

Learning to Rise: Education and Empowerment in How I Taught My Grandmother to Read by Sudha Murthy and The Postmaster by Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

Using two literary works—How I Taught My Grandmother to Read by Sudha Murthy and The Postmaster by Rabindranath Tagore—this research paper examines education as a means of achieving dignity. Murthy recounts the inspirational story of her sixty-two-year-old grandmother Shrimati, who felt humiliated by her incapacity to read devotional texts on her own and decided to become literate. In contrast, Tagore portrays the Postmaster's loneliness and that of Ratan, an illiterate village girl whose unmet desire for direction highlights the silent deprivation brought on by illiteracy. This study makes the case that literacy is not only functional but also linked to self-respect, empathy, and empowerment by closely analyzing the incidents in these works.

Keywords: Education, Empowerment, Rabindranath Tagore, Sudha Murthy, Literacy.

The Study's Objective

- To examine instances that demonstrate literacy as a matter of self-worth and dignity.
- To look at how Tagore and Murthy emphasize the transformative power of education through everyday experiences.
- To highlight the human costs of acquiring literacy (Murthy) as opposed to being denied it (Tagore).

1. Introduction

Education is frequently portrayed in literature as a lived experience rather than an abstract idea. Ordinary events that uncover extraordinary truths about human dignity give stories their power. In her book How I Taught My Grandmother to Read, Murthy describes how, as a child, she helped her grandmother learn to read after the latter became embarrassed when she was unable to follow a saint's story in a weekly magazine. Tagore, on the other hand, places education in the context of lack: Ratan's vulnerability as an uneducated girl in rural Bengal is reflected in her incapacity to express herself or to secure her emotional

needs with the Postmaster. Despite being written in different decades, these works highlight through incidents that literacy is more than just a skill; it is a source of empowerment, empathy, and identity.

2. Analysis:

Shrimati's humiliation and resolution (How I taught my grandmother to read):

The grandmother's pivotal moment in Murthy's story happens when she hears her granddaughter narrate a saint's story. With tears in her eyes, Shrimati confesses that she felt "so helpless and small when I could not read the story on my own," which strengthens her resolve to learn. It is both humbling and revolutionary to see an old woman sitting among kids, demanding a slate and chalk. Here, literacy is portrayed as a tool for self-determination that emerged from a single instance of vulnerability.

The Letter (The Postmaster) That Ratan Could Not Write

Ratan begs the Postmaster in *The Postmaster* to teach her to read and write in order to establish a relationship that transcends her enslavement. However, he never keeps this pledge. Ratan implores him to write to her after he departs the village. Even if he did, she wouldn't be able to read his letters, which is a cruel irony. In stark contrast to Murthy's account of acquiring literacy, this incident demonstrates how illiteracy results in emotional desertion and lifetime reliance.

The Teaching Incident During Summer Vacation (How I taught my grandmother to read)

Murthy pretends to be a teacher during her summer break, helping her grandmother by drawing alphabets on a slate. After being made fun of for lacking education, Shrimati diligently repeats after the young child, while highlighting the delight of intergenerational connection, the role reversal between child-teacher and adult-student dramatizes the dignity that learning bestows, regardless of age.

Loneliness by the Pond the Postmaster)

Tagore's Postmaster frequently composes verses while sitting by the pond, yearning for Calcutta. Education creates a barrier between them while Ratan hovers close by, awaiting attention. Ratan's exclusion is further reinforced by the stark contrast between her silence and the Postmaster's literate world of poetry. This incident illustrates how knowledge—or lack thereof—shapes interpersonal relationships by presenting literacy as both a privilege and a social divide.

Literacy as Empowerment (How I taught my grandmother to read)

When Shrimati reads aloud a lesson for the first time on her own, it is the most poignant moment in Murthy's story. She changes from a reliant grandmother to an independent learner with her proud statement, "Now I can read any novel I want, without anyone's help." This instance demonstrates how education restores self-confidence, agency, and dignity.

Last Departure (The Postmaster)

Tagore's story reaches its climax when the Postmaster gets ready to leave the city and denies Ratan's fervent requests to go with him. Helpless, she watches him go. Because she is illiterate, she is unable to follow him, write to him, or establish an independent life, which adds emotional weight to this scene. She is condemned to isolation due to her lack of education, which stands in sharp moral contrast to Murthy's story.

3. Outcome of the Research

The study illustrates how Murthy and Tagore provide two opposing viewpoints on literacy by concentrating on these instances. According to Murthy, obtaining literacy results in joy, independence, and empowerment. The lack of literacy in Tagore's story leaves people feeling hopeless and powerless. When taken as a whole, these incidents highlight the fundamental reality that education is not optional—it is fundamental

4. Conclusion

The events in *The Postmaster* and *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read* demonstrate how literacy affects a person's interpersonal interactions in addition to their personal development. While Tagore warns of the silent suffering that results when literacy is denied, Murthy demonstrates how education can restore dignity even at sixty-two. Both authors affirm that education is more than academic success—it is a human necessity, a moral right, and an act of compassion—by firmly establishing their points on straightforward but impactful incidents.

References

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