Pedagogies Of Care And Responsibility: Narrative Ethics And Indian Knowledge Systems In Sudha Murty's Narrative World

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Abstract

Ethics, in the Indian civilizational imagination, has rarely been confined to formal treatises or philosophical abstractions; instead, it has travelled quietly through stories, memories, and lived encounters. This paper introduces the concept of "narrative dharma" to examine how Sudha Murty's fiction functions as a contemporary ethical knowledge system rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Through seemingly simple narratives, Murty transforms everyday life into a site of moral inquiry, where ethical understanding emerges not through instruction but through experience, empathy, and reflection.

Focusing on selected works such as Wise and Otherwise, Gently Falls the Bakula, Dollar Bahu, and Grandma's Bag of Stories, the study explores how Murty's storytelling enacts a form of experiential ethics, a mode of learning that aligns closely with traditional Indian pedagogical practices such as kathā-paramparā and the guru–shishya ethos. Her narratives foreground ordinary characters confronting moral dilemmas shaped by family, gender, class, and social responsibility, thereby embedding ethical reasoning within culturally familiar contexts. The paper argues that Murty's fiction does not merely depict moral values but performs ethics, allowing readers to participate in ethical decision-making through narrative engagement.

Methodologically, the study adopts an interdisciplinary framework combining narrative ethics, value education theory, and literary pedagogy. By reading Murty's fiction as ethical pedagogy rather than moral didacticism, the paper highlights how Indian values such as dharma, seva, sahajata, and lokasangraha are re-articulated for a contemporary readership. The paper also briefly situates Murty's narrative ethics within the educational vision of NEP-2020, which emphasizes holistic learning, ethical citizenship, and culturally rooted knowledge practices.

By conceptualizing Sudha Murty's fiction as an ethical classroom without walls, this paper offers a fresh intervention into Indian English literary studies, demonstrating how narrative can function as a living archive of Indian Knowledge Systems and a powerful medium for value-based education in the present era.

Keywords: Ethics, Narrative, Dharma, Pedagogy, Values, IKS.

1. Introduction: Ethics as Story, Not Doctrine

In the Indian intellectual tradition, ethical knowledge has rarely been transmitted through rigid doctrinal systems or abstract philosophical treatises alone. Instead, it has circulated through stories, parables, epics, folktales, and lived narratives that embed moral reasoning within the rhythms of everyday life. From the Itihāsa–Purāṇa tradition to oral storytelling practices across regions, ethics in India has historically functioned as an experiential, relational, and context-sensitive form of knowledge rather than a prescriptive code. This civilizational orientation toward ethical learning finds renewed expression in the fiction of Sudha Murty, whose narratives quietly yet powerfully enact what may be described as narrative ethics rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

Sudha Murty's fiction occupies a distinctive position in contemporary Indian English literature. Often categorized as "simple," "didactic," or "popular," her work has frequently been overlooked in scholarly discourse that privileges stylistic complexity or postmodern experimentation. However, such critical marginalization obscures the ethical and pedagogical depth of her storytelling. Murty's narratives are not simplistic moral lessons; rather, they function as ethical laboratories in which values are tested, negotiated, and embodied through lived experience. Her stories foreground ordinary individuals—teachers, homemakers, bureaucrats, grandparents, children—whose ethical dilemmas unfold within familiar social contexts, making moral reflection accessible without reducing it to moral instruction.

This paper argues that Sudha Murty's fiction represents a contemporary articulation of Indian Knowledge Systems through what may be termed "narrative dharma"—a mode of ethical storytelling where moral understanding emerges through action, consequence, and empathy rather than explicit philosophical exposition. Drawing upon principles such as dharma (righteous conduct), seva (service), sahajata (simplicity), and lokasangraha (social responsibility), Murty's fiction exemplifies how ethics can be taught without being taught—learned through witnessing, reflection, and emotional engagement.

The study situates Murty's work at the intersection of narrative ethics, value education, and literary pedagogy, offering an interdisciplinary framework that aligns closely with the educational vision articulated in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. By reading Murty's fiction as an ethical pedagogy grounded in IKS, the paper challenges dominant academic assumptions about seriousness, complexity, and value in literary studies, and proposes her narratives as significant resources for ethical education in contemporary India.

