

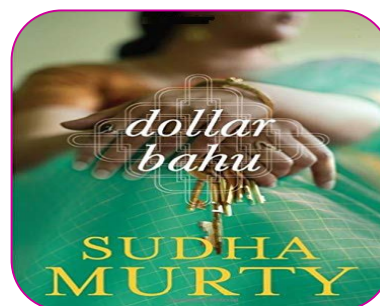


PORTRAYAL OF MATERIALISTIC SOCIETY IN SUDHAMURTY'S *DOLLAR BAHU*

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ABSTRACT

This present article focuses on economic issues. Money becomes a vital part in the modern sophisticated world with the special reference of *Dollar Bahu*. SudhaMurty's one of the best novels is *Dollar Bahu*. When the reader starts to read her novel one can realize the importance of money. *Dollar Bahu*, the novel spans around, the typical South Indian Kannada family. The mental agony of Vinuta in *Dollar Bahu* makes one to feel that everyone experiences the same in their own family but unfortunately the traumas are not identified; SudhaMurty's skill interweaving the characters make the readers to come out of money-madness and retain their permanent human relations. *Dollar Bahu* is a story about dreams, aspirations, culture and the simple life in the context of an American background. The author reveals how money corrupts the life of human beings and portrays how liberating life can be away from the strict norms that govern a middle-class life.

KEYWORDS: *Dollar Bahu*, modern sophisticated world, aspirations, culture.

INTRODUCTION:

SudhaMurty vividly expresses in her novels the present age women who have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependant. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to household works. The present article focuses how money becomes a vital part in the modern sophisticated world with reference of the novel *Dollar Bahu*. SudhaMurty's one of the best novels *Dollar Bahu*, when the reader start to readher novel one can realize the importance of humanity, despite of money. *Dollar Bahu* sets around typical South Indian Kannada family. The mental agony of Vinuta in *Dollar Bahu* makes one to feel that everyone experiences in their own family but unfortunately the traumas are not identified; SudhaMurty's skill interweaving the characters makes the readers to come out of money-madness and retain their permanent human relations.

SudhaMurty, is a famous writer and the Chairperson of the Infosys foundation, and a founder of the Indian software giant, Infosys. In addition to her professional career in information technology, she has various interests like social work, reading, writing and even acting. *Dollar Bahu*, one among the seventeen other books authored by her, first written in Kannada as *Dollar sose* (sose being the Kannada word for daughter-in-law) and later translated into English. It becomes so popular that ultimately it is aired as a television series in 2001 by the Indian television giant Zee TV.

Dollar Bahu is the story of Gouramma and her *Dollar Bahu* Jamuna and her other simpleton Bahu Vinuta (Bahumeaning-daughter- in-law in Hindi), revolves around the daughters- in- law of Gouramma, a greedy mother of Chandru, Girish and Surabhi, living in a small house in Bangalore with her husband Shamanna. Chandru, the eldest son of Gowamma is settled in America and is married to Jamuna, the only

daughter of rich parents. Girish the second, is a bank clerk and married to Vinuta, a sweet young woman who works hard day and night and never fails to carry out her household duties and her duties towards her mother-in-law. But between Jamuna's Dollars and Vinuta's selfless devotion, Gouramma always finds her favors with the Dollar and ignores what is truly priceless –Vinuta's devotion and selfless love.

Vinuta continues to bear all the burden of the endless comparisons between her and Dollar Bahu. She becomes a fractured psyche. Soon Gouramma gets a chance to visit her son Chandru and Dollar Bahu in the America house and stays with them for a long time. But before it is too late and before Vinuta is lost forever, she soon realizes that all that glitters is not gold and that Dollars at the end cannot buy everything. At last her mother-in-law comprehends the real love of Vinuta. Murthy's one of the modern novels is *Dollar Bahu* undoubtedly shows the life of a woman Karnataka, but in general, it is related to the women of this world. She is in the form of poverty, missing her parents when she was very young. She lives with her distant uncle Bheemana. He takes care of Vinuta. She owns a dilapidated house only. She is in the second year of the B.A degree course in Karnataka College, majoring in Hindustani music. A bright talented self-willed girl, she had won almost every prize in every event in the college.

In Bheemana house, Vinu does all the major household works. Vinutha had a golden voice deep dedicating but she does not get an opportunity to pursue it. Despite all the scolding heavy house work, she makes herself happy. The beautiful Dharwad days have to come to an unexpected, abrupt end suddenly her uncle Beemana dies of heart attack. She lives with her grandmother Seetakka in Dharwad. Later, even Seetakka went away to stay with her other children there is no one to take the responsibility of supporting Vinuta. She is at marriageable age with no money of her own and no place to go to. Fortunately, her aunt Indhu, and her husband Rama Rao, generously offered their support. Her aunt Indhu said, "Bangalore is a big city. You will soon get a job. Once you have job it will be easy to get you married. When the marriage fixed you can sell the Dharwad house and cover the marriage expenses for the time being you can rent out and keep your things in the upper –storey room" (29).

