
Whiskers and Wonders: The Importance of Anthropomorphism in Sudha Murty's *The Bird With Golden Wings: Stories of Wit and Magic*

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Abstract: Anthropomorphism and its relation to children's literature in the context of Indian literature is very old. Stories from the Panchatantra to Jataka tales often use animals to illustrate virtues like wisdom, bravery, and kindness, making them accessible to children. By presenting animals and objects as characters with human-like qualities, authors stimulate children's imagination and curiosity. This engagement fosters a love for reading and storytelling, as children can easily relate to the characters' adventures and emotions. Many Indian writers like Ruskin Bond, Sudha Murty, Anushka Ravishankar, Aditi De, Vikram Seth, Kiran Nagarkar, Shivani Singh, and many other Indian writers have successfully utilized anthropomorphism to create memorable characters. This paper explores the effective use of anthropomorphism in Sudha Murty's *The Bird With Golden Wings* and its impact on young readers.

Murty, a well-known Indian author, has contributed significantly to children's literature. Her stories frequently include animals that have human-like characteristics, reflecting a long-standing literary tradition, which adds depth and relatability to her storytelling. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human traits, emotions, and intentions to non-human entities, such as animals, objects, or any other abstract concepts. In Sudha Murty's work, we can see she frequently uses animals and inanimate objects to convey moral lessons, showcase cultural values, and express human emotions.

In children's literature, anthropomorphism serves as a bridge that connects young readers to characters and narratives that might otherwise seem remote or abstract. This paper analyzes how the element of anthropomorphism shapes the narrative landscape of children's literature in Murty's work and, at the same time, provides valuable lessons to future generations, aligning her narrative with the NEP (National Education Policy) of 2020.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Children's Literature, Sudha Murty, Imagination, Narration.

Introduction: Anthropomorphism, or personification, is a common storytelling technique

that has been used since ancient times. For example, the story “The Hawk and the Nightingale” in Hesiod's *Works and Days* uses animals to illustrate moral lessons. Aesop's Fables are replete with anthropomorphic animals that demonstrate human follies and virtues. Many animal stereotypes we know today, like the clever fox and the proud lion, can be found in these stories. By the first century CE, Aesop's stories had become so well-known that they influenced the thoughts of philosophers. One philosopher, Apollonius of Tyana, noted that these stories make animals seem interesting and appealing to people. In the Indian context, *Amar Chitra Katha* and *Chandamama* also feature anthropomorphic stories which play a vital role in children's literature. It is a popular Indian comic book series and magazine that brings to life various stories from Indian mythology, history, and folklore. While the series primarily focuses on human characters and historical figures, it also incorporates elements of anthropomorphism, particularly through its portrayal of animals and deities. Animals in these stories are depicted with human-like qualities, such as the ability to speak, express emotions, and exhibit intelligence. For example, characters like the wise crow or the clever fox might be featured in stories that teach moral lessons, similar to Aesop's fables.

The term “anthropomorphism” originates from the Greek word *anthropos*, meaning “human,” and *morphe*, meaning “form” or “shape.” Thus, it literally translates to “giving human form” or “attributing human characteristics” to non-human entities. In ancient mythology, gods and goddesses were frequently depicted with human traits and emotions, making them more accessible to people. In the same manner, here animals are often given human-like qualities to convey moral lessons and engage audiences. In present times, Devdutt Pattanaik, an Indian author and mythologist, often employs the theme of anthropomorphism in his works to explore and explain complex ideas from Indian mythology and culture. In his retellings of stories from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, gods and goddesses are depicted with vulnerabilities, making their experiences resonate with human readers. This approach helps to illustrate moral dilemmas and the complexities of relationships.

Another fascinating writer in this genre is Sudha Murty. Her work, *The Bird with Golden Wings*, also depicts the theme or element of anthropomorphism, serving to convey important moral lessons and human emotions through the portrayal of animals and their interactions with humans. The primary focus of this research paper is to interpret how she has incorporated the theme of anthropomorphism in her work and, at the same time, given some important life lessons, which shape the young reader's mind. This also makes her work important to be analysed from the perspective of the NEP (National Education Policy) of 2020, as it is also focused on giving moral values to children and making their core strong.

