy highlights both its potential and its limitations, reflecting the challenges of implementing effective and inclusive social policies. Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* also touches upon the role of charitable institutions, particularly in the context of education and healthcare. The novel illustrates how organized efforts can bring about significant change, yet also points to the bureaucratic and societal obstacles that often hinder these initiatives.

In Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, the depiction of charity and aid amidst the Emergency period in India serves as a critique of political corruption and social injustice. The novel portrays the struggles of the lower classes and the often inadequate or misdirected efforts of philanthropic organizations, emphasizing the need for genuine empathy and structural reform. In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, acts of charity are sometimes driven by personal guilt, familial duty, or the desire for redemption. Rushdie's characters grapple with their motivations, revealing the intricate interplay between personal and societal expectations in philanthropic endeavors. Similarly, in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the philanthropic acts of characters are influenced by their experiences of loss, displacement, and the desire to reclaim a sense of belonging. Desai's narrative explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of giving, questioning whether true altruism can exist in a world fraught with personal and collective traumas.

### **Sudha Murty's Literary Narratives about Altruism**

Sudha Murty's *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life* delineates a rich tapestry of stories that reflect her approach to philanthropy and social service. Through a series of anecdotes and real-life stories, Murty illustrates the impact of her philanthropic work and the various social issues she encounters. *Wise and Otherwise* is a collection of 51 short stories, each based on Murty's personal experiences and observations. The book reflects her journey as a social worker, writer, and philanthropist, providing insight into the lives of ordinary people she meets through her work with the Infosys Foundation. Murty's stories often highlight the importance of empathy and compassion in philanthropy. In her writings, she recounts her experience of helping a young girl who had been abandoned by her family. Murty's intervention not only provided immediate relief but also inspired a sense of hope and dignity in the girl's life. Murty does not shy away from discussing the challenges and obstacles faced in philanthropic work. She addresses issues such as corruption, bureaucratic hurdles, and the sometimes-ungrateful nature of those who receive help. In one story, Murty talks about how she was deceived by a person pretending to be in need. This experience taught her valuable lessons about the complexities of human nature and the need for careful evaluation in social work. Murty's philanthropy is deeply rooted in an understanding and respect for cultural diversity. She emphasizes the importance of being culturally sensitive and aware of the unique needs of different communities.

One story describes her efforts to support a tribal community. She takes the time to understand their customs and traditions, ensuring that her help is both respectful and effective. A recurring theme in Murty's stories is the focus on education as a means of empowerment. She believes that providing educational opportunities can lead to long-term social change and upliftment. In several stories, she narrates her initiatives to build libraries, schools, and provide scholarships to underprivileged students. These efforts have a transformative impact on

the communities involved. Education is a recurring theme in Murty's philanthropic efforts. Murty's philanthropic journey is also one of personal growth and reflection. She often reflects on her own values, beliefs, and the lessons learned from her interactions with others. The book includes introspective pieces where Murty contemplates the nature of giving, the responsibilities of being able to help, and the ethical dimensions of philanthropy. Sudha Murty's *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life* offers a comprehensive look at her philanthropic philosophy and practice. Through her stories, Murty illustrates the multifaceted nature of philanthropy, including the importance of empathy, integrity, education, and cultural sensitivity. Her experiences underscore the challenges and rewards of giving, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the impact of compassionate and well-considered philanthropy. It offers a heartfelt and honest portrayal of Sudha Murty's philanthropic endeavours. Through her stories, Murty provides valuable insights into the joys and challenges of helping others. Her work exemplifies the principles of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to education and empowerment. The book not only celebrates the spirit of giving but also serves as a powerful reminder of the impact one person can make through dedicated and compassionate efforts.

## **Humanistic Philanthropy**

Humanistic philanthropy refers to the practice of giving that emphasizes empathy, respect for human dignity, and the holistic well-being of individuals and communities. Rooted in the principles of humanism, this approach to philanthropy prioritizes the intrinsic value of every person and seeks to address not only material needs but also emotional, social, and psychological aspects of well-being.

