

## Similar Narrative Structure between Sudha Murty's Indian Version and its European Analogous

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a comparative study of Sudha Murty's Indian retelling, *The Golden Fish and the Demon* with its two European analogues. Russian writer, Alexander Pushkin wrote *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish* whereas German storyteller, Grimm Brothers wrote *The Fisherman and His Wife*. All three versions undertake common folk elements such as anthropomorphism, sea-side setting, binary opposition of the characters, repetitive narrative structure, circular journey, punishment and transformation. The present study explores how a common narrative is culturally reshaped across Indian, Russian, and German traditions. Russian and German tales emphasize material loss and social downfall as punishment for greed. On the other hand, Sudha Murty's Indian retelling emphasizes moral and psychological degeneration through the symbolic dehumanization. This study reflects an Indian moral view where moral fall is more consequential than economic and social deprivation.

**Keywords:** Sudha Murty, Alexander Pushkin, Grimm Brothers, Indian retelling, anthropomorphism, binary opposition, dehumanization

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Date of Submission: 01-03-2026

Date of acceptance: 10-03-2026

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### I. Introduction

Folktales are most enduring forms of cultural expression. Many folktales share interestingly similar narrative structures despite their geographical and cultural diversity. Among such stories, the tale of a wish-fulfilling golden fish occupies an important place in global folklore, which focuses on human desire, greed and punishment. This common narrative appears in Sudha Murty's Indian version, *The Golden Fish and the Demon*, Alexander Pushkin's Russian poetic tale, *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*, and Grimm Brothers' German folktale, *The Fisherman and His Wife*. All three tales follow a common structural pattern – early poverty life, encounter with a golden fish with magical power, increasing desire, punishment. While the structural pattern is the same, the type of punishment in Indian version differs significantly.

Sudha Murty's narrative *The Golden Fish and the Demon* is included in *The Bird with Golden Wings: Stories of Wit and Magic*. When compared with Alexander Pushkin's Russian poetic tale and Grimm Brothers' German version, Murty's narrative differs significantly in its treatment of punishment, character transformation, and moral degeneration. In European analogues, where punishment is totally material and economic, Murty's narrative focuses on moral and psychological dehumanization of the female protagonist through her transformation into a demon. This shift signifies that in Indian cultural context, moral fall is regarded as more catastrophic than the loss of wealth or social status. Contrarily, Russian and German versions reflect social anxieties regarding power, hierarchy, assets, resolving imbalance through a return to poverty.

The present study compares these three versions to examine how a common narrative expresses distinct cultural traits in different contexts of countries. This paper highlights folklore as a dynamic cultural form that negotiates moral values related to desire, power, and responsibility by juxtaposing Murty's Indian retelling and European analogues.

### II. Literature Review

Singh[4] has explored the human attribution in non-human characters like the golden fish and the demon. The golden fish's ability to speak and grant wishes symbolise positive human qualities like wisdom and a sense of benevolence. Whereas, negative human traits like greed, malice, cunning, and desire for power are represented by the demon. To the researcher the demon acts as a foil to the fish, highlighting themes of selfishness versus generosity. The researcher has also explored attributions of animal traits within the character of Suraj. He interacts with the golden fish and the demon, which are beyond human capability.

Chopra and Mathur [9] critically examine the narrative style, thematic depth, and emotional undertones of Gopi Diaries series. They have observed that though these books are primarily written for children, the books

engage with universal issues such as love, companionship, aging, mortality, moral value and importance of pet animals. The researchers highlight the bond between humans and animals that serves as a subtle commentary on values like empathy, kindness, and emotional intelligence. They have found this trilogy as a significant contribution to Indian children's literature, blending warmth, wisdom, and cultural context in a unique and accessible way.

Bag [10] analyses how Murty tries to teach Indian values for her target readership of children and young adults through her story telling. The researcher has identified how Murty praises the positive values of truthfulness, diligence, and kindness; and opposes the negative traits like niggardliness, exaggeration, and avarice. The researcher has also attempted to indicate the significance of the author's invocation of a rural past and invectives against a consumerist culture in the selected short stories.