1. The Bird with Golden Wings: Stories of Wit and Magic: This is a collection of 21 whimsical and mystical stories; it is full of magic and wit. Most of the stories revolve around the belief of “What you sow, so shall you reap.” There are illustrations in cartoon style all over the book in black and white, done by Ajanta Guhathakurta, an illustrator for Penguin Books, India. Stories and illustrations rely heavily on Indian traditions. By incorporating

anthropomorphism, Murty connects the story to broader cultural themes, such as the value of nature and the interconnectedness of all living beings. The portrayal of the bird as a character with human traits also reinforces the idea that animals are deserving of respect and empathy, aligning with traditional Indian values that emphasize harmony with nature.

1.1 *The Golden Fish and the Demon:* This is the first chapter in the book. It has a golden fish, which is not just a fish; it possesses the ability to speak and grant wishes, embodying wisdom and a sense of benevolence. Its interactions with the fisherman reflect human emotions and motivations. Whereas the demon represents greed and malice, often depicted with human-like traits such as cunning and a desire for power. Its character serves as a foil to the fish, highlighting themes of selfishness versus generosity. The character of the fisherman also shows certain zoomorphic (attribution of animal characteristics to a human, object, or god) traits as he interacts with both the fish and the demon, doing something beyond human capacity. His desires and moral dilemmas reflect human struggles and emotions, making him a relatable character for the reader.

Through the portrayal of the fish and the demon, with anthropomorphic traits, the story conveys moral lessons about integrity and contentment.

1.2 *Divide and Eat:* This story revolves around the theme of sharing. The core message is based on the importance of dividing and sharing resources with each other. It doesn't have any anthropomorphized characters but does provide a very important life lesson to children, stressing equitable distribution and the dangers of selfishness.

1.3 *Skills for a Prince:* This story highlights King Amritsena's intelligence, wit, and fairness in testing the men's claims and then utilizing their unique skills for the benefit of his kingdom, rather than punishing them for their initial transgression. It subtly teaches about judging people not just by their actions but also by their potential and unique abilities. Here, we cannot see any anthropomorphized characters, but for children's psychological development, we find underlying themes of the importance of practical skills and intelligence, discernment and wisdom in leadership, fairness and justice, leadership through prudence (not just power), utilizing diverse talents for the greater good, mercy, forgiveness, and many more.

1.4 *How the Sea Became Salty:* This story explains a natural phenomenon through a classic folk tale narrative, relying heavily on anthropomorphized elements to drive the narrative and convey its moral lesson. In the story, a magic fan—an inanimate object—can produce anything desired, including salt. The fan has immense power and domination to produce, and its behaviour dictates the unfolding events. There are good and greedy characters who come into possession of this magical object. The human flaws like greed, impatience, and lack of wisdom are central to the story. Their inability to control their desires or understand the consequences of their actions directly leads to the sea becoming salty. The sea itself is anthropomorphized indirectly in the story, but it transforms from sweet to salty, becoming a

victim of human desire. The magic fan, the fascinating magical dwarves in the story, and the greedy human characters all have the ability to create a memorable childhood fantasy that is both entertaining and educational.

1.5 *The Banana Tree Princess:* Here, in this story, the banana tree indirectly attributes the elements of anthropomorphism through the princess who lives inside it. The princess who lives in the banana tree is kind, generous, and possesses magical abilities, reflecting human values and traits. The prince is attracted to a mango tree which bears sweet fruits, indirectly showing a kind of association and connection with the natural world. This story teaches us that obedience and trust are the most important aspects of forming healthy and long-lasting relationships.

1.6 *How to Catch a Goddess:* This story incorporates elements of anthropomorphism through the goddess Lakshmi, who is depicted with human-like qualities and emotions, and indirectly also through the bird who catches the queen's necklaces. The title treats a divine entity like something that can be caught or attracted by specific, virtuous human behaviour, rather than just random divine grace. Thus, it shows or teaches children virtues of cleanliness, hard work, sincerity, and wisdom. Also, the interaction between Rohini and Goddess Lakshmi highlights the idea of culture and traditions, which are inseparable from us.

1.7 *The Precious Rupee:* This story teaches us the importance of working hard through the father and son characters. It doesn't have any anthropomorphism elements, but it does teach children the importance of earning money, as earning is not easy, but spending is.