Vinuta miserably, she implored, "Please let us not sell the house. That is the lost reemergence of my parents I love that garden. My life is in the ..." (29). Girish, who is working as clerk in a bank, meets her in a bus. After her uncle's death she has come from Dharwad and stays in her aunt's house, working in the same school where his father was working. His generous father understands the love between Girish and Vinutha. Chandru is Gouramma's favourite child. Like her he is a fair-complexioned, slightly built, with a pleasant intelligent face. He shares her dream of going abroad unlike Girish, he is all and dark complexioned face and irresponsible son finally Chandru fulfill her mother's desire go to USA and earning dollars but Girish becomes a clerk in the bank. So her mother shows partiality between them. Chandru feels happy, since his wish to settle in America comes true that could satisfy his inner feelings were no one way buried. He could get his green card but he missed the real life with Vinuta.

Vinuta, an outstanding singer meets Chandra Sekhar an employe from Bangalore deputed to look after the work at Dharwad in a train. Chandru has his own apprehensions about the new place and with his friend support he finds his stay as a paying guest in Vinuta's house. As a music lover he enjoys Vinuta's songs. He falls in love with her, never expresses it to her because of his dream about America. He attracted by her beautiful shy smile. He likes her well aware of circumstances and adjusts to every situation unlike his sister Surabhi. Chandru's dream has come true. He has finally got the magic green card. It is the destiny which is not in the hands of human beings; both brothers like her but the brother who is not as good as the elder one picture should win the golden voiced girl. Girish send a letter to Chandru about his marriage with a few pictures enclosed. Vinu, the same girl with the golden voice, has become his brother's wife! He says something that had never imagined was now a harsh reality. The spring goddess of Dharwad, the girl who has stolen his heart, the Jayanagar schoolteacher was all the same girl. What a coincidence! What an irony. He was upset himself: if he has not waited for the green card and had returned to India earlier, he could have married Vinuta. He was jealous. Girish is neither handsome nor as well placed as he is, but has won a wife who is far superior to him in everything. He accepts what has happened and digests the reality of life. He fulfills her greed mother's desire he loose his real queen Vinuta(44). Chandru had written a letter

expressing his feelings to Vinuta after he had settled in America, but it was returned as Vinuta was not staying there. He struggles in Nashville to get green card and returned to his own homeland after six years. As said by eminent personalities:

“If you look as a thing from far it deceives our eyes, but when you look from near the ultimate truth comes out. He was deciding to marry Jamuna, a girl from rich family whom his mother had chosen for him. He says, Well, I plan to settle there, but one should be aware that life in America is lonely, as against life in India”.(49)

Very soon, Vinu realizes failure of her marriage. She thinks that she has married the distracted, fickle, and almost irresponsible. He had probably met some friends and lost track of time. She has golden-voiced beauty. She likes to sing but Girish did not have an ear for music but did not object to her singing. He is a commerce graduate, worked as a clerk in a bank. After office he would involve himself in all sorts of cultural activities such as comparing programmers during Dusshera festival, Ganesh chaturthi, and Kannada Rajyotsava. If anyone required help at the bank, Girish would be the first to offer and master help, be it a medical emergency, a funeral, or celebrations for a happy occasion. Before marriage Vinu has no family, but now she has family her longing is for Girish who is not interested listen her singing quality. Vinu adjusts, her marriage life but Girish cannot be compared to Chandru who has a good aesthetic sense and ears to listen to Vinu's songs.

The story reminds readers of the phrase, “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence” (135). The author has vividly put across the typical story witness in many houses with engineers after the software boom where every house wants its daughter married to its son to be an NRI and every house wants its daughter married to an NRI. There has been contrast and comparisons throughout the story or it with the contrasting nature of the two brothers, or the contrast nature of the two bahus and the contrast of the east meets west which firms the epicenter of the story. “The Dollar is the most powerful financial instrument of modern times. Money has magical quality. One dollar is equal to seventy –three Indian rupees. If you have Dollars in your pocket, you can travel to any corner of the world without worry. It is universally acceptable currency”. (135)

Gouramma is in India only in body at such times; her spirit would be flying across the length and breadth of America. She would dream about the Dollar, that magic green currency, which could change her house and fulfils her dreams. It is the Dollar, not Indian rupees, which could elevate her into the elite circle at social gatherings and marriage halls. The Dollar is like the Goddess Lakshmi, with a magic wind.