2. Indian Knowledge Systems and the Ethics of Everyday Life

Indian Knowledge Systems encompass a vast and plural intellectual heritage that integrates philosophy, ethics, education, ecology, medicine, and social organization. Unlike Western epistemological traditions that often separate ethics from daily practice, Indian epistemology emphasizes the inseparability of knowledge (jnāna), action (karma), and ethical responsibility (dharma). Ethical knowledge is not merely something to be known but something to be lived, enacted, and embodied within social relationships (Radhakrishnan, 1951).

The concept of dharma occupies a central place in Indian ethical thought. Rather than a fixed moral law, dharma is contextual, relational, and situational, shaped by one's role, responsibilities, and circumstances. As Bimal N. Patel and others have noted, dharma functions less as a universal commandment and more as a guiding principle that demands ethical discernment rather than blind obedience (Sharma, 2000). This fluid and situational understanding of ethics aligns closely with narrative forms, which are uniquely equipped to represent moral complexity without collapsing it into rigid rules.

Traditional Indian pedagogy recognized storytelling as a vital ethical instrument. Texts such as the Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, Jataka Tales, and episodes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana use narrative

ambiguity to provoke ethical reflection rather than deliver definitive answers. Moral learning occurs through identification with characters, emotional resonance, and contemplation of consequences—what modern educational theory would describe as experiential learning.

Sudha Murty's fiction draws implicitly from this pedagogical lineage. Her stories do not articulate philosophical arguments about ethics; instead, they present ethical situations embedded in social realities shaped by caste, gender, class, family obligations, and economic disparity. In doing so, Murty revives an indigenous mode of ethical instruction that privileges lived wisdom over theoretical abstraction.

3. Narrative Ethics as Methodological Framework

Narrative ethics, as developed in moral philosophy and literary studies, emphasizes the role of storytelling in shaping ethical understanding. Thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum (1990) have argued that narratives cultivate moral imagination by allowing readers to inhabit perspectives different from their own. Ethical knowledge, in this view, emerges through emotional engagement, empathy, and contextual understanding rather than through abstract moral principles.

While narrative ethics has largely developed within Western philosophical traditions, its core assumptions resonate strongly with Indian ethical thought. The Indian narrative tradition has long recognized that moral truths cannot be reduced to propositional statements but must be encountered through experience. Murty's fiction exemplifies this convergence, offering narratives that are ethically instructive without being prescriptive.

In Wise and Otherwise (2002), for instance, Murty recounts real-life incidents involving individuals who embody integrity, compassion, or moral courage in uncelebrated ways. The absence of overt moral commentary compels readers to infer ethical meaning from narrative detail rather than authorial judgment. Similarly, Gently Falls the Bakula (2008) explores marital sacrifice, intellectual neglect, and emotional imbalance without condemning or endorsing characters explicitly. Ethical evaluation is left to the reader's reflective engagement with the narrative.

By employing narrative ethics as a methodological lens, this paper reads Murty's fiction not as moral instruction but as ethical performance—stories that enact ethical reasoning through character, context, and consequence. This approach avoids reductive readings that label Murty as merely "didactic" and instead situates her work within a sophisticated ethical tradition rooted in IKS.

4. Experiential Learning as an Indigenous Pedagogical Mode

Experiential learning—understood as learning through lived experience, reflection, and ethical consequence—has been central to Indian pedagogical traditions long before it entered modern educational theory. In classical Indian thought, education (śikṣā) was inseparable from life-practice (ācāra). Knowledge was validated not by abstraction alone but by conduct, social responsibility, and inner transformation. This indigenous orientation aligns closely with contemporary formulations of experiential learning, such as those articulated by Kolb (1984), yet remains distinct in its ethical and relational emphasis.

Sudha Murty's fiction consistently mobilizes this indigenous pedagogy. Her narratives are structured around situations that demand ethical discernment—often quiet, unglamorous choices whose significance becomes apparent only through their consequences. The pedagogical force of these stories lies not in explicit instruction but in situated moral experience: readers encounter ethical dilemmas as characters do, within constraints of family, class, gender, and social expectation. In this sense, Murty's fiction becomes a site of ethical apprenticeship rather than moral indoctrination.