### **Key Principles of Humanistic Philanthropy**

1. **Empathy and Compassion** Humanistic philanthropy is driven by a deep sense of empathy and compassion. Donors and organizations practicing this form of giving strive to understand the experiences and needs of the people they aim to help. This involves active listening, genuine concern, and efforts to alleviate suffering in a manner that respects the dignity of the recipients.
2. **Respect for Human Dignity** Central to humanistic philanthropy is the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. Philanthropic efforts are designed to empower beneficiaries, rather than creating dependency. This involves respecting cultural differences, involving community members in decision-making processes, and ensuring that aid efforts support self-sufficiency and long-term growth.
3. **Holistic Approach to Well-being** Humanistic philanthropy goes beyond addressing immediate material needs. It seeks to improve the overall quality of life for individuals and communities. This holistic approach includes support for education, mental health, social justice, and environmental sustainability, recognizing that true well-being encompasses a broad spectrum of human experiences.
4. **Ethical Giving** Ethical considerations are paramount in humanistic philanthropy. This includes transparency in operations, accountability to stakeholders, and adherence to moral and ethical standards. Donors and organizations are mindful of the potential impacts of their actions and strive to ensure that their contributions do not inadvertently cause harm or perpetuate inequalities.

## **Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life**

Sudha Murty's short stories impart deep moral lessons, stressing virtues like integrity, modesty, resilience, respect, and cultural awareness. The narratives encourage embracing change, diligent effort, honoring traditions, and treating all individuals with compassion and dignity. They underscore the power of collaboration, the influence of even small acts of generosity, and the importance of finding meaning and satisfaction in life's path. For young readers, these stories inspire the development of strong character, valuing simplicity, and aspiring to create a positive impact in the world. *Treat Me as Human*, every individual deserves to be treated with humanity and respect, regardless of their status or condition. "You are the first person who has treated us like any other human being" (192). *Once Upon a Time Life Was Simple*, simplicity brings contentment. As life becomes more complicated, it's important to remember the joy found in simple things. *Living Through Change*, change is inevitable, and embracing it with a positive mindset leads to growth and new opportunities. *In Sabyadri Hills, A Lesson in Humility*, nature teaches us humility and the importance of staying grounded. Despite human

achievements, nature's grandeur reminds us of our small place in the world. *Honesty Comes from the Heart*, true honesty is an intrinsic quality, rooted in a person's heart and character. It is not just about being truthful but about being genuine and trustworthy in all aspects of life. *Cause Than Cure*, prevention is better than cure, especially when it comes to health and well-being. It is better to address problems early on rather than deal with the consequences later. *On Human Foibles*, everyone has weaknesses and flaws, and it is important to acknowledge and work on them rather than criticize others. *Idealists at Twenty, Realists at Forty*, as we age, our perspectives change. What we see as ideals in youth often get tempered by the realities of life, but it is important to retain a balance between idealism and realism. *An Unknown Benefactor from Chennai*, acts of kindness, even from unknown sources, can have a profound impact on people's lives. *Crisis of Confidence*, confidence can be fragile, but it is crucial for success. Overcoming self-doubt and believing in oneself is key to achieving goals. *The Nobel Prize*, great achievements come from perseverance, dedication, and the pursuit of knowledge. *The Price of Jealousy*, jealousy can be destructive, leading to negative emotions and actions. It is important to overcome jealousy and focus on one's own path. *Think Positive, Be Happy*, a positive attitude can transform challenges into opportunities, leading to happiness and success. *A Life with Dignity*, living with dignity, regardless of circumstances, is crucial. Self-respect and integrity should never be compromised. *Be Fair to Others*, fairness, and justice in our actions towards others build trust and respect. It is important to treat everyone with fairness. *Willing Candidate*, sometimes, willingness and enthusiasm can open doors that seem closed. Being eager to learn and participate is often more valuable than just having skills. *Life is an Examination*, life constantly tests us, and how we respond to these tests defines our character and future. *Oh Teacher, I Salute Thee*, teachers play a vital role in shaping lives, and their guidance should be valued and respected.

