

SUDHA MURTHY'S DOLLAR BAHU: JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-REALIZATION

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Abstract

While dealing with Sudha Murthy's 'Dollar Bahu' the present paper is an attempt to highlight the journey of middle-class characters through expectation, exploration and self-realization. It shows how a constant comparison between two and a tussle between Dollar and Rupee affects the psychic of woman. She graphically portrays the true face of the middle-class, educated people in 'Dollar Bahu'. The over expectation became the cause of daughter in law, Vinuta's sufferings. The constant comparison between two daughters in law i.e., Vinuta, who was a docile, accepting Indian bahu and Jamuna a double faced, known as dollar bahu, which forced to grow inferiority complex in the mind of simple, self-reliance Vinuta. It also focuses the contemporary middle class woman's struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. The female protagonist is able to free herself from the continuous comparison after a long and bitter struggle. During the journey they came to know that mere dollars cannot buy the love and respect that gets in India, and the charm of invincible dollar had fallen in comparison to Indian values.

Keywords: *Journey, Self-Realization, Sudha Murthy, Dollar Bahu.*

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Introduction

Sudha Murthy is a great prolific woman writer in English and Kannada, her contribution in Indian English Literature is remarkable. She has received the Padma Shri in 2006 and R.K. Narayan award for literature. She has written novels, technical books, travelogues, collections of short stories and non-fictions and books for children. Many of her literary works have been translated into various Indian languages and English. 'Dollar Bahu' is one of them, originally written in the Kannada with the title 'Dollar Sose' and later translated into English. She points out in her work whatever she experienced her surroundings. Her work reflects real life experience and the issues close to her heart. She focuses the life of ordinary people and also notable theme is the role of women in present Indian society. Her writing style is lucid, simple and impressive. Sudha Murthy graphically presents the true face of the middle-class, educated people in 'Dollar Bahu'.

The Journey of 'Dollar Bahu' through expectation, exploration and self-realization

While dealing with 'Dollar Bahu' the present paper is an attempt to highlight the journey of middle-class characters through expectation, exploration and self-realization. Actually, it is the story of ordinary middleclass family of Shamanna and Gouramma and their children Chandrashekhar, Girish and Surabhi. The story of this novel sets partly two cities of India, Bangalore and Dharwad, and partly in an America. Shamanna was a Sanskrit teacher, who was a calm, sensible and contented man. He had a reputation in society as a good teacher and a good human being. His wife Gouramma was a clever woman, she knew how to manage the family. She worked hard to keep the domestic expenses within modest income. But she was extremely ambitious. It became the cause her daughter in law Vinuta's sufferings. Her constant comparison between two daughters in law i.e., Vinuta, who was a docile, accepting Indian bahu and Jamuna a double faced, known as dollar bahu, which forced to grow inferiority complex in the mind of simple, self-reliance Vinuta

Expectation: While think about expectation regarding “Dollar Bahu”. Here we see the Chandru’s expectations towards his career, it is fair to have expectations about own career. He was a civil engineer with a very reputed company in Bangalore, then because of his efficiency at work, he had been specially selected to supervise a project in North Karnataka, suddenly after few months Chandru was being sent to America on deputation, America to him was the dreamed land; the land of milk and honey. Actually, he wanted to go America for higher studies but financial constrains at home had not allowed it. So, he had hoped to study computer science that he could get a job abroad, unfortunately he couldn’t get what he wants. So, he gets a seat in the civil engineering department. His dream of America was the end. But his efforts brought him to near and finally he got an opportunity.

He had another expectation that, at Dharwad, Karnataka he was in one-sided love with beautiful simple girl, Vinuta. But he could not open up his heart, and because of his dreams, before telling to Vinuta he was being sent to America on deputation, it was his dreams, which had finally come true. He thought that it was the land of opportunities and amazing wealth. He wanted to settle first and then gave the preference to other dreams i.e., to marry the girl who meet him at Dharwad, thought of marriage reminded him of his first one sided love. He tried to contact her but it was too late, he couldn’t get any response so he killed his dreams in his heart. Unfortunately, he had faced a harsh reality, the girl who stolen his heart. Her marriage was with his brother Girish. Now Vinuta became his sister-in-law. So, we have many expectations from life but as every expectation we cannot fulfill.

The expectation of Gouramma, she was extremely ambitious, greedy and always dreamed of diamond, gold jewelry, car, a big house, servants and so on. Her husband had a modest salary, he fulfilled all need of his family and he wanted to provide good education, instead of extending his house or making any changes. Since he had been unable to fulfill Gouramma’s over expectation which her dreams. For her dreams she had pinned her hopes on her children. Specially from Chandrashekhar called Chandru, her elder son. Everyday she would pray to God that her children should go abroad and earn lot of money. Not only to fulfill her dreams but to show off the others.