Gouramma's house bursts with a new energy. He gives his mother four thousand dollars for wedding expenses. Gouramma has never seen that kind of money in all her life. She is effervescent with joy. She explains her plans to Chandru, “Jamuna is from a rich family. We should give her nice saris and jewels for the wedding. Otherwise they will look down upon us. Gouramma felt she had to give Jamuna something from the family” (156).

Shamanna is not a wealthy man. So Gouramma takes two of her own bangles to a jeweler and got them redesigned into new ones. Vinuta's sharp eyes noticed this. Her son lived in America and her future daughter-in-law is the only daughter of a rich man. Such charming scenarios, mere dreams for so long, where gloriously coming true. In her mind she thanks the blessed power of the Dollar. From behind the scenes, Girish and Vinta ensured that everything went off without a hitch. But it was Gouramma who handled all money-related matters. Gouramma realizes that she could not rule over Jamuna the way she had come from all over and there was nothing wrong in Jamuna's decision to go to her Parent's home.

Shamanna had seen through Jamuna's pretence, but Gouramma, blinded by the dollars that her daughter-in-law now represented, reassured her. “It is all right, my dear. I know that you are very fond of all of us. When Surabhi gets married; it will be your responsibility to see to everything. You are the “Mahalakshmi” of our house You should not leave in sorrow. Go and join your husband in happiness. Our blessings shall be with you always”(54). Jamuna did not even bother to talk to Vinuta. For that matter, nobody in the house seemed to even acknowledge her presence these days.

After Chandru's wedding, things take in a different turn in the Shamanna household. Gouramma's conversations usually begin with, "our Jamuna, in America..." (55). Every day, she would repeat that they were very lucky to have such a daughter-in-law. Paeans of praise were constantly chanted for the unknown and absent Jamuna, and the two daughters-in-law were constantly compared. Before Jamuna's advent into their lives Gouramma used to say:

"Now that Vinuta is here, I am totally relaxed, like a retired person. She takes care of everything. But now, there was no such talk. The Proverb 'If you have money like the Sun you will shine; if you don't have money, like a dog you will whine' Was quite apt in this case? Jamuna's sun shone brighter each day while Vinuta's life became more like that of a dog. Gouramma even justified Jamuna having kept all the wedding gifts in her parent's house. "Our house is so small. There is no space to keep all the gifts"(55).

The sudden entry of dollars disturbed the peaceful and otherwise cohesive structure of Shamanna family. His wife Gouramma is infuriated by it. She begins to calculate each and every person in dollars. Personal human touch lost its value for her. It is replaced by commercial considerations. Dollars purchased not only lifeless objects like cars and houses for her but also living human beings like servants. Its touch turned human beings into commodity. It ruled the minds of the members of the family.

Dollar reversed the chronological order that was conventionally followed in children's marriages. Indian parents generally celebrated the eldest son's marriage first, followed by other son's marriages age wise for a long time. Unless there was any serious problem like physical or mental disability in the child, this pattern was not broken. But Gouramma preferred to take up her second son's marriage before her first son's marriage. She knows that once her second son Chandru begins to earn dollars, she would get ample wealth in form of dowry; she would be able to show off in her friends, neighbors and relatives. Though this does not seem to be a revolutionary act in the twenty first century, it is certainly a topic to become a talk of the town today.

Gouramma repented her visit to America in the following way:

"Oh God! Why was I so stupid? She cursed herself. Her head began to throb. For the first time she felt that her husband was a clever man for not coming here. She felt like running away to India immediately. She also realized that she had married off her son to an evil minded person, falling prey to her wealth and sweet talk" (129).

Vinuta always worried that she had never been a good daughter-in-law in Gouramma's eyes, her best efforts notwithstanding. Now, she is more worried that after a year-long stay in America, Gouramma would never back her; he always had a standard answer:

"Amma is like that. You cannot change her at this age. She respects Chandru more than she does me, but I don't mind. After all, he is my brother. Vinuta knows from past experience that any discussion on this matter with Girish is a waste of time. So she had to be prepared to listen to Gouramma's words Jamuna on. She sinks into a depression as Gouramma's arrival drew nearer.(125)

Vinuta also felt that there would now arise a new complication—constant comparisons between Manasi and Harsha. Harsha would grow up with a complex because Manasi is a Dollar granddaughter. She begins to hate the word 'dollar'. She feels that if she were in America, she would also have come home once in three years and everybody would have praised her to high heaven. She prays to god: Let a day come when forty-five dollars are equal to one rupee. If that did happen, what would this Dollar Bahu do! (87). Vinuta wants to escape from this atmosphere of constant comparison and unfair judgments. She keeps brooding about America and its strange effects on people. Shankar had loved Shashi, and their marriage had been fixed. For a green card he has broken the alliance. Surabhi has ditched Gopi because he does not have prospects of going to America. What kind of power is this? She worries. Shamanna guesses what is going on in Vinuta's mind. One day he calls her to his room and says:

"Vinu, I want tell you a story". Vinuta is surprised, but then she thinks that it is probably an incident from his younger days, many of which Shamanna has already narrated, and often. Vinuta and Kadru are the two wives of Sage Kashya, begins Shamanna. "There was tough competition between them. The conditions were such that the one who lost would become the other's slave until her son brought back the holy nectar.

