



Reflection of social issues in Sudha Murty's *The Circle of Life*

Mrs.P. Amirthayogam

Assistant Professor of English

V.V.Vanniaperumal College for Women

Virudhunagar

Sidha Murty is known for her simple but powerful storytelling that captures the essence of life, love and human values. Sudha Murty's recently published book, *The Circle of Life*, sheds light on social issues. The current social issues such as, social and political corruption, sufferings and struggles of the underprivileged, rise in belief in astrology, relationship issue etc. get entangled with the interesting narrative in *The Circle of Life*.

Uttara Rao, Janaki Paranjape, Arvind Shaw, Subba Rao, and Sumitra Iyer became friends at Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore in 1999. Uttara, daughter of a well-known engineer in Hyderabad, had completed her engineering from Osmania University and applied for her master's in IISc. Subbu, son of a postman, graduated from Visvesvaraya College of Engineering, Bangalore. He completed his education on scholarship, and joined IISc with full scholarship. Janaki, daughter of Dr. Paranjape in Pune, completed her B.Sc., in IISc and joined the institute again for her post graduation. She wanted to become a computer scientist and an entrepreneur. Arvind, son of a successful business man and millionaire in Kanpur, completed her B.Tech., Civil in IIT, and joined IISc to pursue his master's. Sumitra, daughter of a school teacher in Chennai, hailed from an orthodox family, and joined for pursuing PhD., in Chemistry. On completing their courses, they decided to meet in the same institute after twenty-five years. What happened in their lives in these years forms the essence of the book, providing the writer with the ample space to exhibit her perspectives on social problems.

They all came from varied strata of society-from different states and communities, and spoke different languages. But there was one thing common: their love for knowledge. For that sake, they were all set to leave their homes and familiar environments and arrive at Bangalore to fulfil their ambition. (*The Circle of Life* 34)

Sudha Murty always exemplifies the transformative power of education and the limitless potential it possesses. She emphasizes on the need for educational institutions to instill self-confidence and resilience in students. (www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka)

The issue of corruption, which is blamed for stunting the economy of the country, is highlighted through Arvind's story. Arvind was very much interested in the upliftment of the underprivileged. So, he applied for a job in a company in Delhi that was working on a housing project in Madhya Pradesh. After joining the company, he started working on the project to build rural houses. Soon he found that his company had been building houses and bridges with low quality cement and producing false receipts. He was able to foresee the impending danger that the bridges would collapse and lead to the death of many people. When he questioned the concerned authorities, they advised him that he should take it lightly and think the population had decreased.

He resigned his job and understood that there might be many such companies which had been cheating the poor people. Then, he joined hands with the retired professor Parameshwaran who was working for the tribal people in Haripur, Madhya Pradesh.

Pami was a research student in Delhi university and she was inclined toward social work. When she was working on a project based on Arvind's work in Haripur, they fell in love and got married. After some days, Arvind's mentor Parameshwaran suffered a heart attack. They were helpless since the village had no good medical facilities. Their efforts to save him ended in vain and he passed away. Pami thought if Arvind was in politics, it would be easier for them to build hospitals and bridges. But Arvind was reluctant to get involved in politics.

Pami died in an accident which was caused by the bad condition of the roads. If the roads were good, Pami would be alive. This thought rang in Arvind's mind day and night. Arvind competed in the election to improve the living standard of the people by making better schools, roads and hospitals. He had lost the election as people whom he worked for ten years had not voted for him due to their lure of money and other things. He left Haripur with great disappointment. Arvind's brothers made him join the ruling party and prepared him for the elections in Beespur. He won the election with majority and became a state minister. He had been sincere in discharging his duties for one year, then he started accepting favours for his work. When he felt guilty of getting bribery for his work, his brother Ramesh convinced him saying,

If you don't take, someone else will take in your name. This favour is not given to you, because you are a good speaker, or have done social work, or are trying to bring a change or because they like you. They want a favour and that is why they are favouring you. (*The Circle of Life* 247)

The political life changed Arvind very much. A man of power, a true Gandhian, a great social worker had changed with power.