### **Three Thousand Stitches: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives**

Sudha Murty's short stories convey profound life lessons that emphasize values such as honesty, humility, perseverance, respect, and the importance of cultural understanding. The stories teach readers to embrace change, work hard, respect traditions, and treat everyone with kindness and dignity. *I Can't, We Can*, the story teaches the power of teamwork and collective effort. It shows that while individual efforts are important, working together can achieve far greater results. *A Powerful Ambassador*, this story illustrates the profound impact that humility and kindness can have, often more powerful than wealth or status. It shows that positive human qualities can influence and inspire others. *A Day in Infosys Foundation*, this story reveals the significance of social responsibility and the impact that organizations and individuals can have on society. It emphasizes that success should be used to give back to the community. *Rasleela and the Swimming Pool*, reflects the importance of understanding cultural differences and respecting diverse traditions. It also highlights how humor and open-mindedness can bridge cultural gaps. *A Place Like Home*, emphasizes the value of finding comfort, peace, and belonging in one's surroundings. It highlights that "home" is not just a place but a feeling of safety and warmth. *Cattle Class*, sheds light on humility and the importance of not judging others based on appearances or social status. It reminds us that everyone deserves respect, regardless of their circumstances. *A Life Unwritten*, life is unpredictable, and sometimes, plans do not go as expected. However, this does not mean that life is less meaningful. The story highlights the importance of finding purpose and contentment in what we have. *Food for Thought*, underscores the importance of respecting food and the people who work to provide it. It teaches gratitude and mindfulness in our consumption habits. *Three Handfuls of Water*, tradition and rituals often have deep meaning and emotional value. Understanding and respecting them can connect us to our roots and provide a sense of belonging. *Three Thousand Stitches*, persistence, compassion, and dedication can bring about significant change, even in the most challenging circumstances. The story highlights how one person's determination can positively impact many lives. *How to Beat the Boys*, determination, self-confidence, and a strong work ethic can help break stereotypes and overcome gender biases. The story encourages women to pursue their goals despite societal expectations.

### **DISCUSSION**

Sudha Murty's short stories can be seen as an excellent vehicle for introducing the concept of philanthropy to children. Through her simple yet profound narratives, Murty instills values such as kindness, generosity, empathy, and social responsibility, which are the cornerstones of philanthropic behavior. Connection to Real Life: Many of her stories are based on real-life experiences or inspired by actual events, which helps ground the

concept of philanthropy. By reading these stories, children learn that philanthropy is not just about grand gestures but also about the small, everyday actions that contribute to the well-being of others. Accessible Lessons: Murty's stories are written in a manner that is easily understandable for children. She uses relatable characters and everyday situations to convey the importance of helping others, making the concept of philanthropy accessible and relevant to young minds. Role Models: The characters in her stories often serve as role models for children. They demonstrate how small acts of kindness, whether through helping a neighbor, supporting a friend, or standing up for what is right, can make a significant difference. These narratives encourage children to think beyond themselves and consider the impact they can have on others. Empathy and Inclusivity: Murty's stories often emphasize empathy and inclusivity, teaching children to care for others regardless of their background. This aspect of her storytelling helps foster a sense of social justice and equality, which are key elements of philanthropy. Cultural Context: Sudha Murty's stories often reflect the cultural and social context of India, offering children insights into the diverse ways philanthropy can be practiced in different settings. This cultural lens helps children appreciate the global and local dimensions of giving and social responsibility. Life Lessons: The moral lessons embedded in Murty's stories go beyond simple didactic messages. They encourage children to internalize values like humility, respect, and the importance of community, which are essential for developing a philanthropic mindset. Encouraging Critical Thinking: While her stories promote kindness and generosity, they also encourage children to think critically about the reasons behind their actions. Stories like *Three Thousand Stitches* show how philanthropy is not just about giving but about addressing the root causes of social issues.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Sudha Murty's short stories serve as an effective tool for nurturing philanthropic values in children. Through relatable characters, real-life scenarios, and culturally rich narratives, she imparts lessons on kindness, empathy, and social responsibility. Her stories encourage young readers to think critically about their actions and their impact on society, helping them develop a deeper understanding of philanthropy. By weaving together moral lessons with engaging storytelling, Murty's work fosters a generation that is not only compassionate but also aware of the broader social issues that philanthropy seeks to address.

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