Kadru cheated and won, and Vinuta became the slave. A hundred years later, however, Vinuta's son Garud brought in the nectar and rescued his mother from slavery". I don't want you to stay in this house for that long, in bondage. Please go away and make your own home." (138).

Many lower-middle-class families have benefited from their children going to America. Many parents have been able to see some comforts in life because their children have settled there. They have been able to build houses, and marry off their daughters without too much trouble. Look at Gouri, her desires were mostly fulfilled because of Chandru. But she does not understand that money is not everything in life. There are other problems.

This Dollar may have transformed the lifestyles of some families, takes them from poverty to wealth, but it has also broken up some families. It has created financial and social distinctions within families and destroyed the peace of mind. Very few people have understood this. If Gouri had been more mature, she would not have been in awe of the Dollar and danced to its tune. Her greed childhood, lack of education, the sudden surge of money, have obviously affected her. Gouri is not a bad human being, but she is misguided.

Finally Gouramma learns a new lesson from her dollar bahu. She feels that she is only a servant in her son's house and everything has to be decided by her dollar bahu. She is still upset by what she has found out in Jamuna. She has always praised her dollar bahu to high heaven but now realized how undeserving Jamuna is of that praise. After a long walk, Gouramma returned home. Manasi is asleep in her stroller. When she reached the door, Gouramma heard her name and stopped for a minute. She is curious to know what Jamuna and her friends are saying about her. Foolishly she thinks; maybe Jamuna is praising her services. She listens the conversation. Girija said:

"Jamuna, you are the smartest of all. I can trade my PhD to possess your talent on how to handle a mother-in-law and win her heart." It seems her mother-in-law always treats her like her own daughter! Is it not surprising? Says Veda. Nothing is surprising. My mother-in-law is greedy and stupid. My co sister-in-law Vinuta is from a poor family and innocent about the ways of the world. My sis-in-law and Surabhi do not have any brains. It is easy to manage such women". (140)

Gouramma begins sweating. Her Dollar Bahu continues sweeping out her real feelings. "I give them what I don't like and they don't suspect anything" (128). Dollar bahu said I don't like to back to India. "Noway! Here our husband listens to us; we can eat, drink, dress and roam around the way we want. It is better to send some dollars as gifts than to settle in India. My father had clearly told me that he agreed to the proposal only because Chandru was in America, otherwise he would not bother. My parents had already judged these people before they accepted the proposal. My mother advised me to be nice, speak to them well, but keep them at a distance. That advice has helped". (129)

Jaumuna is allowed to dominate and Vinuta is not even allowed to express her mind. This discriminatory treatment had certainly to do with the dollar maniac. Jamuna speaks because she has dollars; Vinuta does not speak because she does not have dollars. Thus different form of untouchability has entered in the family with the arrival of dollar in the Indian life.

Traditional Indian society believes in the power of human relations more than the power of money. Chandru runs after dollar so much that he has no time to share his feelings with his mother when she is in America. It is as if he has forgotten his parents, brother, sister in law, sister and brother in law back home. Incoming dollars has tricked him into subdued silence. Thus globalization brings dollars. Dollars cripples Indian minds. Most of the people have been blinded by the glaring power of dollar. People lose their interest in each other without reasonable explanation for it. *Dollar Bahu* thus comes to be regarded as a scratching attack on Indian madness for money. Resources are common for all. Each one uses as much as he or she wants and leaves the rest. The value of one's attitude towards resource is illustrated in the story "An Old man's Ageless Wisdom" where the old man considers natural resources to be God's grace. The story "Life is an Examination" shows the attitude of a rich couple towards money. While one resort to philanthropy, the other drive pleasure in spending money lavishly. The story, *My Money, Your Money*" depicts the financial independence of a wife and husband due to their jobs. In the process of earning more, the wife of Anitha

forgets to respect her husband, illustrating how values change with the change in income. Here SudhaMurty says, "Money is a double-edged sword that can be used to cut a fruit and also to kill a person it is important to earn money, but much more important to handle money." 'Dollar Bahu' is a story about dreams, aspirations, culture and the simple life in the context of an American background. The author reveals how money corrupts the life of man, it is also way portrays how liberating life can be away from the strict norms that govern a middle-class life.

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