1.8 *The Bird with Golden Wings:* Here, the bird with golden wings has anthropomorphism elements in it, attributed with human characteristics, emotions, and behaviours—for instance, the bird's generosity towards Varsha and rudeness towards Kapila, whom the bird finds very greedy and selfish. Varsha's character has the qualities of kindness, compassion, and resilience. Her interaction with the bird symbolizes her nurturing nature and her ability to see beauty in the world around her. Her actions and character teach children to value empathy and kindness. Kapila is very greedy and envious; his desire to take what is not rightfully his leads to negative consequences.

1.9 *The Smartest Cook:* Here, we don't find any anthropomorphism elements, but the story talks about how wit, humour, and intelligence can help people solve any problem. Clever thought and interpretation of a challenge help in a big way. Through the cook character, the author stresses practical intelligence, which can be more powerful than physical strength. Thinking outside the box, wit, and discernment are valuable assets. These qualities can lead to success and recognition.

1.10 *Sukeshini and the Lake Demon:* In this story, we have anthropomorphism in the lake demon character, who is terrifying, powerful, and evil. He is magical and unreal to human thought but has been given traits of anthropomorphism. Sukeshini demonstrates immense bravery by confronting a terrifying demon for the sake of her village, which itself is a powerful virtue and a lesson to learn from her character. Intelligence and wit overcome brute strength, rather than attempting a physical fight which she cannot win. Her motivation is purely for the well-being of her village, emphasizing the value of communal responsibility and selflessness. The lake demon is shown having human-like emotions and a personality of malevolence, cunning, pride, and arrogance. Here, the author makes it a more complex and engaging antagonist, making it a battle of minds and virtues, enhancing the moral lessons derived from Sukeshini's cleverness and bravery. The demon in the story guides children to shun vices—or else face terrible consequences.

1.11 *The Silly Rich Boy:* This is a light-hearted story. Here, we don't find any elements of anthropomorphism. This story teaches children to listen to their parents and to gain knowledge and wisdom through the character of a young, arrogant, and somewhat naive rich boy and the consequences of arrogance and greed.

1.12 *The Clever Thieves:* It is a folktale about a thief who uses wit and cleverness to outsmart others and achieve his goals. There are no elements of anthropomorphism in the tale, but it does teach children about the importance of wit and intelligence and that it should be applied in a manner that is ethical and constructive.

1.13 *The King with Donkey's Ears:* This story talks about the burden of keeping secrets, which sometimes can be heavy, and how truth will eventually come to light regardless of attempts to hide it. It also touches on the idea that everyone has imperfections, and accepting them is part of being human, encouraging readers to embrace their flaws rather than hide them. As truth cannot be concealed indefinitely, it will eventually emerge, often in unexpected ways. The barber's struggle to keep the king's secret shows the psychological stress and emotional burden that secrets can impose on individuals, whereas honesty is often a lighter burden than deceit. The comparison of the king's ears to those of a donkey imbues the king with human-like emotions of shame and pride. The donkey, often associated with stubbornness and humility, serves as a metaphor for the king's own pride and the need for self-awareness. Also, the tree trunk (indirectly) and the drum (directly) are given the human traits of speaking, eventually revealing the secret. Thus, these elements of anthropomorphism serve to convey moral lessons and a rich narrative that encourages reflection on truth, humility, and the nature of human flaws, and also shows how accepting oneself leads to true wisdom.

1.14 *Books for the Cook:* There are no anthropomorphic elements in the story. It revolves around the power of knowledge and the joy of reading books. It shows how education and literacy can transform one's life and how leisure can spoil things and people.

1.15 The Kind Stepmother: Here, the author teaches the value of love, kindness, and compassion, which can transform relationships and bring happiness into one's life. In the story, the snake is given anthropomorphized elements. For instance, the snake talks like a human, expresses gratitude, and has the capacity to bestow blessings and to curse and cure, which allows for deeper moral and philosophical exploration. This connects with Indian culture, where worshipping snakes is also a part of many traditions. The snake is not merely a reptile but a divine entity with the power to grant wishes and influence human lives and is given human traits.