5. Story as Ethical Encounter: Wise and Otherwise

Wise and Otherwise (2002) offers a particularly instructive example of experiential ethics. The text comprises brief narratives based on Murty's encounters with individuals across India—teachers, laborers, administrators, villagers—whose lives reveal ethical wisdom through action. The stories resist sensationalism and refrain from moralizing commentary, compelling readers to infer value from circumstance.

One narrative recounts an impoverished schoolteacher who refuses bribes despite personal hardship; another depicts an elderly woman who sacrifices comfort to preserve dignity. These accounts function as micro-ethical case studies, where values such as integrity, restraint, and compassion are demonstrated rather than declared. The ethical lesson emerges through narrative economy and restraint—an approach consistent with Indian storytelling traditions that privilege anubhava (experience) over upadeśa (instruction).

From a pedagogical perspective, such stories enact what may be termed reflective moral learning. Readers are not told what to think; they are invited to dwell with the ethical weight of actions and outcomes. This narrative strategy aligns with Nussbaum's (1990) argument that literature cultivates moral perception by training readers to notice ethically salient details in human situations. Murty's contribution lies in localizing this ethical encounter within Indian social realities, thereby grounding moral reflection in culturally recognizable contexts.

6. Learning through Loss and Sacrifice: Gently Falls the Bakula

If Wise and Otherwise foregrounds ethical conduct in public life, Gently Falls the Bakula (2008) explores experiential ethics within intimate, domestic spaces. The novel traces the life of Shrimati, a woman of intellectual promise whose aspirations are gradually subsumed under her husband Shrikant's career ambitions. The ethical complexity of the narrative lies in its refusal to frame Shrikant as a villain or Shrimati as a passive victim. Instead, Murty presents a slow accretion of ethical imbalance—missed opportunities, emotional neglect, and unacknowledged sacrifice.

The pedagogical power of the novel emerges from this gradualism. Readers witness how ethical harm can occur without malice, how neglect can be normalized through social expectations, and how gendered sacrifice is often rendered invisible. The narrative thus performs an ethics of attention, prompting readers to recognize moral dimensions of everyday choices that rarely appear in ethical discourse.

From an experiential learning standpoint, the novel exemplifies reflective judgment. Ethical understanding arises through sustained engagement with Shrimati's interior life and her eventual assertion of selfhood. The story does not offer closure through punishment or redemption; rather, it leaves readers with a heightened sensitivity to the ethical costs of ambition, conformity, and silence. Such narrative openness aligns with Indian ethical thought, which often privileges discernment (viveka) over absolute moral verdicts (Radhakrishnan, 1951).

7. Moral Formation through Family Narratives: Grandma's Bag of Stories

In Grandma's Bag of Stories (2012), Murty explicitly situates storytelling as a pedagogical practice. The frame narrative—children listening to their grandmother's tales—recalls the oral transmission of values within Indian households. Yet the ethical work of the text lies not in nostalgia but in intergenerational moral formation. The stories address themes of honesty, humility, greed, kindness, and social responsibility, embedding ethical reasoning within culturally familiar situations.

Crucially, these stories avoid simplistic moral binaries. Characters often learn through error, embarrassment, or unintended consequence, reinforcing the idea that ethical growth is incremental and relational. The

pedagogical logic here resonates with Indian traditions of kathā and nīti literature, where stories function as ethical rehearsals rather than moral decrees.

From a literary pedagogy perspective, Murty's use of simple language and episodic structure enhances accessibility without diminishing ethical depth. The stories invite readers—particularly younger ones—into ethical reflection by grounding values in lived experience. This approach anticipates contemporary educational emphasis on age-appropriate, culturally rooted value education, as later articulated in NEP-2020 (Government of India, 2020).

8. Service (Seva) as Ethical Practice: Dollar Bahu

Dollar Bahu (2007) offers a socio-ethical critique of material aspiration and cultural displacement. Through the contrasting lives of two daughters-in-law—one living in India, the other in the United States—Murty examines how economic desire reshapes familial ethics. The narrative exposes how monetary value can eclipse moral value, leading to emotional alienation and ethical distortion.

The pedagogical strength of the novel lies in its treatment of seva (service) not as self-sacrifice alone but as ethical attentiveness to relational responsibility. Characters who prioritize status over service experience moral dissonance, while those who practice care and restraint embody ethical balance. Importantly, Murty avoids idealizing poverty or demonizing wealth; instead, she foregrounds ethical orientation as a matter of disposition rather than circumstance.