Chopra and Mishra[11]have explored that Sudha Murthy's children's literature is educational, entertaining, and socially relevant. Through her creative storytelling, she provides cultural representation, and moral guidance. She bridges the gap between artistic expression and societal values. Her children's literature implements empathy, social responsibility, and cultural awareness. The fusion between society and art in her writing makes her literature timeless, insightful, and influential for readers of all ages.

### **Research Objectives:**

- a) To examine the common narrative structure of the selected folktale versions
- b) To analyse the role of binary opposition in the selected folktales versions
- c) To explore the folk elements in the selected folktales versions
- d) To compare the modes of punishment in the selected folktale versions

## **III. Discussion**

### **a) Common Narrative Structure**

The study is based on three primary texts:

- (i) Indian folktale, The Golden Fish and the Demon retold by Sudha Murty
- (ii) Russian verse folktale The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish by Alexander Pushkin
- (iii) German folktale The Fisherman and His Wife collected by Grimm Brothers

All three versions follow a common narrative structure. A fisherman and his wife live in poverty. The fisherman encounters a golden fish that has magical power of wish fulfilment. The magical fish grants those wishes which are progressively increased due to the wife's greed. Wife's increasing demand leads ultimately to punishment.

While the structural sequence remains the same in all three versions, the type of punishment differs. In Sudha Murty's Indian folktale, the wife is transformed into a demon and live in isolation with all her wealth. This transformation and punishment symbolize moral dehumanization and spiritual isolation. Whereas in Pushkin and Grimm's European versions the fisherman and his wife lose all material gains and return to their original miserable condition. Thus, in European versions, greed is punished through economic loss, whereas, Indian version enforces moral and existential punishment.

### **(b) Binary Opposition**

All three versions follow a common set of binary oppositions:

1. Contentment vs. greed
2. Hardship vs. comfort
3. Poverty vs. wealth
4. Humbleness vs. power
5. Human vs. non-human

In Sudha Murty's Indian version, Suraj is a peace-loving, hardworking, content fisherman, while his wife, Lakshmi is loud, dominating, greedy and dissatisfied with her lot. Both Russian and German versions retain the same opposition, though the characters do not have any particular names. In Murty's version, the characters of the story are individualized. On the contrary in European versions, the characters of the story are archetypal. This contrast signifies that in Indian context, both individuals and plot are important; whereas in European context, only plot is important.

In all three versions, the fisherman and his wife live in poverty and hardship. With the help of a magical fish they gain wealth and start living comfortably for a period of time. In all three versions, the fisherman is humble and passive character who always follow wife's order. There is little difference in the character of the fisherman's wife in Indian and European versions. In Indian narrative, Suraj's first requirement was firewood. Afterwards, Lakshmi sends him for asking food grains, grand clothes, better house, pots of gold,

and finally permanent security of their wealth. Here, her desire is totally material for better lifestyle. In Russian version, the fisherman initially wishes for a new trough. Then his wife sends him for asking new house, and a palace for comfortable living. Next, she sends him to the golden fish wanting to be a noble lady, then ruler of the province, then the tsarina, and finally to become the ruler of the sea and to want the magical fish as her servant. Here, her desire was initially for material comfort, then desire for social hierarchy and power. In German folktale, collected by Grimm Brothers, the fisherman does not ask anything from the magical fish. His wife sends him for asking a palace, then to become the queen, then the empress, the Pope, and finally to be equal to God by controlling the sun and the moon. Here, her desire is totally for authority.

In all three versions there are two human characters and one non-human (animal) character. But in Sudha Murty's retelling, one human character (Lakshmi) is transformed into another non-human character (demon). This opposition between human and demon becomes the central theme of the story, as Lakshmi's transformation signifies moral degeneration and loss of humanity.