Sudha Murthy's stories often feature strong female characters who challenge societal norms. Janaki is depicted as one such strong character. Janaki married Nakul, her father's friend's son. They were working in Los Angeles. After their marriage, Janaki started her own company, and always busy with her projects. Nakul had an illegal relationship with his executive assistant, Sara. Janaki was shocked when she came to know his affair. She could not tolerate his disloyalty towards her. With no second thoughts, she decided to divorce him rejecting his plea to forgive him, and pursue her dreams. The hardships and difficulties made her more resilient and courageous and she became a successful entrepreneur.

Women have historically faced numerous challenges and discriminations in our society. By portraying strong female characters in my stories, I hope to inspire and empower women to break free from the shackles of social expectations. I want to encourage young girls to dream big, pursue passion, and behave in their ability. (<https://brainly.in/question/57201721>)

Marriage system in India is influenced by a lot of factors. One among them is astrology creating unnecessary stress and conflict within families. Even in era of scientific and technological advancement, many people had a belief in astrology. The strong influence of horoscope can make or break marriages. Important life choices were based on astrological compatibility rather than genuine love. Though the younger generation are more inclined towards love marriage, the orthodox parents insist on astrological check. This issue gets reflected in Sumitra's story. Sumitra wanted to pursue her post-doctoral degree in the prestigious German University. She got a scholarship and moved to London. After some years, she came back to India to join as a professor in IISc. Sumitra remained unmarried due to her ill-fated star. Her family could not find a suitable match for her. Narayan Iyer, the celebrated astrophysicist, made a marriage proposal to Sumitra. He was working in Princeton University and well known for his book *Myths in Astronomy*. His name had been proposed for Nobel Prize.

Sumitra was extremely happy and mentally prepared herself for the adjustments she had to make for her marriage life. She had to leave her present job and relocate to America. Her happiness was short lived. Narayan's

mother and her relatives made an objection to their marriage pointing out Sumitra's unfortunate horoscope. Narayan could not marry Sumitra against the wishes of his family as his mother threatened him that she would commit suicide if he married Sumitra. For Sumitra's valid question, "What is the writing of the book then? If you have been unable to convince your people at home, then how will you convince your readers", he had no answer. (*The Circle of Life* 208). Scientific community rejects astrology as a pseudoscience having no scientific validity. But, if the most educated and progressive scientist behaved like this, what could be said about common man. Favorinus, a Roman sophist, and skeptic philosopher argued that it was absurd to imagine that stars and planets would affect human bodies in the same way as they affect the tides, and equally absurd that small motions in the heavens cause large changes in people's fates. (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology>)

Sumitra continued to concentrate more on her work. Due to her immense dedication, she had an impressive list of accolades and merits to her name.

Another important deciding factor in marriages is money. Subbu referred to Gopal's proposal to marry Uttara as 'a priced catch' and he became envious of Gopal. So, when a chance for such a 'big catch' came to him, he was ready to give up other things. Subbu was working in the company of the rich man, Diwanji, in Pune. He was in love with Sarala, his personal assistant. He verified her background, and found out that she was from an extremely underprivileged family from Jama khandi and she was her family's main breadwinner. Subbu promised to marry Sarala. Meanwhile, Diwanji had a good impression about Subbu and he wanted her daughter, Veena, to marry a bright and promising young man like Subbu. When Diwanji asked his consent to marry his daughter, Subbu started analysing the gain from this marriage.