This nuanced ethical framing aligns with Indian philosophical views that regard ethical action as context-sensitive and intention-driven. From an experiential learning lens, readers engage with ethical consequences as they unfold within family dynamics, migration, and cultural transition—domains central to contemporary Indian life.

9. Literary Pedagogy and the Ethics of Simplicity

Across Murty's oeuvre, simplicity functions not as aesthetic limitation but as ethical strategy. Her restrained prose, linear narratives, and familiar settings enable readers to focus on ethical substance rather than stylistic spectacle. This stylistic choice resonates with Gandhian ethics, which emphasize clarity, restraint, and moral transparency in communication (Gandhi, 1930/2009).

In pedagogical terms, Murty's simplicity facilitates ethical accessibility. Her narratives can be integrated into educational contexts without extensive mediation, making them valuable resources for value education across age groups. Yet simplicity does not equate to superficiality. The ethical questions raised—about ambition, sacrifice, dignity, and responsibility—are complex and enduring.

By positioning ethics within everyday experience, Murty's fiction exemplifies what may be called ordinary ethics—a mode of moral engagement attentive to the small decisions that shape character and community. This approach challenges dominant academic tendencies to equate ethical seriousness with theoretical abstraction, reaffirming the pedagogical power of narrative grounded in lived reality.

10. Gender as Ethical Location in Indian Narrative Traditions

In Indian cultural and philosophical traditions, ethical responsibility has often been unevenly distributed along gendered lines. Women have historically been positioned as custodians of moral continuity—within families, communities, and social institutions—through roles that emphasize care, sacrifice, endurance, and emotional labor. While classical texts frequently idealize these virtues, contemporary feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the ethical asymmetry embedded in such expectations (Chakravarti, 2003). Sudha Murty's fiction

engages critically with this inheritance by narrativizing women's ethical labor without romanticizing it, thereby exposing what may be termed the "invisible curriculum" of gendered morality.

Murty's female protagonists are rarely heroic in a conventional sense. They do not lead revolutions or openly defy social order; instead, they negotiate ethical responsibility within constrained spaces—marriage, family, workplace, and community. This narrative choice aligns with Indian ethical realism, which recognizes that moral action often unfolds within limitation rather than freedom. By foregrounding women's ethical labor, Murty reframes everyday endurance as a site of moral intelligence rather than passive submission.

11. Ethical Labor and Silent Pedagogy in Gently Falls the Bakula

The concept of ethical labor—the sustained emotional, moral, and relational work required to maintain social harmony—is central to Gently Falls the Bakula. Shrimati's life is shaped by a continuous process of ethical adjustment: suppressing ambition, accommodating her husband's career demands, and internalizing social expectations of the "supportive wife." These actions are not framed as virtues in themselves; rather, Murty presents them as ethical negotiations that carry cumulative psychological cost.

Importantly, the novel resists a simplistic feminist binary of victim and oppressor. Shrikant is not ethically monstrous; his failure lies in ethical inattentiveness rather than cruelty. This narrative restraint foregrounds a subtle but significant ethical insight: harm can result from ethical neglect as much as from overt wrongdoing. The pedagogical effect of the narrative lies in making readers attentive to what often goes unnoticed—the quiet erosion of selfhood through normalized sacrifice.

Shrimati's eventual decision to reclaim her intellectual life does not negate her prior sacrifices; instead, it re-signifies them. Her choice becomes an ethical reorientation rather than a rebellion, suggesting that moral growth involves recalibration rather than rupture. This aligns with Indian ethical thought, which emphasizes balance (samyatā) and discernment (viveka) over confrontation. From a narrative ethics perspective, the novel teaches readers to recognize ethical harm in silence and absence, expanding the moral vocabulary available for understanding gendered experience.

12. Women, Service, and Moral Recognition in Wise and Otherwise

Several narratives in Wise and Otherwise foreground women whose ethical contributions remain socially unacknowledged. Murty recounts stories of widows, teachers, domestic workers, and rural women whose moral clarity contrasts sharply with their marginal social status. These narratives function as ethical counter-archives, documenting forms of wisdom excluded from dominant knowledge systems.

