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Sudha Murty's "How the Onion Got its Layers": A Narrative Rooted in Indian Oral Traditions.

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Abstract

Sudha Murty's "How the Onion Got its Layers" fascinates young readers and plays a vital role in preserving essential cultural practices. Sudha Murty draws readers into a simple yet profound tale encapsulating life's experiential and emotional complexities.

Murty's narrative methods and how they mimic oral traditions, where, from generation to generation, the stories are passed, typically conveying cultural norms, moral guidance, and lessons. Though the audiences/readers are primarily from modern times, the essence of the stories remain true to the folklore's original charm, relatability, and simplicity. Her use of a familiar object as a metaphor reflects the layered nature of human emotions, encouraging deeper introspection among readers of all eras.

The paper highlights Murty's unique ability to infuse modern literature with timeless values, ensuring that these stories will be engaging and easily accessible to young readers. This contribution to the evolution of Indian storytelling underscores the enduring relevance of "How the Onion Got its Layers" in preserving essential cultural practices. This paper explores Sudha Murty's "How the Onion Got its Layers" as a narrative rooted in Indian oral traditions. It emphasises the book's unique role as a bridge between the oral storytelling practices that shaped Indian culture and contemporary children's literature.

Keywords- oral traditions, cultural practices, metaphor, contemporary readers

Introduction

Though we give so much of importance to our Indian culture but, when it comes to oral traditions one can easily say that it has been cornerstone since a very long time. The stories which were passed down through generations were how values, lessons, and cultural practices were conveyed. Though the oral storytelling may not occupy the same central position in the modern age, but its impact remains undeniable. Murty's book "How the Onion Got its Layers" is a modern manifestation of these traditions, capturing their essence in a contemporary form. Murty preserves and adapts the age- old storytelling practices for young minds and demonstrates how oral traditions can be relevant in today's context.

The book is not just a text; it carries the weight of centuries- old cultural wisdom while inducing complex ideas in accessible manners. Making the story a meaningful exploration of self-awareness, empathy. And interpersonal relationships, the onion, with its numerous layers, serves as a metaphor for the complexity of human emotions.

The Role of Oral Traditions in Indian Culture:

In India, oral storytelling has historically been a primary vehicle for transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural norms. Oral narratives have played an important role in shaping the collective consciousness of the Indian subcontinent from the ancient epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana to folk tales and mythological stories. These stories were not just entertainment but a way to help communities understand their place in the world, instil morals, foster social cohesion.

These stories have echoed in every village and passed down from generations to generations, often narrated by griots, storyteller and elders who used rich, vivid language to engage the young audiences. Often laced with humour, parables, lessons, these stories made the audience



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feel relatable. This narrative style which focuses on teaching life lessons is visible in Murty's work which is characterised by a conventional tone.

Sudha Murty's Narrative Technique:

Simplicity and clarity in writing is what one gets in Murty's text. Her narrative style in *How the Onion Got its Layers* echoes the characteristics of oral traditions. With an engaging and conventional tone, Murty employs a straightforward, easy-to-follow structure. The plot revolves around a common object in Indian kitchen which is an onion and how it serves as an emotional and psychological complexities of human nature. Through the story she draws a parallel between the multifaced nature of human emotions and experiences and the onion.

The key feature of Indian oral tradition is the use of metaphor. Human behaviour, social values and relationships have often been explained by serving a variety of metaphors through the folk stories of animals, yore, objects and nature. A symbolic representation of the complexities that lie beneath the surface of individuals has been metaphorically unleashed by Murty by following the same tradition using onion a simple and relatable object. Just as an onion reveals its layers of human emotions- such as happiness, sorrow, anger and love- are revealed through experiences and self- reflection.

On top of that the interaction and the use of dialogue between characters in *How the Onion got its Layers* reflects how the stories were narrated in Indian oral culture. The story draws the attention of the readers and make it feel personal as the characters In Murty's tale speak in a natural, engaging manner. The narrative skills which Murty has not only reflects how much it is rooted in oral traditions but also adapted herself to attract the contemporary audience.

The Onion as a Metaphor for Human Complexity:

In Murty's narrative the onion serves as a powerful metaphor, symbolizing the various layers of human emotions and experiences. Just like an onion has many layers, human beings too possess multifaceted personalities shaped by their interactions, emotions and relationships. The emotional journey of understanding oneself and others is parallel to the peeling away of an onion's layers, which often leads to tears.

Different emotional states of humans have been flashed in the story – each one revealing a new aspect of individual, different facets of human nature is exposed through different life experiences. The readers, especially children are encouraged through this metaphor to reflect on the complexity of their own feelings and those of others. It underscores the idea that no one is ever truly one- dimensional, and that in dealing with people from different walks of life we need understanding and empathy.

Preservation of Cultural Practices:

Sudha Murty has immensely contributed the preservation of Indian oral tradition and cultural practices by weaving this narrative into a simple, engaging tale for young readers. The Indian nature that is deeply ingrained in Indian folklore is reflected in her book *How the Onion Got its Layers*. Murty bridges the gap between past and present by ensuring that these lessons are passed on to future generations.

The book not only attracts the local young minds but also her global followers unravelling the rich cultural tapestry of India to the world. Through her simple yet profound storytelling, Murty ensures that the cultural heritage embedded in Indian folklore remains accessible and relevant in contemporary times.

Contemporary Relevance of Oral Traditions in Children's Literature:

Children's literature continues to be strong as they have a strong influence of the oral traditions even though it might not be widely practiced in modern times. Authors like Sudha Murty demonstrates how these traditions can be seamlessly incorporated into modern narratives. The



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hallmark of a great storytelling is the ability to convey moral lessons, emotional complexities, and life's intricacies in an engaging and accessible manner.

Murty's work is a prime example of how the attention of young readers can be drawn on traditional forms through a contemporary writer. The story provides a valuable blueprint for how oral traditions can be modernized and preserved for future generations without losing the essence of it. Murty's book contributes to the ongoing evaluation of Indian children's literature by combining the simplicity of storytelling with profound themes.

Conclusion:

Sudha Murty's *How the Onion Got its Layers* is not merely a book which you will easily pick in the school library but it's a narrative deeply rooted in the tradition of oral storytelling. The simple language, engaging characters and profound metaphors, Murty preserves the core principle of Indian folklore while making them accessible to today's readers. The onion, as a symbol of human emotions, serves as a powerful metaphor for the complexity of human nature, urging readers to reflect on their feelings and relationships. The perfect blending of traditional Indian cultural practices with contemporary storytelling, Murty make sure that the essence of oral traditions continues to resonate with audiences across generations, fostering an enduring connection to India's rich cultural heritage.

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