When once news of Chandru’s posting to the US, Gouramma had set her eye entirely on Chandru’s earning, the dream, held dear for so long had finally come true, her son arrived in the land of opportunities and amazing wealth though her expectation fulfilled by Chandru but now “she would dream about the Dollar, that magic green currency, which could change her house and fulfill her dreams. It was the dollar not Indian rupees, which could raise her prestige at social gatherings and

marriage halls because “The dollar was like the Goddess Lakshmi, with magic wand” (Murthy,25). There is no end her expectation, Chandru also thought that “The dollar is most powerful financial instrument of modern times, it is the magic money, one dollar equals to forty- two 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” (Murthy,25). With fulfillment of dream, her burden of expectations kept increasing and Vinuta’s life was largely miserable in expectation of Gouramma. As a mother-in-law Gouramma was a strict, dominating person and on other side as a mother, she indulged her daughter; treating Surabhi like a princess.

Vinuta’s expectation from life was not more, she just wants loving, caring family and live happily and with peace of mind. But we know destiny plays the game always with us. In the same way Vinuta, the protagonist of the “Dollar Bahu”. Vinuta was bright talented girl. She had received almost every prize in whichever competitions she participated in the college. She was fair with bold and beautiful black eyes, a straight sharp nose and long thick hair, she was the girl who has gifted golden voice and enchanting face. Her parents died when she was young. So, she has to live with her distant uncle Bheemanna, who was kind and caring person He had moved in the house belonged to Vinuta with his family to take care of her. Vinuta had to manage whatever household work before going to college. When Chandru’s transfer was at Dharwad, while he travelled by train his accidentally meeting with Vinuta as a co-passenger as well as he got the house for living as a paying guest which was belonging to Vinuta. He was very impressed to see her beauty and captivated to hear her golden voice. There was the thing had struck him that the major share of housework was done by her. So, Chandru thought about her i.e., who was she really? A maid servant, an orphan, a poor relation, a housekeeper or..? (Murthy 11). But she was never seen unhappy, tearful or angry. She seemed to be very well aware of circumstances and adjusted to every situation.

Unexpectedly, the days at beautiful Dharwad had come to end. Her uncle Bheemanna had died suddenly, his family dispersed after his death no one was prepared to take responsibility of supporting Vinuta, she was of marriageable age but she had no money of her own except Dharwad house and no place to go. In such situation her aunt Indu and her husband Ramarao generously offered support. After completing education Vinuta had to do a temporary job of teacher to manage the expense of marriage. Both Indu and her husband suggested Vinuta when the marriage will fix, she has to sell her Dharwad’s house for managing wedding expense, Vinuta felt miserable. It was her last thing of her parents.

In the course of time Vinuta's marriage was fixed with Girish, he was tall and dark complexioned; he was a commerce graduate, worked as a clerk in a bank. He was contented and happy with his lot. He was very active and helpful person. He was just as his father, Gouramma, his mother didn't like she shows her anger and directed her husband "Bad enough that you are impractical, you have now spoilt him and given him wrong ideas, how will he ever be a successful man with this sort of approach to life and society "(P. 20). Girish was matured enough, satisfied with his clerical job and has modest income.

Vinuta married Girish and starts living with his family, she was in Bangalore very happy in her new house, her father-in-law Shamanna was just like his uncle Bheemanna who always understand and take aside of her. Girish lavished love on her. But her mother-in-law was a domineering person and Surbhi her sister-in-law who was self-centered person. She looked upon Vinu as her rival, Vinuta took on many of the household chores soon after marriage. Before going to school, she finished most of the work. Now she had a permanent job in the government school where her father-in law worked. She had to give up her passion for music even though she had golden voice. she did not expect much , so she lived with satisfaction; she adjusts herself in new family well. She managed whole family very well and not taking to heart her mother-in-law constant taunts or criticism.

Girish's elder brother Chandru, came back to India to get married. After Chandru's marriage Vinuta's life became very painful, she had to listen the endless comparisons, which is always made by her mother-in-law between her and Chandru's wife Jamuna, a daughter of rich property dealer. After marriage she became favorite daughter-i- law of Gouramma and also became citizen of dollar country and known as a "Dollar Bahu", her husband earned the valuable dollars that have brought the family specially Gouramma its affluence. Vinuta was suffered and slowly loses her health and peace of mind. And also, the greed of dollar has killed the spirit of koel (ability to sing). Vinuta was just remained dutiful and caring daughter in law which Gouramma never acknowledged her.