One recurring motif is women's commitment to seva—not as self-effacement but as ethical agency. However, Murty carefully distinguishes between service chosen and service imposed. Women who act ethically out of conviction retain moral agency, while those compelled into sacrifice by structural inequality experience ethical depletion. This distinction is crucial, as it prevents the romanticization of suffering and aligns Murty's narrative ethics with feminist critiques of moral exploitation (Gilligan, 1982).

Pedagogically, these stories cultivate ethical recognition. Readers are prompted to question whose ethical labor is visible, whose wisdom is valued, and how moral authority is socially distributed. In doing so, Murty's fiction performs an educative function that complements formal ethical instruction by sharpening moral perception toward gendered injustice.

13. Domestic Space as Ethical Classroom: Dollar Bahu

In Dollar Bahu, Murty situates ethical conflict within domestic space, transforming the household into an ethical classroom where values are enacted, distorted, and evaluated. The novel examines how economic aspiration—symbolized by the "dollar"—reshapes familial ethics, particularly in relation to women's labor and dignity.

The protagonist Vinuta embodies ethical patience and care, while her mother-in-law's preference for the affluent NRI daughter-in-law reveals how material success reconfigures moral judgment. Importantly, Murty does not present Vinuta's endurance as morally superior by default; rather, she reveals how ethical virtue is often exploited in patriarchal structures that reward compliance over justice.

The ethical insight of the novel lies in its exposure of moral misrecognition—the tendency to equate wealth with worth and sacrifice with obligation. By allowing consequences to unfold organically, Murty avoids overt moral commentary, relying instead on narrative consequence to generate ethical understanding. This strategy reinforces experiential learning, as readers witness how ethical imbalance corrodes relationships over time.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Dollar Bahu offers a critical lens on value education in a globalized context. It challenges readers to interrogate the ethical implications of migration, consumerism, and cultural displacement—issues central to contemporary Indian society. The novel thus extends Murty's narrative ethics beyond personal morality into the realm of social ethics.

14. Storytelling, Grandmothers, and Feminine Ethical Authority

Grandma's Bag of Stories offers a more affirmative representation of feminine ethical authority through the figure of the grandmother. Unlike institutional educators, the grandmother teaches through storytelling, humor, memory, and relational intimacy. Her authority is neither coercive nor hierarchical; it is earned through trust and lived wisdom.

This mode of ethical instruction resonates with Indian domestic pedagogies, where moral education has traditionally occurred within family spaces through elders' narratives. Murty's choice to foreground a grandmother as ethical guide reclaims feminine authority often marginalized in formal knowledge systems. The stories transmit values such as honesty, kindness, restraint, and accountability, but they do so through narrative engagement rather than moral prescription.

The pedagogical significance of these stories lies in their dialogic structure. Children question, reflect, and reinterpret lessons, reinforcing the idea that ethical learning is participatory rather than passive. This aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize learner-centered pedagogy, while remaining rooted in indigenous practice.

15. Feminist Ethics without Polemic

One of the most distinctive features of Murty's engagement with gender ethics is her refusal of polemic. Unlike explicitly activist feminist writing, Murty's fiction operates through ethical persuasion rather than ideological assertion. This does not indicate political neutrality; rather, it reflects an ethical strategy that prioritizes moral awakening over confrontation.

By embedding feminist ethical critique within familiar narrative forms, Murty reaches readers who might otherwise resist overt ideological discourse. Her fiction demonstrates that ethical transformation can occur through identification, empathy, and reflection—modes deeply embedded in Indian storytelling traditions.

From a scholarly perspective, this narrative strategy complicates prevailing critical hierarchies that privilege overt resistance over subtle negotiation. Murty's work suggests that ethical critique need not be loud to be effective; it can operate quietly, reshaping moral sensibility over time.

16. Gendered Ethics and the Curriculum of Everyday Life

Taken together, Murty's representations of women reveal an invisible curriculum—a set of ethical lessons learned outside formal education, transmitted through family roles, social expectation, and lived experience. This curriculum teaches patience, care, sacrifice, and responsibility, but often without reciprocal recognition or justice.

By narrativizing this curriculum, Murty's fiction performs a dual pedagogical function: it documents gendered ethical labour and invites readers to evaluate its fairness. In doing so, her narratives align with broader efforts within Indian Knowledge Systems to integrate ethics, social responsibility, and self-reflection into education.