#### **(c) Common Folk Elements**

**Anthropomorphism** is the key folk element in all three versions. The golden fish is attributed human quality. It speaks, prays for life, and has magical power of wish fulfilment. The fish is capable of rewarding virtue and punishing moral failure.

**Repetitive structure** is a central folk device in all three versions. The fisherman repeatedly approaches the fish, each time requesting something greater. Suraj's first requirement was firewood. Gradually, Lakshmi sends him for asking food grains, grand clothes, better house, pots of gold, and finally permanent security of their wealth. In Pushkin's Russian tale, the fisherman initially wishes for a new trough. Then his wife sends him again and again asking for a new house, noble status, to be ruler of the province, the tsarina, and finally to become the ruler of the sea having the magical fish as her servant. In Grimm Brothers' German folktale, the fisherman's wife desires for a palace, to be the queen, empress, pope, to be equal to God.

**Nature** plays an important role in all three versions. It is used as symbolic indicator. Both in Pushkin's Russian tale and Grimm Brothers' German folktale, the sea becomes more and more stormy, violent, and rougher each time the fisherman comes to meet the golden fish for fulfilling his wife's increasing desire. The colour of the sea water also changes from deep blue to grey and finally black. The change of sea mirrors her growing greed. When the couple lose all material gains, the sea becomes calm, quiet, and blue again. In Sudha Murty's Indian retelling, no such external change is emphasized. Instead, the change of human nature is shown through moral decay. Hardworking Suraj becomes lazy; Lakshmi becomes more domineering, she lost mental peace after getting excessive wealth and suffers from insecurity of losing wealth. Finally, she is transformed into a demon and remains isolated till her death. Suraj never returns to her, and the golden fish never appears. The role of nature highlights a cultural difference. European versions externalize moral disorder through external nature, whereas, Indian version internalizes it through human psyche.

#### **(d) Modes of Punishment**

There is a stark contrast in the mode of punishment between Sudha Murty's Indian story and its European analogous. Lakshmi desires for material security and lifestyle improvement. This escalating desire reflects the anxiety for security in Indian society. Her escalating demand transforms her into a demon. She loses her humanity and remains isolated till her death with all her wealth. Even, Suraj also leaves her. Her transformation symbolizes moral dehumanization and spiritual isolation. Thus, Sudha Murty's version enforces moral and existential punishment. This punishment suggests that moral punishment is more devastating than financial ruin.

In Pushkin's Russian version, the fisherman's wife desires for social hierarchy and political power. In Grimm Brothers' German version, she desires for divine authority. These desires in European folktales reflect European imperialism. In both European versions, the couple loses all material wealth and returns to their poverty and miserable conditions. Thus, European versions punish greed through economic loss according to European culture.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The present study compares a universal narrative about a magical fish having the power of wish-fulfilment as represented in Sudha Murty's Indian narrative, *The Golden Fish and the Demon*, Alexander Pushkin's Russian poetic tale, *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*, and Grimm Brothers' German folktale, *The Fisherman and His Wife*. This comparative study embodies both structural universality and cultural speciality. This research confirms that all three narratives share a common structural framework characterised by initial poverty, encounter with a magical fish, repetitive increasing desire, violation of moral order, punishment, transformation, and restoration of order. This common structural framework establishes the purpose of narratives across cultures.

The present study also applies common binary oppositions such as Contentment vs. greed, Hardship vs. comfort, Poverty vs. wealth, Humbleness vs. power, and Human vs. non-human. These oppositions reveal that resolution varies according to the cultural worldview. The European versions restore social and economic balance through material loss, whereas, Indian version resolves moral imbalance through psychological and moral transformation. The protagonist's dehumanization into a demon establishes that inner moral corruption is more catastrophic than economic deprivation.

Thus, this comparative study shows that different narratives may be circulated within various nations with similar structural framework but their moral resolutions are shaped by the cultural consciousness of that nation.

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