1.16 A Father's Wisdom: It's another wonderful story from Murty that gives the moral that true wisdom lies not in literal interpretation or rigid adherence to advice but in understanding the underlying principles, adapting them to specific situations, and applying common sense and thoughtful discretion. This reflects a broader lesson on the importance of critical thinking and independent reasoning.

1.17 The Cunning Lion: The lion in the story heavily features anthropomorphic elements. It is portrayed with evil intentions and discontentment; it plans, plots, and manipulates. It displays a human-like capacity for strategic thinking, deception, and ambition beyond basic animal needs. It uses its mind to exploit situations and other beings. The lion's desire to rule and establish control over the village or forest goes beyond typical animal behavior. The lion represents human ambition, power struggles, and the desire for dominance seen in human societies. Also, zoomorphism (the attribution of animal characteristics to a human, object, or god) elements can be seen—how the lion's downfall is brought about by the clever character Bela, who takes a monstrous animal form with the help of other characters in the tale. Intelligence over strength, arrogance leading to downfall, and the destructiveness of greed and selfishness are many of the lessons to be learned from this particular story.

1.18 The Magic Jug: This story features a cloth and a jug possessing magical qualities, producing gold coins and turning a human into an animal form like a donkey. Here, the jug is not just a passive object with a fixed magical property, but rather it reacts to human virtues and vices. It's as if it knows the heart of the person using it, which is a very human-like judgmental quality. For example, when the selfish neighbor tries to use it for his selfish gain, it turns him into a donkey. Thus, the magic isn't constant; it's conditional on human behavior. Here, elements of anthropomorphism are indirectly attributed to the donkey and the inanimate object, the jug and the cloth.

1.19 The Wishing Tree: The wishing tree is given anthropomorphic qualities, associated with the divine ability to fulfill wishes. This tale explores the complexities of family relationships between a stepmother and her stepchild and the power of selfless love. The anthropomorphic elements in the story—the “wishing tree,” or ‘Kalpavriksha’—are deeply rooted in Indian culture. The blessings it represents manifest not in material wealth, but in the restoration of love and harmony within a family. The tree has the ability to judge; it does not merely act as a vending machine for wishes. Because, in the end, we actually don't know

whether the stepmother's change of heart is due to Lakshman's wish or her own realization of her mistakes.

1.20 Tit for Tat: The story typically features two main characters, often a clever or cunning individual and a naive or innocent one. The core premise revolves around the idea of receiving back exactly what one gives, especially in terms of unfairness or deception. Here, in the story, monkeys are anthropomorphized indirectly by being given human traits.

1.21 Sow a Witch: Witches in folklore are often powerful but can have peculiar vulnerabilities or be susceptible to clever tricks. Here, a witch is tricked into a situation where she is literally turned into a soybean. The sowing aspect of the title becomes literal—the witch is sown as a bean. The anthropomorphism is given to the witch, which helps readers understand the story in an interesting way. Once she becomes a soybean, she is rendered powerless and can be easily dealt with—perhaps cooked, buried, or simply unable to harm anyone anymore. Here, the author also shows cultural significance, where roasted soybeans are thrown to ward off evil. Thus, before her transformation, the witch is herself a highly anthropomorphic character—having a human-like form, evil intentions, speech, magical powers, cunning, and arrogance. The act of her turning into a soybean introduces a subtle but profound twist related to anthropomorphism, as she has later been *de-anthropomorphized* by being completely turned into a plant.

Conclusion: In conclusion, Murty intricately weaves the elements of moral teaching, anthropomorphism, and zoomorphism into her tales, enriching narratives and inviting young readers into a world where animals possess human traits and wisdom guides action. These stories reflect cultural values and traditions with a focus on ethics and empathy. The stories of Murty serve not only to entertain but also to educate and enlighten, imparting essential life lessons while fostering a sense of wonder and connection to the world around us. According to the National Education Policy of 2020, which emphasizes a comprehensive approach to education that values holistic development, inclusivity, quality, cultural awareness, and sustainability, these stories of Sudha Murty perfectly align with its objectives. They offer children engaging and culturally significant content that fosters critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and a profound appreciation for their surroundings. Her stories serve as a powerful tool in achieving the goals of NEP 2020. Her work not only entertains but also educates, aligning perfectly with the vision for a transformative educational framework in India.

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