Day by day Vinuta had become thin and frail like drooping flower. She looked depressed and went about housework in listless machine-like manner. Vinuta has to bear the continuous comparison between her and Jamuna. It leads to wilting and losing her health and peace of mind. She might tussle in self-exploration for self-identity. Exploration of Vinuta – Vinuta tries to explore herself what is my identity because she was always treated by her mother-in-law as a dirt. Her husband Girish would never back her, he always had a modest answer; "Amma is like that" (Murthy, 137). No one can change her at this age

The news of Jamuna's pregnancy raised many questions in Vinuta's mind. By hearing it Gouramma decided to visit her US based son and dollar bahu. Vinuta saw how Gouramma was very cared for dollar bahu. Vinu watched with silence and remembered that how Gouramma treated her in her pregnancy, no gifts, no sweets, not even a tender word. Her mother-in-law had been told her "If you want to buy anything or eat anything you can go and eat outside with Girish" (Murthy,77). On the contrary, for Jamuna, Gouramma visited and prayed at different temples for the well-being and safe delivery of her dollar bahu's baby. And she decided to go to America on her own for delivery preparations and care during pregnancy. Gouramma planned to buy gold chain for the unborn baby and a silk for dollar bahu. Vinuta somehow tolerated the unjust and comparison between herself and Chandru's wife Jamuna, but how can she bore the comparison between Chandru's and Jamuna's daughter Mansi and her son Harsh. She doesn't want her son would grow up with the complex because Mansi was a Dollar Granddaughter. She always thought that the influence of Dollar Bahu's had ruined her life. Vinuta felt all this is so unfair, what is my identity, what was about my baby boy Harsh. She was mute observer and sufferer. It stirred her inner world of mind.

In one year long stay whatever bitter experience Gouramma got from her favorite dollar bahu, she decided to come back to India. Gouramma realized that the grass was always greener. On the other side Vinuta was worried to hear the news that her mother-in-law return to India after a long year stay in America. She had to be prepared mentally to listen to her mother-in-law singing Jamuna's praises every day. She sank into a depression as Gouramma's arrival drew nearer, she felt that new complication of constant comparisons between her son Harsh and Mansi was a Dollar granddaughter, would now arise. She could bear the comparison between her and Jamuna, but how can she bear the comparison between Harsh and Mansi. Whatever she had endured in whole life, but she would not be able to bear it as a mother in the case of her son and she felt that her son never grows up in such atmosphere. Vinuta wanted to escape this atmosphere of constant comparison and unfair judgement.

Vinuta remained silent, as usual, no body taken her into consideration, there is no respect for the opinion of a particular member in a family she thought bitterly, that person is an outsider. In the convulsion Vinuta's father-in-law, who supported her, he tried to escape her from this situation and so he understood her by telling the mythological story of Kadru and Vinata; two wives of sage Kashyap. He understood Gouramma, his wife was not enough matured to understand Indian middle class daughter-in-law's value, because her greed burnt the peace and harmony in his

family. So, he sent Vinuta and Girish away from such an atmosphere it was not only good for healthy, happy, peaceful life but better for Harsh future. In Vinuta's concerned he thought that "If the woman of the house is unhappy, a family can never live in peace" (Murthy, 138). As a good human being, he convinced Vinuta and Girish to go away and live comfortable life which they deserved. Her exploration for herself which is possible due to her father-in-law Shamanna's understanding, he guessed what was going on in Vinuta's mind. He observed whatever was in the house and how his wife Gouramma foolishly behave and treated Vinuta. As a result, Vinuta had a complex and she may be started hating his family. So, he advised Vinuta to shift another place which is good for her health and for family i.e. to go away and make her own home. Shamanna convinced his son Girish that how Vinuta's as well as his self-respect is important and also, hoped Girish should become like Chandru as independent, assertive and confident. Here we can realize the journey begins from expectation, exploration towards self-realization.

Conclusion

Chandru living in America understands the value of Indian culture and people. He planned to visit Dharwad to see the newborn baby of Vinu and Girish which was neglected in Surabhi's wedding. Being friendly he realized the pain of Vinuta, he expressed his sigh "Vinuta you are living around own people speaking the same language, sharing the same culture. Your child will grow up with his grandparents, with the same set of values, you are not compelled to live in another country with different language and alien climatic conditions. Chandru proceeded that just buying, counting dollars; living in a big house doesn't make everyone happy, they have to lie in two different worlds, two different cultures, just felt lonely" (Murthy,72). In the process; Chandru came to know he had lost real love and mutual trust. It was an inevitable fact that no amount of dollars could buy the warmth of genuine affection.

Vinuta realized what is good for her son and for the sake of her identity. After listening the mythological story of sage Kashyapa's two wives, she took the decision to shift from Bangalore to Dharwad which would be proved better for her and her son. She didn't want to compete with any one in life, just wanted to live with dignity. Her self-realization shows her progressive mindset as well as conscious motherhood.

In the journey of self-realization, Gouramma realized what mistake she had made in underestimating Vinuta and how she illtreated to her. And also understood Jamuna was double faced person. She also got a lesson that mere dollars cannot buy

the love and respect that gets her in India. In the long stay in America, she realizes the value of Indian bahu i.e., her eyes were opened and realized the values of Vinuta and the charm of invincible dollar had fallen in comparison to Indian values.

References

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