This gendered ethical lens prepares the ground for the next section, which situates Murty's narrative ethics within contemporary educational discourse, particularly the value-based and holistic framework articulated by NEP-2020.

17. Re-cantering Ethics in Contemporary Education

One of the most significant interventions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is its explicit reorientation of education away from narrow skill acquisition toward holistic human development. The policy foregrounds values, ethics, constitutional responsibility, and cultural rootedness as central to educational reform (Government of India, 2020). This emphasis marks a departure from technocratic models of education that privilege efficiency, standardization, and measurable outcomes over ethical formation. Within this context, Sudha Murty's fiction emerges as a literary articulation of the very ethical pedagogy that NEP-2020 seeks to institutionalize.

Indian Knowledge Systems form a foundational pillar of NEP-2020, which calls for integrating indigenous epistemologies, multilingualism, and culturally grounded learning practices into curricula. The policy recognizes that ethical citizenship cannot be cultivated through abstract instruction alone; it must be nurtured through lived values, contextual understanding, and reflective engagement. Murty's narrative ethics—rooted in everyday experience, relational responsibility, and moral consequence—offer a model of ethical learning that complements and deepens this policy vision.

18. Narrative as Ethical Infrastructure

NEP-2020 repeatedly emphasizes "experiential learning," "story-based pedagogy," and "value-based education" as essential components of meaningful learning. While the policy outlines structural and curricular reforms, it leaves open the question of pedagogical content—what kinds of narratives, texts, and cultural resources can effectively embody these values. Murty's fiction provides one such ethical infrastructure.

Her narratives function as ethical simulations, allowing learners to encounter moral dilemmas without real-world risk. Readers are invited to deliberate alongside characters, to witness consequences unfold, and to reflect upon ethical tensions embedded in ordinary situations. This narrative process aligns with the policy's emphasis on critical thinking, empathy, and reflective judgment rather than rote moral instruction.

Moreover, Murty's stories exemplify how ethics can be integrated across disciplines rather than confined to moral science or philosophy courses. Her fiction intersects with sociology, gender studies, economics,

environmental ethics, and cultural studies, making it particularly suitable for interdisciplinary pedagogy—a key objective of NEP-2020.

19. Value Education beyond Moral Didacticism

A persistent challenge in value education has been the tendency toward moral didacticism—presenting values as fixed doctrines to be memorized rather than principles to be interpreted. NEP-2020 cautions against such approaches, advocating instead for pedagogies that foster internalization through understanding and practice. Murty's fiction exemplifies this non-didactic ethical pedagogy.

Her narratives rarely offer explicit moral conclusions. Instead, they rely on ethical ambiguity, allowing readers to grapple with competing values and incomplete resolutions. For instance, in Gently Falls the Bakula, the ethical conflict between personal fulfilment and familial duty is not resolved through moral judgment but through ethical reorientation. This narrative openness encourages learners to develop moral discernment rather than moral conformity.

Such an approach resonates with Indian ethical philosophy, which emphasizes situational judgment over universal prescription. By engaging readers in ethical interpretation, Murty's fiction cultivates what NEP-2020 identifies as "ethical and constitutional values" grounded in reflection rather than instruction.

20. Language, Accessibility, and Ethical Inclusion

NEP-2020 underscores the importance of linguistic accessibility and multilingual education as tools for equity and inclusion. While Murty writes in English, her language is deliberately simple, culturally resonant, and inclusive. This stylistic choice ensures that ethical narratives are accessible to diverse learners, including first-generation students and those from non-elite backgrounds.

Murty's English carries traces of Indian speech patterns, social contexts, and cultural idioms, positioning language itself as a bridge rather than a barrier. In this sense, her fiction exemplifies what may be described as ethical bilingualism—a mode of writing that mediates between global language and local value systems. Such mediation aligns with NEP-2020's vision of promoting Indian languages and cultural knowledge while engaging with global academic discourse.

21. Teacher Education and Narrative Pedagogy

Another key focus of NEP-2020 is the reform of teacher education, emphasizing reflective practice, ethical responsibility, and cultural competence. Murty's fiction offers valuable resources for teacher preparation by modelling how ethical sensitivity can be cultivated through narrative engagement.