She was not bad looking, she would come with money, position, status and honour – everything that he longed for, for a long time. His dream would be realized with not much effort in his end. (*The Circle of Life* 173)

Subbu accepted to marry Veena, as Veena weighed higher than Sarala in the balance of life. But he was not happy in his marriage life. He had contracted leprosy and tried to hide it from Veena. When Veena came to know this, she wanted to be separated from him. Subbu thought that if he married Sarala, life would be more meaningful to him. Sudha Murty's advice to the youth they should not run after money, but instead be passionate about work and ethics in real life is relatable here. (www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh)

It was Uttara who took all efforts to convene a reunion in 2023. Uttara had always been working as a temporary faculty due to Gopal's frequent transfers. She preferred to work in a college closer to her house in a city where Gopal was posted. She was supportive to her family members. She always helped her friends in their difficult times. She attended Arvind's marriage, and gifted him one lakh rupees which was a great help for him. When Arvind was inconsolable after the death of his wife, she tried to console him. She took care of him and nursed him when he was suffering from typhoid. Arvind was deeply moved by her sisterly concern towards him. She retained her genuine nature through ups and downs of time. During her free time, she worked with leprosy patients in Bangalore. Uttara understood the mental agony of Subbu when he had had contracted leprosy. She comforted him saying that his illness would be curable and promised him that she would not reveal this to anybody.

Uttara had connected with everyone through WhatsApp and conveyed the date, time and venue of their promised reunion. It was exactly after twenty-five years, and at the same place – under the neem tree, at the Institute from where they had gone separate ways. (*The Circle of Life* 279) Everyone is willing to attend except Subbu. Uttara's role in convincing him is pivotal. First, he hesitated to come as everyone would ask about his wife Veena. But he accepted immediately after listening to Uttara's advice.

Nobody will ask. This is our meeting. Even if they ask, tell them Veena has gone to Dehradun for a PTA. I will support you. Please do come. I do not know where we will be after twenty-five years. Let us not give reasons, and waste our precious time. (*The Circle of Life* 280)

Gopal was also happy to join them as the witness. The visit to their alma mater after 25 years rekindled their good old memories. They were thrilled and excited to see the lecture hall, library, garden, computer centre etc. They were able to witness the changes in the Institute. There were many computer centres, the dress code of the students was changed and everyone seemed to be tech savvy.

Many people recognized Arvind Shaw as a famous minister, and Janaki Paranjape as an eminent entrepreneur. Sumitra had received the honour of Fellow of Royal Society. Uttara had a little bit of regret that she was the least recognized person. Everyone remained more or less in their own field, except Arvind. He had deviated so much from his vision. Sumitra said that she was successful only in Chemistry as many of her dreams remained unfulfilled. Listening to the story of their success and failure, Gopal defines true success in his terms.

It is very difficult to sum up success from someone else's view. It is like four blind men and an elephant. Everybody defines success the way they want, and they measure someone else's life with that yardstick. There is no complete success or complete failure. What brings happiness to us internally is success and can be measured with your own yardstick. (*The Circle of Life* 282)

Everybody was happy and agreed. They all wanted to stay in touch and went to relish the hostel food. As Uttara felt, life was like a flowing river and everyone was like a piece of wood floating on it. They may join at one place and disjoin at the other. (*The Circle of Life* 227)

As a story of hardships, perseverance, successes, and disappointments, Sudha Murty's *The Circle of Life* is a testament to her successful writing career, reflecting her thoughts on life and relationships. Her vast life experiences combined with artistic and creative skills are evident in her handling of social themes. Addressing the social issues is essential for the stability and prosperity of a society. Through her writings, Sudha Murty is creating positive and meaningful societal changes which are indispensable to improve the quality of the life of the individuals.

Works Cited

Murty, Sudha. (2025). *The Circle of Life*. Penguin Random House India: Gurugram.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/rank-not-important-in-life-but-courage-to-face-reality-is-says-sudha-murty/article68988939.ece>

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/be-passionate-about-work-and-do-not-run-after-money-sudha-murthy-exhorts-youth/article67796935.ece>

<https://brainly.in/question/57201721>

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology#:~:text=Favorinus%20argued%20that%20it%20was,with%20respect%20to%20the%20zodiac>