Teachers encountering Murty's stories are invited not only to teach ethics but to reflect upon their own moral positions—as educators, caregivers, and social agents. The narratives encourage teachers to recognize ethical labour in everyday interactions with students, colleagues, and institutions. This reflective dimension aligns with the policy's emphasis on teachers as ethical role models rather than mere transmitters of content.

In classroom practice, Murty's stories can facilitate discussion-based learning, ethical debate, and reflective writing—pedagogical strategies explicitly endorsed by NEP-2020. Her fiction thus bridges literary study and teacher education, reinforcing the interdisciplinary ethos of the policy.

22. Ethical Citizenship and Social Responsibility

NEP-2020 envisions education as a means of producing ethically responsible citizens capable of contributing to a democratic and plural society. Murty's fiction consistently foregrounds social responsibility—toward family, community, and nation—without collapsing it into nationalist rhetoric. Her narratives emphasize ethical citizenship grounded in care, integrity, and accountability rather than ideological allegiance.

By portraying ethical action within everyday social roles, Murty demystifies citizenship, presenting it as a practice rather than a slogan. This narrative framing aligns with Indian ethical traditions that understand civic responsibility as an extension of personal dharma. In educational terms, such narratives help learners internalize citizenship as lived ethics rather than abstract duty.

23. Narrative Ethics as Policy Complement

While NEP-2020 provides a structural framework for educational reform, Murty's fiction supplies its ethical texture. Her narratives operationalize policy ideals by translating abstract principles—holistic development, ethical reasoning, cultural rootedness—into lived experience. This complementarity highlights the importance of literature in policy implementation, reminding educators that ethical reform requires narrative imagination as much as institutional design.

Murty's fiction demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems are not relics to be archived but living resources capable of shaping contemporary education. Through narrative ethics, her work offers a model of ethical pedagogy that is culturally grounded, experientially rich, and pedagogically versatile.

24. Conclusion: Narrative Dharma as Ethical Pedagogy

This study has examined Sudha Murty's fiction as a contemporary articulation of Indian Knowledge Systems through the lens of narrative ethics, arguing that her storytelling constitutes a form of ethical pedagogy grounded in lived experience. Against critical tendencies that dismiss her work as merely popular or didactic, the paper has demonstrated that Murty's narratives enact a sophisticated moral framework—one that privileges discernment over prescription, experience over abstraction, and relational responsibility over rigid doctrine.

By conceptualizing Murty's storytelling as narrative dharma, the paper has shown how ethical knowledge in her fiction emerges through action, consequence, and empathetic engagement. Drawing upon indigenous pedagogical traditions—kathā-paramparā, experiential learning, and the integration of jnāna, karma, and dharma—Murty's fiction revives a civilisational mode of ethical instruction that remains deeply relevant to contemporary educational needs. Her narratives transform ordinary life into an ethical classroom, where values such as seva, sahajata, integrity, and social responsibility are learned through reflection rather than instruction.

The analysis of texts including Wise and Otherwise, Gently Falls the Bakula, Dollar Bahu, and Grandma's Bag of Stories has revealed how ethical learning operates across public, domestic, and intergenerational spaces. In particular, the paper has foregrounded Murty's nuanced engagement with gendered ethical labour, exposing an "invisible curriculum" in which women's moral contributions sustain social life while remaining structurally undervalued. By narrativizing this ethical labour without romanticization or polemic, Murty invites readers to cultivate moral attention toward silence, absence, and everyday sacrifice.

Situating Murty's narrative ethics within the framework of NEP-2020 further underscores the pedagogical significance of her work. As India's education policy emphasizes holistic development, value-based learning, and the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems, Murty's fiction offers a ready ethical vocabulary and

narrative methodology for realizing these goals in practice. Her accessible prose, experiential ethics, and interdisciplinary relevance make her work particularly suitable for classrooms, teacher education, and value-oriented curricula.

Ultimately, this paper contends that Sudha Murty's fiction exemplifies how literature can function as a living archive of Indian ethical thought—quietly shaping moral sensibility through stories that teach without teaching. In an era increasingly dominated by technocratic rationality and instrumental learning, Murty's narrative ethics reaffirm the enduring power of storytelling as a mode of ethical formation, cultural continuity, and human-cantered education.

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